

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

32 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

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Photo by John White

Covering the soil—insuring against disaster (see page 26).

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—*Join a CSA Farm in 2014*—

—*A Petition to Protect the Land*—

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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.

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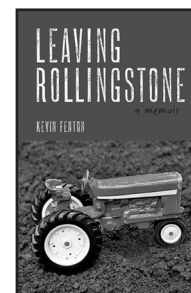
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Sand, Land & Land Stewardship

By Johanna Rupprecht

For longer than I can remember, my family has taken the same route from our farm in southeast Minnesota to visit my grandparents in north-central Wisconsin. The first leg of the four-hour trip takes us across the Mississippi River and through the farmland, pastures and rolling, wooded hills of Trempealeau and Jackson Counties. The landmarks and scenery along every mile of the route have become deeply familiar to us over countless trips in all seasons.

So the sight that greeted me on a trip in the spring of 2012 was shocking and brutal in its unfamiliarity. East of the village of Blair — just a mile or two down the road from the slope on which we had once counted a flock of over 40 wild turkeys — a section of the hills was gone. The trees had been torn down, the land ripped open, and pale silica sand dug out and piled up in mounds almost as large as the hills they had once been. These piles of sand waited to be processed and shipped away to other states, to be pumped deep into the ground, along with undisclosed chemicals and massive amounts of water, in the process of hydraulic fracturing to obtain oil and gas.

This was the first frac sand mine I had ever seen in person. Since then, I've seen many more. Some of them were gaping wounds in landscapes I never had the privilege of seeing when they were whole, so I could only imagine, not remember, the hills or bluffs they used to be. The sense of the fundamental wrongness of this desecration of the land has never left me. I have also seen rural roads and tiny villages overrun with an endless stream of trucks hauling frac sand. I have seen sand mining, processing and shipping being done with no meaningful measures in place to protect innocent neighbors from exposure to dust that contains deadly crystalline silica.

For all these reasons and many more, people across our region have been moved to take action together to fight the frac

sand industry. When southeast Minnesota first began to face the threat of a proposed onslaught of frac sand mining two and half years ago, citizens here called on the Land Stewardship Project to take a stand. As I've led our local organizing on this issue for the past 16 months, it's become ever more clear to me that both our members and our mission have called LSP into the frac sand fight. The idea of destroying the land by strip-mining it for frac sand is fundamentally opposed to the stewardship ethic we seek



A frac sand mine in western Wisconsin's dairy country: The idea of destroying the land by strip-mining it for silica sand is fundamentally opposed to the stewardship ethic we seek to foster. (Photo by Johanna Rupprecht)

to foster. And the frac sand industry represents precisely the kind of corporate-driven exploitation of the land, people and rural communities that our organization has stood against throughout our history. Moreover, LSP and our members understand that other ways are possible. Farmers like my own family, or like southeast Minnesotan Bob Christie — who was told by a mining company that the land he farms and loves was merely “overburden” in the way of sand — know that people can make a living on the

land without destroying it.

The scale of the threat we face from this new industry means we must work to combat it on many fronts and in many ways. During the 2013 session of the Minnesota Legislature, members of LSP and other groups traveled to the capitol in Saint Paul by the busload, again and again, to fight for strong legislation to restrict the frac sand industry. On a hot summer night last July, 100 people packed into a church hall in Rushford, Minn., to focus on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) ordered on 11 proposed mines. From the comments at that gathering, LSP compiled the *People's EIS Scoping Report*, a grassroots document we have released widely to make certain that the voices of directly impacted local residents are heard as the EIS is carried out.

Knowing from long experience that strong local democracy can be the best protection against harmful, corporate-backed developments, LSP is also working to combat the frac sand industry at the local government level. We have held trainings to help people understand and practice their rights, and I am working with residents in townships heavily targeted by the industry to build the power to protect their communities with local ordinances. Recently we have begun to work with members and allies in Wisconsin to fight the frac sand industry in that state as well.

Most recently, over 225 people from across our region braved a snowstorm in January to gather at LSP's Citizens' Frac Sand Summit in Winona, Minn. There we launched a new petition drive as part of the next phase of our state-level work to protect the land and people from frac sand mining (see pages 8, 9 and 10). We also discussed the importance of fighting attempts to

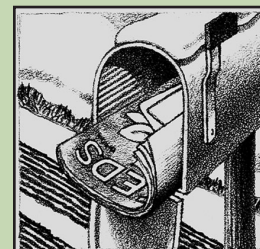
Frac Sand, see page 4...

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.



weaken local democracy in Wisconsin—something the frac sand industry is pushing hard for.

Working together, organized people have already had much success. But there is a long fight still ahead. The sand in our hills and bluffs is desired by Big Energy, one of the most powerful industries the world has ever seen. No matter how many front groups, middlemen or subsidiaries may be involved, frac sand mining ultimately exists for the benefit of the oil and gas industry.

The 2014 Farm Bill Falls Short

A Statement from the Land Stewardship Project's Federal Farm Policy Committee

In February, President Barack Obama signed the new Farm Bill, known as the Agriculture Act of 2014. This update to the “five-year” farm law was long overdue, but unfortunately the Land Stewardship Project believes it does not measure up as good farm policy. While some encouraging elements are included, in its totality this legislation continues to perpetuate inequities in our food and agriculture systems and falls brutally short in providing for stewardship of the land and stewardship of our nation’s fiscal resources.

At a time when more is being demanded of our farming landscape, it’s unconscion-

able that \$6.1 billion is cut from conservation funding by this legislation. This is the largest Congressional cut to conservation funding ever, and the first time we’ve witnessed a decrease in conservation funding since it became part of farm bills in 1985.

On the crop subsidy front, the bill ignores the will of the majority of Congress by failing to enact either meaningful limits to excessive crop insurance subsidies or commodity program payments. This is particularly egregious considering that such limits have been generally supported in both bodies of Congress in the past.

Crop insurance, already the largest farm-

coming together again and again, building and sharing hope, courage and power. If you have not already begun to take action with us against the frac sand industry, then I urge you to join this fight today. Standing together, we can protect our communities and the land. □

Organizer Johanna Rupprecht is based in LSP’s office in Lewiston, Minn., where she grew up on a crop and livestock farm. She can be reached at 507-523-3366 or jrupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org. See pages 8, 9, 10 and 11 for more on the frac sand issue.

spending item in the bill, had its budget increased by an additional \$5.7 billion to a total of \$89.8 billion over 10 years. And while some worthwhile changes were made to federally subsidized crop insurance in terms of conservation compliance and a limited sodbuster provision, it is unacceptable that agricultural policy makers would fail to put limits on the amount of subsidies massive operators can extract from taxpayers through this program.

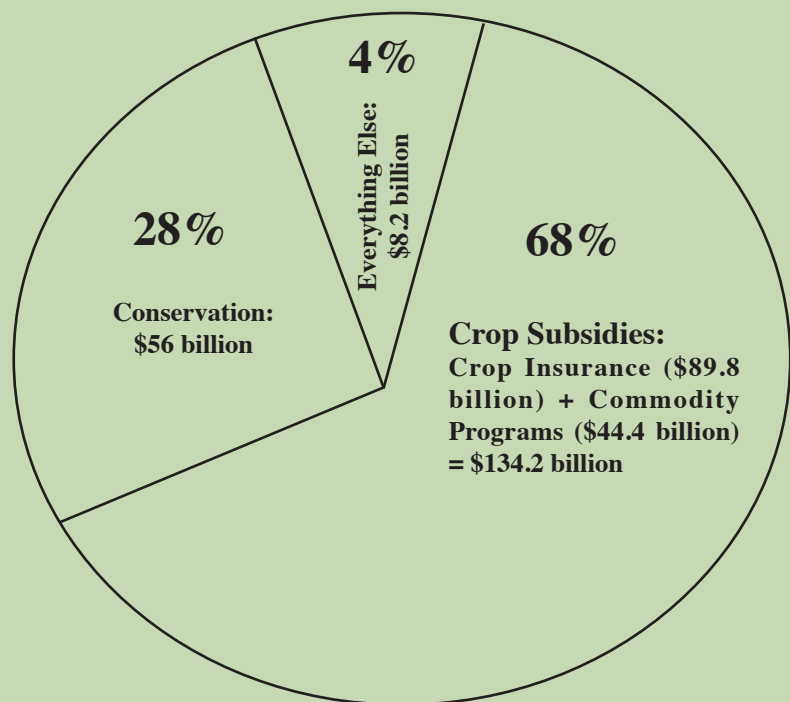
We do not accept the proposition that because the antiquated direct payment system has been discontinued, reform has been achieved. The 2014 Farm Bill’s new commodity programs and its expanded crop insurance system create a structure that does not adequately target payments or limit payment amounts producers can receive. This threatens to send the cost of these programs skyrocketing in the future. This is not reform—it is simply a new delivery system for making payments in a manner that is not accountable to or good for the public. Because of this, the new farm law will continue to be unfair in its distribution of resources and damaging to the long-term care of farmland.

There were a few Farm Bill bright spots, including investments in programs for new farmers and a number of key initiatives that support local and regional food systems, organic production methods and rural development. Approximately \$1.2 billion is being dedicated to these innovative growth areas of agriculture. However, it should be noted that this represents just 6 tenths of 1 percent of overall farm-focused spending.

The final bill also rejected attempts to repeal the Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) law as well as efforts to undermine fair competition rules in the livestock sector. These provisions are important and were hard fought wins over the corporate meatpacking lobby in the final days of negotiations. It is important we guard against

Flawed Farm Bill, see page 5...

Farm Bill Funding Over 10 Years (Excluding Nutrition)



weakening them.

LSP's mission is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture and to develop sustainable communities. Farm policy is inextricably linked to how farmers approach their

land and business, as well as how citizens spend their food dollars and what their tax money supports.

In the end, some gains were made in the Farm Bill and LSP will work to make sure those gains are realized, but greater reform and a new alignment of priorities is desperately needed. □

This statement on the 2014 Farm Bill was developed by members of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee: Darrel Mosel, Bill Gorman, Tim Gossman, Jon Jovaag, Tom Nuessmeier, Darwyn Bach and Paul Sobocinski. For a complete analysis of the new agriculture law, see pages 12-13.

Myth Buster Box

An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

→ Myth: Cattle & Water Should Never Mix

→ Fact:

Kent Solberg, a livestock farmer from northwestern Minnesota who also serves as the livestock and grazing specialist for the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, knows all too well the reaction most environmentalists have when "cattle" and "creeks" are used in the same sentence. He has worked as a staffer and consultant for four state natural resource agencies as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and has a master's degree in wildlife biology.

"I've had the experience of sitting in a freshman class on wildlife management and a slide pops up showing cattle on an eroded stream bank with a red circle around it and a slash through it," says Solberg.

For good reason: allowing bovines unfettered access to rivers, streams and lakes can be a disaster for water quality. Cattle can contaminate water directly through urination and defecation and indirectly by removing vegetation on adjacent lands to the point where nothing is left to keep silt and other contaminants out of the aquatic system.

However, an increasing number of water quality experts are pointing to examples where cattle not only do not destroy water quality, but in some cases make it better. The key is to not allow cattle uncontrolled access to water systems, which is often the case in continuous grazing, a system where cattle are turned out onto the same pasture for the entire growing season, and sometimes longer.

But when stream banks, for example, are exposed to short (a day or two at most) bursts of livestock activity, it tends to stabilize the riparian area, getting rid of the invasive species that can crowd out deep-rooted grasses. And it turns out such "flash

grazing" activity works well with managed rotational grazing, a system livestock producers are increasingly using to produce meat and milk. Instead of turning cattle out into one big pasture for months at a time, graziers rotate the animals through a series of smaller paddocks, providing the land plenty of rest time between grazings. Such frequent rotations reduce overgrazing and allow grasses to recover and develop deep root systems. It also spreads manure and urine more evenly across the landscape, reducing contaminant runoff, and can lengthen the grazing season for farmers significantly.

Making a stream bank one stop on a rotational grazing schedule is not a new idea. In the 1990s, the Land Stewardship Project-led Monitoring Team, a partnership of farmers, scientists and natural resource professionals, showed that managed grazing of riparian areas could significantly improve water quality.

A study published in the journal *Hydrobiologia* in 2011 found that in southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin and northeast Iowa rotationally grazed sites were "associated with more stable stream banks, higher quality aquatic habitat, lower soil compaction, and larger particles in the streambed" when compared to conventionally grazed riparian areas.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service have come to recognize the role rotational grazing can play in reducing nonpoint water pollution, a major problem in the Midwest.

A recent *Land Stewardship Letter* described a 3,000-foot stretch of Trout Run Creek in southeast Minnesota, where farmers Earl and Judy Prigge are using flash grazing to preserve the effects of a \$133,000 restoration effort led by Trout Unlimited a few years ago.

"It's a great relationship—livestock and streams," says Jeff Hastings, a project manager for Trout Unlimited. "If we had our way, we

would have grazing on every project we work on."

But grazing requires livestock out on the land, something that's disappearing as monocrops of corn and soybeans come to dominate many parts of the Midwest. The 2011 *Hydrobiologia* study came with an important caveat: while rotational grazing can improve water quality on a very local scale, land use in the wider watershed may be limiting the potential of this sustainable production system. A landscape dominated by a few annual crops can wipe out the benefits of a perennial plant-based farming system practiced on a handful of farms in a watershed.

In other words, the fate of water quality and the future of livestock production are even more intertwined than imagined—and not in the way we might have assumed.

→ More Information

- The *Land Stewardship Letter* article on Trout Run Creek is in the No. 3, 2013, edition at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

- The *Hydrobiologia* paper can be found by Googling the title "Relationships among rotational and conventional grazing systems, stream channels, and macroinvertebrates."

- *Managed Grazing in Stream Corridors* is a how-to manual for farmers. It's at www.mda.state.mn.us/news/publications/animals/livestockproduction/grazing.pdf or available by calling 800-967-2474.

→ More Myth Busters

To download previous installments in LSP's *Myth Busters* series, see www.landstewardshipproject.org. For paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377, bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.



LAND
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LSP News

Holistic View of Finances



Participants in a February Land Stewardship Project/Practical Farmers of Iowa workshop in Decorah, Iowa, learned about generating wealth utilizing Holistic Management-based financial planning. This was one in a series of Holistic Management workshops sponsored by the two organizations this winter and spring. In March, a workshop on planned grazing was held in Houston, Minn. On May 31 there will be a biological monitoring workshop at the Michael Natvig farm in northeast Iowa. For details, see www.landstewardshipproject.org or contact Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366, caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. (Photo by Caroline van Schaik)

Developing a Long View for LSP



Farmers Daniel Miller (left) and Curt Tvedt were part of a group of Land Stewardship Project members who participated in recent meetings about developing the organization's long range plan. Every five years, LSP formulates an outline describing its long range goals and strategies for achieving those goals. During meetings in the Minnesota communities of Wabasha and Hutchinson, members, staff and representatives of LSP's board discussed everything from beginning farmer support, policy initiatives and communications strategies to racial justice and soil health work. The plan will be published later this spring. (LSP photo)

MN-Western WI CSA Directory Available

Spring is here and eaters in Minnesota and western Wisconsin who want to receive fresh, sustainably-produced food on a weekly basis during the 2014 growing season can reserve a share in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm today. The Land Stewardship Project's 2014 Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory provides detailed information on over 75 farms that deliver to locations in the Twin Cities, Minnesota and western Wisconsin.

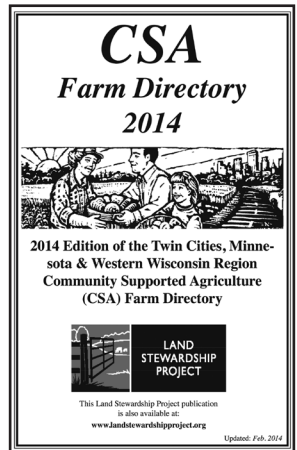
For a free copy, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/csa or call 612-722-6377. Free paper copies are also available at the Land Stewardship Project's South Minneapolis office (612-722-6377), as well as the organization's offices in Montevideo (320-269-2105) and Lewiston (507-523-3366).

Community Supported Agriculture is an arrangement where consumers "put a face on their food" by buying shares in a farming operation on an annual basis. In return, the farmers provide a weekly supply of fresh produce throughout the growing season (approximately June to October). Most of the farms focus exclusively on fresh produce, although a few also offer shares for other food items such as meat.

Subscriptions are often sold out by early spring and eaters are encouraged to reserve their shares early. The details of the share arrangements such as how much and what kind of food is offered vary from farm-to-farm. □

CSA Fair April 12

Seward Community Co-op in Minneapolis (2823 East Franklin Avenue) will hold its annual CSA Fair on Saturday, April 12, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Community Supported Agriculture farms from around the region will be available to answer questions about their operations. Paper copies of LSP's *CSA Farm Directory* (see article above) will also be available. For details, see www.sewardcoop.org or call 612-338-2465. □



Grazing's Opportunities, Challenges, Benefits



The Land Stewardship Project sponsored an “Opportunities in Grazing” panel and workshop Jan. 30 in Glenwood, in west-central Minnesota. Farmers, grazing specialists, marketing experts and natural resource professionals discussed how managed grazing of grasses and cover crops can provide profits for farmers as well as environmental benefits in the Chippewa River watershed. Pictured (left to right): Jeff Duchene, Natural Resources Conservation Service grazing specialist; Jim VanDerPol, Pastures A Plenty farm; grazing consultant Howard Moechnig, Midwest Grasslands; University of Minnesota Extension forage specialist Jim Paulson; Ryan Jepsen of Grass Run Farms; and U of M dairy scientist Brad Heins. For more on LSP’s work in the Chippewa River Watershed, see the **Stewardship & Food** section at www.landstewardshipproject.org or contact Robin Moore at 320-269-2105, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org. See pages 24-25 for more on the environmental benefits of grazing. (LSP photo)

LSP Staff Updates

Parker Forsell has left the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings Program to coordinate the Mid West Music Fest (www.midwestmusicfest.org) in Winona, Minn.



Parker Forsell

Forsell joined LSP’s staff in 2008 and played a key role in developing its Farmer Network, the Journeyperson Course, the Farm Beginnings Collaborative and the Advanced Farmer Training steering committee (see page 16).



Anna Cioffi

Anna Cioffi has left LSP’s Community Based Food Systems Program to pursue a degree in nursing. In 2011 Cioffi became an LSP organizer focusing on urban agriculture initiatives. Before that, she had worked as an LSP

Federal Policy Program organizer. During the past two years Cioffi was instrumental in organizing farmers and others in Minneapolis around developing zoning rules that benefited urban agriculture. In addition, she worked with the “Growing Neighborhood Access to Healthy Food” initiative, a joint project of LSP and Hope Community (see page 22).

Aileen Clarke served an internship with LSP’s Farm Beginnings Program this winter. Clarke is studying geography with a minor in Hispanic Studies at Macalester College. In 2013 she participated in the Institute for Study Abroad-Butler University program in Peru. During her internship, Clarke helped conduct research on land ownership in Minnesota as part of LSP’s land access initiative.



Aileen Clarke

Kaitlyn O’Connor recently served an internship with LSP’s Policy Program.

O’Connor has a bachelor’s degree in biology/environmental science from Winona State University and has worked as an integrated pest management specialist at an orchard, a teaching assistant and a Naturalist Corps intern. While at LSP, O’Connor coordinated the Citizens’ Frac Sand Summit and frac sand petition drive (see pages 8-10). She also coordinated LSP’s 9th annual Family Farm Breakfast and Lobby Day at the Capitol on April 8.



Kaitlyn O’Connor

Ben DeVore served a Communications/Community Based Food Systems internship with LSP this winter. DeVore is a student at South High School in Minneapolis, where he serves as the news editor of the *Southerner* newspaper. While at LSP, he produced the 2014 *Community Supported Agriculture Farm Directory* (see page 6). □



Ben DeVore

Coming Together Over Sand

LSP's Frac Sand Summit Notes Victories, Outlines Next Steps for Action

During the opening session of the Citizens' Frac Sand Summit on Jan. 18, Land Stewardship Project board member Tex Hawkins recalled an airplane ride he took from Red Wing, Minn., to Decorah, Iowa.

"It reminded me of dental work," he said of the sand strip mines that he spotted on the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi River. "The bluffs were like molars—they were pockmarked with white, gaping cavities, hollowed out, lacking fillings."

The Summit, organized by LSP, was an acknowledgement that a "pockmarked" landscape is in the future

for many more communities in the region if the powerful frac sand industry has its way. The event brought together over 225 citizens from across the region to celebrate victories grassroots groups have achieved during the past few years, share strategy, learn from experts and strengthen the movement to keep frac sand mining from destroying farms,



Farmer Bob Christie spoke at the Summit about the threat frac sand mining poses: "It is our moral responsibility to pass land on to the next generation in as good or better condition as we received it in. It is the way not only agriculture but all life can be sustainable. I don't believe anything I have witnessed in the frac sand industry makes that an achievable goal." (LSP photo)

natural areas and communities in the region.

Areas like southeastern Minnesota are grappling with attempts by the frac sand mining industry to strip-mine thousands of acres to supply raw material for hydraulic fracturing, a process where silica sand is injected into shale deposits in states like North Dakota to release oil and gas. Southeast Minnesota and western Wisconsin are home to vast reserves of the kind of sand sought after by the industry. Many Wisconsin communities have already been inundated by large frac sand operations, which remove entire hillsides, fill the air with particulate matter, rely on large amounts of water and chemicals to process the sand and clog roads with large truck traffic.

It Starts with the Soil

One of the victories attained by LSP and its allies in 2013 was the passage of state legislation requiring the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and other agencies to develop a set of regulations related to air and water impacts of frac sand mining,

A Summit Summary

Check out LSP's **Report from the Citizens' Frac Sand Summit** web page for copies of the presentations, podcasts and other resources related to the Jan. 18 event. The page is under the **Organizing for Change** section at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

processing and transportation facilities. A special advisory panel consisting of citizens, local government officials and industry representatives will be meeting for the next year or so to guide this rulemaking process. Several LSP members are on that panel (*see page 11*).

"We have to hold the MPCA accountable," said LSP organizer Bobby King, who acknowledged that, while the 2013 legislation is far from perfect, it is seen by the frac sand industry as a major barrier. "We have to demand these regulations are tough."

MPCA Commissioner John Linc Stine talked at the Summit about what concerns related to frac sand mining need to be addressed by regulation.

A big unknown, said Stine, is how much a mined area can be reclaimed. That's especially important when it comes to soil that's removed to get at the sand. This soil is not only critical for growing food crops, grasses and trees, it also provides an important water filtering function. This is particularly important in places like southeast Minnesota, where the limestone-based karst geology makes groundwater vulnerable to contamination.

"It's impossible to reconstruct soil in a productive way," said Stine, who has academic training in soil science. "You can reconstruct the soil profile, but you can't reconstruct the soil. The natural world does that over time through various processes and you can't replicate it."

Breathtaking Problems

Another major point of discussion at the Summit was the impact frac sand mining has on air quality. Crispin Pierce, director of the Environmental Public Health Program at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, described the air monitoring he and his graduate students have been doing near frac sand mines, processing facilities and railroad tracks where trains haul sand. Silica sand particles with diameters of 2.5 micrometers or less, also known as PM_{2.5}, are considered a health hazard. It's these smaller particles that lodge deep in the lungs, causing respiratory problems and even cancer, say health experts.



Over 225 people from southeast Minnesota, western Wisconsin and northeast Iowa attended the Citizens' Frac Sand Summit, the first gathering of its kind in the region. (LSP photo)

Frac Sand Summit, *see page 9...*

...Frac Sand Summit, from page 8

“Based on the measurements we’ve been doing, I’m not concerned people are going to have immediate acute reactions from frac sand mines,” said Pierce as he showed photos taken in Wisconsin of sand train derailments and conveyor belts over a mile long that were leaking frac sand. “What I’m concerned about is long-term, low exposure. That’s why monitoring is so, so important. It’s the long-term exposure we want to monitor and reduce.”

Michael McCawley of the School of Public Health at West Virginia University said health problems have spiked in the vicinity of mountaintop removal coal mining operations in West Virginia, where researchers have detected “ultrafine” particulates that are smaller than the PM2.5 standard.

No direct cause and effect has been determined, but “essentially mountaintop mining, which is surface mining, is not a good thing for people living in the area.” He recommended that state and federal environmental agencies monitor for ultrafine levels around Midwestern sand mining operations. “The suspicion is if it was a problem in West Virginia, it’s probably going to be a problem here,” said McCawley.

And the drive for more frac sand is likely to increase, said Jennifer Krill, executive director of Earthworks, a national organization that works to protect communities and the environment from the impacts of mineral and energy development while seeking sustainable solutions. She said frac sand mining is part of a push for “extreme energy

extraction” as high quality oil, gas and coal get harder to come by. An estimated 4,000 more oil and gas wells, on average, are launched each month, and at least 90 percent of those rely on fracturing shale deposits, according to Krill. Hydrofracturing facilities have been shown to be a threat to surface and groundwater while producing significant greenhouse gas emissions. And yet, they are exempt from the federal Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act.

However, citizens across the country are organizing against this powerful industry. In New York, counties and villages are placing moratoriums or outright bans on hydrofracturing, which has prompted Governor Andrew Cuomo to refuse to open the state up to the industry. This is a good example of local action influencing state policy, said Krill.

“People are mobilizing and activated all across the country and that’s the first, most powerful thing you can do in order to say no to this industry,” she said.

Fighting Frac Sand

That’s exactly what LSP and its allies are doing, said LSP’s King. He described the importance of having both local and state regulations in place when it comes to controlling something as threatening as the frac sand industry.

“The fact is we have to have both,” he said. “We need state regulations to protect our state resources like air and water. These resources don’t follow city, county or township boundaries. And local control is about the ability of our local governments to go beyond state standards and add further protections for the local community when it’s

Give it a Listen

LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast (www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast) features a seven-part series on the Citizens’ Frac Sand Summit:

- **Tex Hawkins** talks about why frac sand mining poses such a risk to the driftless region: episode 142.
- Farmer **Bob Christie** talks about how frac sand mining threatens the farming community: episode 143.
- Scientist **Michael McCawley** on the health risks posed by surface mining’s production of ultrafine particles: episode 144.
- Scientist **Crispin Pierce** describes cutting-edge research on silica sand dust in Wisconsin: episode 145.
- The MPCA’s **John Linc Stine** talks about the role his agency plays in regulating the frac sand industry: episode 146.
- Earthworks’ **Jennifer Krill** describes the negative impacts of extreme energy extraction: episode 147.
- LSP’s **Bobby King** talks about the role of local government and state regulations in controlling the frac sand industry: episode 148.

needed and when local folks call for it.”

At the Summit LSP launched a petition drive calling on Governor Mark Dayton to enact a two-year moratorium on the frac sand industry in the fragile karst area of southeast Minnesota and to impose tough standards for the whole state that protect air and water quality. LSP’s goal is to get at least 5,000 signatures on the petition by Earth Day, April 22 (*see page 10*).

Marilyn Frauenkron Bayer, an LSP member from Houston County who is involved in battling the frac sand industry, said it’s becoming increasingly difficult for Dayton and other officials to ignore the obvious: the majority of rural communities are opposed to this kind of development. She cited as proof the dozens of grassroots victories in Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota where people are standing up to the frac sand industry and its supporters.

“We are powerful and we are committed to building more power to protect our communities from the devastation of frac sand mining,” she said as several Summit participants involved in those local victories stood up to thunderous applause. □

Sign the Petition by April 22

To sign the Land Stewardship Project’s petition to protect Minnesota from the frac sand industry, *see page 10*.



Scientists Michael McCawley (left) and Crispin Pierce shared the latest research on the health effects of being exposed to the sand particles that can be produced by silica operations. (LSP photo)

Help Us Protect Minnesota from the Frac Sand Industry

During the Citizens' Frac Sand Summit (*see pages 8-9*) the Land Stewardship Project launched a petition drive calling on Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton to enact a two-year moratorium on frac sand mining in southeast Minnesota, put in place tough state level air and water regulations on this activity and push for the development of community-based renewable energy production.

LSP has a goal of sending at least 5,000 signatures to Dayton when the petition drive wraps up on Earth Day, April 22. As this *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press, there were over 4,000 petition signatures.

Please sign the petition below, cut it out and mail it to LSP using the envelope included with this *Land Stewardship Letter*. The petition can also be signed online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/forms/fracsandpetition. Extra copies can be downloaded from LSP's web page and shared with others who are interested in protecting our land and communities from the frac sand mining industry. For more information, contact LSP's Bobby King at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org. If you know of an upcoming venue that would make a good place to circulate the petition, contact King.

Sign, Snip & Send the Frac Sand Petition in the Envelope Included with this LSL by April 22



Petition for Effective Action to Protect Minnesota from the Frac Sand Industry

Governor Dayton:

We, the undersigned Minnesotans, are opposed to the proposed onslaught of the frac sand mining industry being driven by oil and gas corporations and their political allies. Our concerns are serious and include threats to the health, economic prosperity and quality of life of the people of Minnesota, and the long-term care of the land. You have outlined a policy that southeast Minnesota should be off-limits to the frac sand industry and that there must be tough state standards for the rest of Minnesota.

Therefore we support:

1. Executive action by you as Governor of the State of Minnesota to enact a two-year moratorium on frac sand mining in southeast Minnesota. Such powers are granted under the Critical Areas Act, passed in 1973.
2. The creation of tough state level regulations on frac sand mining to protect air and water quality, and the strong enforcement of such.
3. Development of community-based renewable energy production and implementation of effective energy conservation through state legislative policy and administrative action.



We urge you to use your authority as Governor of Minnesota to advance these initiatives.

Sincerely,

Name _____ Address _____ City _____ MN _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail _____

Name _____ Address _____ City _____ MN _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail _____

Name _____ Address _____ City _____ MN _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail _____

Return petition to: Land Stewardship Project/821 East 35th St., Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407/ 612-722-6377/ bking@landstewardshipproject.org

LSP Members on Frac Sand Advisory Panel

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Department of Natural Resources have created a new joint advisory panel that will guide the agencies as they consider possible rulemaking for the regulation of silica sand operations in Minnesota. The committee is comprised of five citizens, five representatives of local government and five industry representatives.

A majority of the panel members have strong concerns about the frac sand industry and want tough regulations. Six of the 15 appointees are Land Stewardship Project members; another two are representatives with an environmental background. The panel will guide agencies as they develop new rules for the regulation of silica sand operations (*see pages 8-9*) in the state, as outlined by the 2013 Legislature. The panel had its first monthly meeting Jan. 29, and the entire rulemaking process is expected to take at least a year. The meetings are public

and the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board is also participating in the process (*see story below*).

The LSP members who are part of the panel include:

- Vince Ready, citizen representative, Winona County.
- Kelley Stanage, citizen representative, Houston County.
- Jim McIlrath, citizen representative, Goodhue County.
- Beth Proctor, local government representative, Lime Township.
- Keith Fossen, local government representative, Hay Creek Township.
- Lynn Schoen, local government representative, City of Wabasha.

More information on Minnesota's silica sand rulemaking process is at <http://silicasand.mn.gov>. □

Eide-Tollefson Appointed to Minnesota EQB

Land Stewardship Project member Kristen Eide-Tollefson has been appointed to the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) by Governor Mark Dayton. The EQB (www.eqb.state.mn.us) develops policy, creates long-range plans and reviews proposed projects that could have a significant impact on Minnesota's environment. The EQB is currently involved in developing new rules for the frac sand industry (*see story above*). Board membership consists



Kristen Eide-Tollefson

of the Governor's office, five citizens and the heads of nine state agencies.

Eide-Tollefson has long been involved with efforts to maintain local government rights related to environmental regulation. She serves on the Florence Township planning commission in Goodhue County. That township was one of the first to address the frac sand mining and processing issue (*see pages 8-9*), and it currently bans such activities. □

LSP Member on Beginning Farmer Advisory Committee

A Land Stewardship Project member with decades of experience in agricultural lending has been appointed to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture's Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers. Tim Gossman, who is a vice president and commercial and agriculture loan officer at Merchants Bank in Saint Charles, Minn., is also a supervisor for the Fillmore County Soil and Water Conservation District. He is one of 20 new members on the national advisory committee.

Gossman, who farms part-time near Chatfield, has 32 years of experience in agricultural lending and has been a regular trainer for LSP's Farm Beginning course, which helps new farmers throughout the Upper Midwest launch their agricultural enterprises

(*see page 16*). He is also a member of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee.

"New farmers and ranchers are important not only to agriculture but for rural communities as well. I'm excited and honored to be appointed to the



Tim Gossman

Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers," says Gossman. "My involvement in agricultural lending and in working with community-groups on new farmer challenges are experiences I can bring to this committee."

The Advisory Committee provides guidance to the USDA Secretary on expanding opportunities that will help beginning farmers and ranchers. Appointees include farmers, ranchers, educators, bankers, veterans, agency personal and representatives from farm organizations.

USDA is responsible for offering various credit, conservation and training initiatives, such as the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, that are specifically targeted at the next generation of farmers.

"The average age of farmers in the United States and in Minnesota continues to rise," says Gossman. "We need to remove barriers and implement ideas that will enable the next generation of farmers to produce the food we need while conserving our soil and water for the future." □

Jovaag Joins Federal Farm Policy Committee

Jon Jovaag has joined the Land Stewardship Project's Federal Farm Policy Committee. He has a degree in animal science from the University of Minnesota and recently returned to the family farm near Austin, Minn., after working in the agriculture industry for 17 years. Jovaag raises crops, cattle, sheep and hogs on 480 acres. His pigs are raised for Ni-man Ranch natural meat company and some of his crop acres will become certified organic this year.

In 2013, the Jovaag farm hosted a meeting involving LSP members and Minnesota U.S. Representative Tim Walz, who serves on the House Agriculture Committee.

The Federal Farm Policy Committee helps LSP set priorities related to the Farm Bill (*see pages 4, 12 and 13*) as well as national agricultural policies in general. For more information on LSP's federal policy work, see the **Federal Farm Policy** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org or contact Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377, adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.



Jon Jovaag

Digging into the Farm Bill Hill

A Full Analysis of the Agricultural Act of 2014

Adam Warthesen

Over the past three years Land Stewardship Project staff and members have applied our time and skills to the development of the nation's most central piece of food and agriculture policy — the Farm Bill. A behemoth piece of legislation (this one totals \$956 billion over 10 years), this law is typically renewed every five to seven years by Congress.

While organizationally LSP takes positions on a number of national food and agriculture issues, in this Farm Bill we focused largely on three areas:

- 1) Advancing conservation measures that reward diversity and care of the land. This includes programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).
- 2) Expanding and enhancing beginning farmer investments and policy.
- 3) Reforming unaccountable and wasteful crop subsidies, mainly crop insurance and commodity programs.

As we make clear in the commentary on page 4, the 2014 Farm Bill falls significantly short in terms of its support for innovative policy related to conservation and commodity reform. Following is a summary of some of the more relevant components in the bill.

Conservation Takes an Unprecedented Cut

Overall funding for conservation was slashed by \$6.1 billion dollars over the next 10 years. The Farm Bill makes \$4 billion in cuts and sequestration accounts for another \$2.1 billion. This is a devastating loss and the first time conservation funding has decreased since conservation funding became part of the Farm Bill in 1985. To make matters worse, the cuts in conservation fall disproportionately on programs like CSP.

CSP, a top priority of LSP, was reduced by 22 percent per year or \$2.27 billion over 10 years. Enrollment goals of 12.8 million acres per year were cut to 10 million acres. Considering the first class of Conservation Stewardship Program contracts from 2009 sunset this year, LSP anticipates a large demand for the program in the coming year—one that can't be met as a result of

cuts applied to CSP.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) grew overall by around \$500 million and is projected to spend roughly \$15 billion over 10 years. The Farm Bill makes two significant changes to EQIP: adding a major wildlife habitat incentives component and expanding payment limits from \$360,000 to \$450,000. The growth of payment limits is especially troublesome since EQIP continues to allow for the subsidized construction of huge environmentally dangerous manure basins for factory farms.

The other big conservation program, the Conservation Reserve Program, ended up getting hit with a \$3.32 billion reduction over 10 years. This land retirement program will be stepped down from 27 million acres to 24 million acres nationwide by 2017.

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“The severe loss of conservation resources and failure to provide stronger limits on crop subsidies are shortcomings that cannot be overlooked. LSP will continue to work for stronger reforms as well as the implementation of this legislation so gains can be maximized and better accountability is achieved.”

— Tom Nuessmeier, LSP Federal Farm Policy Committee member & Le Sueur County, Minn., farmer

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Crop Insurance & Conservation

The most encouraging structural change in the stewardship realm was the linkage of conservation compliance to crop insurance premium subsidies. Under the new rules, farmers must have in place basic soil and water stewardship on highly erodible land or very wet land to qualify for subsidized insurance premiums.

The new conservation compliance requirements are a good step forward but may present challenging implementation issues, such as how an enforcement system is put in place.

The bill also included a sodsaver provision that reduces crop insurance subsidies on land previously unplowed for crops. Sodsafer, originally sought nationwide, ended up being limited to the states of Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska and Montana. Sodsafer requires producers who are breaking new land into production to pay a greater share of the crop insurance premium costs, meaning taxpayers will pay less.

Crop Insurance Subsidies

The bad news on the crop insurance front is that it represents the largest growth in spending at \$5.7 billion, which will total \$89.8 billion over the next 10 years. Crop insurance is already the largest farm-oriented spending area in the bill, and many analysts consider the nearly \$90 billion figure a conservative estimate.

During the protracted Farm Bill debate, a major focus of LSP and a wide variety of other groups was to reform crop insurance, making it more targeted and less expensive. But in the end, this Farm Bill in fact did the opposite—putting more funding to crop insurance and creating new provisions that will be even more geared toward the very largest and well-capitalized farm operations and insurance corporations.

The bill failed to include the \$750,000 Adjusted Gross Income limits which passed twice in the Senate as well as were adopted as a “sense of the House” this past year. This modest reform would have required those who make three-quarters of a million dollars or more a year to pay a slightly greater share of their subsidized insurance premium costs. On average, the federal government pays 60 percent of a producer's premium costs.

As it operates now, crop insurance has no subsidy limits and no means testing. It also continues to have a guaranteed overhead and administration revenue stream for crop insurance corporations. To top it off, there are limited reporting requirements, which in effect acts as a way to hide the identities of program beneficiaries.

During the past few years, numerous studies and analyses from across the political spectrum have come to generally the same conclusion: crop insurance is in need of major reform. It's hard to fathom that policy makers would create a Farm Bill that would do nothing to make crop insurance more accountable or more cost effective, but that seems to be exactly what they've done.

In 2011, 20 Minnesota farm operations received over \$300,000 each in crop insurance subsidies, with two receiving over \$1

Farm Bill Hill, see page 13...

million each that year. We fear this trend will only get worse with a select few well-capitalized operations using crop subsidies, in part, to bid away land from family farmers and beginning farmers.

Direct Payments Dumped, But...

Commodity program changes in the new Farm Bill include the discontinuing of direct commodity payments and the creation of two new programs: Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage.

Crop farmers will need to pick one of these programs if they want to be enrolled in the government commodity program.

Theoretically, getting rid of the traditional direct payment system will contribute \$14.3 billion to deficit reduction. But because of large commodity price swings, many Farm Bill observers believe these cost estimates could be dramatically low as these two new programs lack sufficient payment limits. The limit under the old direct payment system was \$40,000 per year, per person. Under the newly created programs, the limit is \$125,000 per person.

"Who can predict the market prices for commodities five or 10 years from now? Often in the past Farm Bill estimates have proven to be dramatically low, and the potential for that to be true this time is heightened by the multiplicity of program options and higher coverage levels," says Ferd Hoefner, Policy Director for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

Both the House and Senate versions of the Farm Bill included stronger payment limits and better criteria for determining who is actively engaged in a farm operation, but amazingly these common sense reforms never made it into the final bill that was signed into law.

The criteria for program payment eligibility was pushed onto USDA, which has a poor track record of creating clear and enforceable guidelines, no matter what administration is in office.

Beginning Farmer Gains

On the bright side, LSP was encouraged by the Farm Bill's support for beginning farmer initiatives. For example, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), which provides support to organizations training and assisting beginning farmers, was expanded from \$75 million over four years to \$100 million over five years.

Conservation incentives for beginning farmers were maintained and slightly improved, and credit options were changed

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"Conservation is not only good for the farmers, but also provides public benefits like clean water, more wildlife habitat and improved soil health. These are things a Farm Bill should grow and encourage, not diminish."

—Darwyn Bach, LSP Federal Farm Policy Committee member & Yellow Medicine County, Minn., farmer

• • •
to make Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans more user-friendly for beginning farmers.

The most notable credit changes included making the FSA Microloan Program permanent and providing better criteria for determining what can count towards "farm management experience," which is a requirement for loan eligibility.

The bill also gives beginning farmers in their first five years of operation a 10 percentage point reduction on their crop insurance premiums.

Local & Regional Food Systems

Local and regional food systems and healthy food access received a boost in the bill. The Value-Added Producer Grant program will get \$12.5 million annually to assist farmers and their partners in developing new markets for agricultural goods. Numerous LSP farmer-members have used this program to strengthen their businesses and reach more consumers.

The bill expands funding to \$30 million annually for the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, which promotes direct-to-consumer projects. It also nearly doubles funding for Community Food Proj-

• • •
"There is something wrong when a bill expands crop insurance with no limits, and then on the other hand, we cut conservation and nutrition resources. We're allowing the largest operations in the country to expand with the government checkbook. This is facilitating farmland being bid away from local family farmers and beginning farmers."

—Paul Sobocinski, LSP Federal Farm Policy Committee member & Redwood County, Minn., farmer

ects to \$10 million per year for five years.

LSP and other groups have used the Community Food Projects program to enhance learning and growth of local food initiatives like community gardens and the Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign.

The bill opened some good pathways between nutrition programs and local and regional food systems. This will provide support for organizations administering farmers' markets and grocery store programs that encourage increased fruit and vegetable consumption by SNAP (food stamp) recipients. Additionally, several provisions make it easier for SNAP participants to obtain fresh, local food through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations, farmers' markets and other direct-to-consumer outlets.

Unfortunately, SNAP did not fare well otherwise in the Farm Bill. Nutrition programs account for 79 percent of this law's budget, making them a large target, despite the huge number of families facing hunger in this country. In the end, Congress chose to cut SNAP by \$8 billion, a troubling move, especially considering the major boost programs like crop insurance received.

COOL is Saved

Despite targeting by the meatpacker lobby and commodity groups like the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the Farm Bill did not include changes to Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), which provides consumers valuable information on the source of their meat products. This lobby also targeted rules which are supposed to provide farmers protection from unfair competition in the livestock marketplace. In the end, the 2014 Farm Bill left these rules untouched as well.

What's Next

Passage of a Farm Bill is one thing, implementation is another. Many of the new or improved initiatives will require rule-making or administrative action.

In coming months, LSP will be engaging allies, farmers and agency personnel, as well as Congressional offices, to ensure gains in the new Farm Bill are realized and available for farmers and community groups. We'll also be busy building a base that can demand greater reform to food and agriculture policy in the future. □

LSP organizer Adam Warthesen works on federal policy issues and can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org. Updates on federal policy are available at www.landstewardshipproject.org in the **Organizing for Change** section.

A Healthier Marketplace

Despite the Rocky MNsure Rollout, Rural Minnesota Residents are Using the Program to Get Affordable Coverage

By Paul Sobocinski & Megan Buckingham

Between September and December of last year, the Land Stewardship Project's Healthcare Organizing Committee held six meetings in rural communities to talk about healthcare reform in Minnesota. The questions posed at these meetings were fast and furious, and for good reason: when the MNsure marketplace opened in October, it became clear that Minnesota, like so many other states, was not fully prepared to operate a new online health insurance exchange. Too many people had a hard time using the website, got wrong information from local "navigators"—people and organizations MNsure trained to help with enrollment—and in general got tripped up by the glitches and outright problems with MNsure's technical administration.

While the technical problems and terrible administration of MNsure are unacceptable, the program still offers an important avenue toward quality, more affordable healthcare. Minnesotans who look for coverage through MNsure are eligible for programs based on

their family income. For example, people and families making less than 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Line are eligible for Medicaid. People and families making 139 percent to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line qualify for MinnesotaCare. For those whose income is 200 percent to 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Line, tax credit subsidies are available to help bring down the cost of private insurance policies purchased through MNsure. And those whose income is greater than 400 percent of that poverty line can still purchase insurance through the MNsure marketplace, but they won't be eligible for subsidies.

It turns out many people in Minnesota (nearly 110,000 as of March), including many LSP members, have gotten through the rocky enrollment process and have been able to get quality, affordable health insurance coverage via MNsure. Following are a few examples of how people have been able to use MNsure so far.

Chad Kingstrom

Since 2008, when Chad Kingstrom started farming and working on farms, he has been without health insurance. Even bad coverage was unaffordable—he figured he could swing the premiums for coverage with a \$4,000 deductible, but couldn't really afford to spend \$4,000 on medical bills while paying insurance premiums before the coverage kicked in. After a back injury in 2009, insurance was even further out of reach. Any money allocated for healthcare went to pay the \$2,000 in medical bills, and

now he had a pre-existing condition.

As a graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings class (see page 16), Kingstrom had been in a situation many other beginning farmers and farmworkers face: look for a job with benefits/high enough salary to pay for insurance, or take the risk of doing dangerous work without a safety net.

"Farming is a risky business," Kingstrom



James Kanne (left) and his son-in-law Andy Rieke

says. "I always worried about going without insurance."

In just a couple of hours, Kingstrom was able to sign-up for health insurance through the MNsure website. Under the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA), Kingstrom can't be denied coverage nor can he be charged more for insurance coverage because of past injuries or pre-existing conditions.

But as a member of LSP's Healthcare Organizing Committee, he knows that even though his coverage is now affordable, a lot of work needs to be done before the program reaches its full potential.

"Building a better healthcare system is about better coverage for farmers and rural residents, like me, right now," Kingstrom says. "But it's also about working to win a simple, efficient and fair system that covers all people in Minnesota, no exceptions."

James Kanne

James Kanne has been a dairy farmer for more than 35 years. In the past few years, Kanne has started to transition the family farm, located near Franklin, Minn., to his daughter, Linda Rieke, and son-in-law, Andy Rieke.

For the last decade, Kanne has gone on and off health insurance. Unable to afford



Chad Kingstrom

Healthcare, see page 15...

insurance when milk prices were low, he would drop it and wait for prices to go back up so he could enroll again. A few years ago, during a period when he didn't have insurance, the farmer suffered an appendicitis attack. For the next few years he worked to pay off the \$30,000 in hospital bills, putting nearly a quarter of his monthly income towards the medical payments and still going without insurance.

Through MNsure, Kanne was able to find health insurance coverage that cost him less than his hospital payments and came with a reasonable deductible. Milk prices have been good in the past few years, so he didn't qualify for the tax-credit subsidies, but he still feels like he got a good deal through MNsure.

"I have been looking forward to the exchange. It made my search for affordable insurance much easier—better coverage, and easier to compare insurance policies apples to apples," says Kanne. "I've been worried about the risk I take going without insurance—the risk to the farm now that I'm passing it on to my daughter and son-in-law. Now I don't have to worry about that anymore."

Audrey Arner & Richard Handeen

Audrey Arner and Richard Handeen farm in Sparta Township in western Chippewa County on farmland that has been in the Handeen family since 1872. Arner and Handeen's 240-acre farm now supports continuous living cover in the form of grazing and hay acres along with 40 acres planted in 42 woody species, and their beef is raised on 100 percent grass and hay without pesticides, antibiotics, hormones or GMOs. They have long served as mentors and leaders in the sustainable agriculture movement.

The farmers participated in an LSP Healthcare Organizing Committee meeting last fall to learn more about MNsure. Although the process wasn't easy—working through the MNsure website was a significant challenge—Arner and Handeen were able to enroll in better and significantly more affordable insur-



Audrey Arner and Richard Handeen

ance coverage through MNsure. In the end, they will go from paying more than \$1,000 a month for insurance with an approximately \$5,000 deductible to coverage that costs them significantly less and covers significantly more.



Bill Gorman

Bill & Sue Gorman

Longtime LSP members, Bill and Sue Gorman farm near Goodhue, Minn. During the past few years, Bill has transitioned out of dairy farming, and is now growing crops and raising beef cattle.

For many years, the Gormans got health insurance through Sue's work. But last fall, knowing that Sue planned to leave her off-farm job with benefits at the end of 2013, Bill started looking at the MNsure website.

More on ACA & MNsure

For more information on the way MNsure and the ACA work in Minnesota, see the No. 4, 2014, *Land Stewardship Letter* or LSP's **Affordable Healthcare for All** web page at www.landstewardshipproject.org

Like others, he found the website somewhat challenging to use early on. But in December, Bill came to an LSP meeting on healthcare reform to learn more about the program and by the end of the year he and Sue were able to enroll themselves in an affordable insurance program through the site.

As residents of southeast Minnesota, the Gormans noticed that the sticker prices for the private insurance plans offered on MNsure were much higher in their region than they were in other parts of the state. There were also fewer choices for plans and companies.

Because of the way the tax credit subsidies work, families eligible for the credits get subsidies that bring insurance premiums down to 9.5 percent (or less) of their household income. These are not flat subsidies, but MNsure adjusts them to the price of the insurance plans where enrollees live. This is particularly important for folks like the Gormans, considering their southeast Minnesota location. It's also important for residents across the other parts of rural Minnesota where insurance coverage has traditionally been more expensive.

What's Next?

The 2014 open enrollment period for MNsure wrapped up March 31. There will be another enrollment period for 2015 insurance coverage next fall. Families and individuals who are eligible for the public programs Medicaid and MinnesotaCare can enroll at any time during the year—enrollment for these programs is not confined to the open enrollment periods.

Watch LSP's website and upcoming issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for updates on the continuing fight to reform healthcare. In coming months,

LSP and our allies plan to explore next steps and guiding principles of what healthcare reform that includes all Minnesotans should look like. ▢

LSP organizers Megan Buckingham and Paul Sobocinski are working on the Affordable Healthcare for All campaign. Buckingham (meganb@landstewardshipproject.org) can be reached at 507-523-3366 and Sobocinski (sobopaul@redred.com) at 507-342-2323.

Farm Beginnings

LSP's Farm Beginnings Course Accepting Applications for 2014-2015

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course is now accepting applications until Sept. 1 for the 2014-2015 class session. There will be three classes—one in Watertown (central Minnesota), one in La Crosse, Wis. (southwest Wisconsin-southeast Minnesota), and one in Ashland, Wis. (Lake Superior region).

In 2014, LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its 17th 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.

This 12-month training course provides training and hands-on learning opportunities in the form of classroom sessions, farm tours, field days, workshops and access to an extensive farmer network.

Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the area. The

classes, which meet approximately twice-a-month beginning in the fall, run until March 2015, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 650 people have graduated from the Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings program. 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. Farm Beginnings courses have recently been launched in South Dakota, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, New York and Maine.

For application materials or more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org. Details about the Watertown and La Crosse classes are available by contacting Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or karenb@landstewardshipproject.org. For the Lake Superior class, contact Cree Bradley at 218-834-0846 or creeb@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Karen Weiss (right) of Little Foot Farm in Afton, Minn., describes her system for raising hogs and sheep during a Farm Beginnings field day last August. The Farm Beginnings course augments classroom presentations with on-farm education events where participants can see innovative practices firsthand while networking with established producers. (Photo by Julia Ahlers Ness)

Is Farming in Your Future? Let Farm Dreams Help You Find Out

Farm Dreams is an entry level, four-hour, exploratory Land Stewardship Project workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether sustainable farming is the next step for them. This is a great workshop to attend if you are in the exploratory stages of getting started farming. Farm Dreams is a good prerequisite for LSP's Farm Beginnings course.

Upcoming classes:

- April 26—Mountain Iron, Minn.
- April 27—Menomonie, Wis.
- May 4—La Crosse, Wis.
- June 22—Minnetrista, Minn.
- Aug. 10—Minneapolis, Minn.
- Aug. 17—Viroqua, Wis.

For more information or to register, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmdreams. Details are also available by contacting LSP's Nick Olson at 320-269-2105 or nicko@landstewardshipproject.org.

2014 Farm Field Days

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program offers on-farm field days throughout the spring, summer, fall and winter. These events cover a specific topic on a farm. Members of the public interested in farming (limited to 20 people) may attend for a fee. Farm Beginnings participants and LSP members can participate in field days at no charge. If you are interested in attending a field day, contact LSP's Dori Eder at dori@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-578-4497.

Scheduled fields day thus far:

- June 14: **Urban Agriculture**, Growing Lots Farm, Minneapolis, Minn.
- June 20 or 22: **Innovative Multi-Species Livestock Production**, Hidden Stream Farm, Elgin, Minn.
- July 16: **Fruit Production**, Sam Kedem Nursery & Garden, Hastings, Minn.
- July 27: **Vegetable Production**, Sweet Beet Farm, Watertown, Minn.
- Aug. 16: **Beef Grazing**, Compton Farm, Dassel, Minn.
- Aug. 24: **On-Farm Education Events**, Deep Roots Community Farm, La Crosse, Wis.
- Sept. 14: **Vegetable Production Start-up**, Living Land Farm, Saint Peter, Minn. □

Stories of Our Connections to the Land



Farmers and other rural residents shared stories, art, music and good food during a Land Stewardship Project Agri-“Cultural” Winter Social event at the historic Theilman Opera House in southeast Minnesota on Feb. 15. LSP’s Plainview Land Access Organizing Committee sponsored the event to raise awareness of the importance of land in all of our lives. Specifically, the committee is working to raise awareness about land access challenges for beginning farmers.

“If you are a landowner considering selling your land and don’t have a family member planning to take over, you may be faced with a choice,” Bill McMillin, a farmer and co-chair of the Plainview Land Access Organizing Committee, told those gathered. “That choice could be to sell your land to a large crop farmer looking to expand or perhaps to a beginning farmer. To the large crop farmer, your farm might mean a couple extra days of planting and harvesting and a little extra income. But to the beginning farmer, that piece of land could be the opportunity of a lifetime and a chance to fulfill a dream.”

For more information on LSP’s land access work, contact Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org. □



PHOTOS: (clockwise, starting at the top left) Arlene Hershey talked about her family farm’s transition to the next generation during the storytelling portion of the Winter Social; Wyman Schultz described his first foray into farming; local residents brought in paintings, photos, writings and other art pieces that represented their connections to the land and community; and local musicians (and Farm Beginnings graduates) The Misty Mountain Boys provided entertainment. (LSP photos)

Give it a Listen

Episode 152 of LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast (www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast) features excerpts of the Theilman storytelling event.

Looking to Transition Your Farm to the Next Generation? Check out the *Farm Transitions Toolkit*

Owners of farmland who are looking to transition their enterprise to the next generation of farmers can now turn to the *Farm Transitions Toolkit*, a comprehensive Land Stewardship Project/Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture resource. The target audience for the *Toolkit* is those people who want to pass their farm on in a way that supports healthy rural communities, strong local economies and sustainable land stewardship.

The *Toolkit* contains resources, links to services and practical calculation tables to help landowners establish a commonsense plan. It also features user-friendly resources on the economic, legal, governmental, agronomic, ecological and even social issues that must be considered in order to ensure a successful farm transition. It is rounded out with profiles of farmers who are in various stages of transitioning their enterprises to the next generation. For more on the *Toolkit*, see the No. 4, 2013, edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

An online version of the *Toolkit* is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmtransitiontoolkit; paper versions can be purchased by calling 800-909-MISA (6472).

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland in the Upper Midwest? Or are you an established farmer/landowner in the Upper Midwest 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*. To fill out an online form and for more information, see www.landstewardshipproject.org. You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Doris Eder at dori@landstewardshipproject.org, or by calling her at 612-578-4497. Below are excerpts of recent listings. For the full listings, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/lspfarmernetwork/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse.

Seeking Farmland

◆ JH Koby is seeking to buy 10-60 acres of farmland in **central, eastern or southeastern Minnesota**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years, has a hoop house/greenhouse and a house is preferred. Contact: JH Koby, kobyjh@gmail.com.

◆ Tanya Villano is seeking to buy 10-20 acres of farmland in **Minnesota**. Land with pasture, barn, equipment shed and a house is preferred. Contact: Tanya Villano, tanya.villano@gmail.com.

◆ Gary Borash is seeking to buy 40-160 acres of farmland in **central Minnesota's Stearns or Morrison County**. He is looking to pasture beef cattle and poultry, and water and fencing would be a plus. Contact: Gary Borash, 320-290-1738, gmbora05@smumn.edu.

◆ Lindsey Byers is seeking to buy 10+ acres of farmland in the **Saint Croix River Valley in the Twin Cities region**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred; a barn would be good but a house is not required. Byers is open to various arrangements, including transitional planning and ownership. Contact: 720-317-7330, LindseySByers@gmail.com.

◆ Megan Swenson is seeking to rent 10-20 acres of farmland in **Wisconsin or Minnesota**. Swenson is seeking land to put into biodiverse food production. Contact: Megan Swenson, megankswenson@gmail.com, 952-270-1860.

◆ Craig and Rachel Olson are seeking to rent 5+ acres of farmland in **central Minnesota**. They prefer that the land be within 1-2 hours of the Twin Cities area. They are open to an opportunity for a long-term rental or rent-to-own option. Contact: Rachel Olson, rachelolson6@gmail.com, 612-636-0135.

◆ Chad Blanchard is seeking to buy 1-10 acres of farmland in **Iowa**. A small barn and house are preferred. Contact: Chad Blanchard, 319-936-2729.

◆ Lucas Popp is seeking to purchase 5-10 acres of tillable farmland in **Minnesota**. A pole shed is preferred; no house is required. Contact: 612-961-8184, lucaspopp@hotmail.com.

◆ Lori and Shaun Cox are seeking 10+ acres of farmland to purchase in the **Twin**

Cities region (Dakota, Scott, Hennepin, Carver, Ramsey or Washington County). Contact: Lori Cox, ldcrealty@gmail.com.

◆ Barb Koloshuk is seeking to buy less than 5 acres of tillable farmland in the **Twin Cities region**. Fencing and outbuildings are preferred; access to water is critical. No house is required. Contact: Barb Koloshuk, bkoloshuk@gmail.com.

◆ Harold and Ed Hilton are seeking to buy at least 8-10 acres of farmland (2-3 acres tillable) in the **driftless region of southwest Wisconsin, northeast Iowa, southeast Minnesota or northwest Illinois**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years, fencing, outbuildings and a house are preferred. Contact: Harold Hilton, 773-213-4652.

◆ Josh Holzl is seeking to rent 40-300 acres of farmland in **Wisconsin**. Pasture, a milking barn, outbuildings, silos, fencing and a house are preferred. Contact: Josh Holzl, 715-427-3636.

◆ Brandon Smith is seeking to rent 20-200 acres of tillable farmland in **east-central Minnesota's Wright County**. No outbuildings or house are required. Contact: Brandon Smith, 763-257-3256.

◆ Caden Coleman is seeking to rent tillable farmland in **North Dakota**. No house is required. Contact: Caden Coleman, 701-710-0189.

◆ Joshua Lubenau is seeking to buy 10-40 acres of farmland in **Wisconsin** where he can raise vegetables and perennial fruits. He prefers land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has pasture. Contact: Joshua Lubenau, 608-332-5020, plahnts@gmail.com.

◆ Mark Rankin is seeking to rent farmland in the area of **north-central Iowa's Hardin or Franklin County**. Land that includes pasture is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Mark Rankin, 641-373-0742.

◆ Shodo Spring is seeking to purchase 10-100 acres of farmland **south of the Twin Cities**, preferably near Northfield, Minn., to practice permaculture. Contact: Shodo Spring, 507-384-8541, shodo.spring@gmail.com.

◆ Choua is seeking to rent 5-10 acres of farmland in the Twin Cities area. Contact: Choua, 651-260-3862, xcyang3@hotmail.com.

◆ Rick Thornton is seeking to rent ap-

proximately 5 acres of tillable farmland in **southern Wisconsin**. A well, creek access and house are preferred. Contact: Rick Thornton, 608-322-3373, antelopenope@gmail.com.

◆ Gerry Lindmark is seeking to rent tillable farmland in **north-central Iowa's Boone, Webster or Hamilton County**. No outbuildings or house are required. Contact: Gerry Lindmark, 515-230-3056 (cell), 515-838-2758 (home), lindmark@globalccs.net.

◆ Marvin Baer is seeking to rent tillable land in **northern Illinois' Peoria or Stark County**. He is a beginning farmer and looking to expand the family farm to include his brother. They can work with a landlord on cash rent options or other rental options that may work better for the landlord such as bonuses when income is higher, etc. Contact: Marvin Baer, 309-369-6953, baerm82@yahoo.com.

◆ Karla and Elizabeth of Bossy Acres farm are seeking to buy 20-40 acres in the **Minnesota region** as a permanent location for their operation. They are in their fifth growing season and are currently enrolled in the Organic Field School's incubator program and would like to transition onto property where they can do annual production, with an eye towards perennial polycultures/small livestock. They would prefer land within 60-75 miles of the Twin Cities that consists of mixed acreage of tillable and woods and that has not been sprayed for several years, as well as has outbuildings and a house, but they are flexible. Contact: Karla or Elizabeth, bossy-acres@hotmail.com.

◆ Andy Roed is seeking to buy tillable land in **western Wisconsin's Pierce County**. No house is required. Contact: Andy Roed, 715-497-5470, ARoed@att.net.

◆ Elana Sitrin is seeking to buy 5-15 acres of tillable farmland in **southwestern Michigan's Berrien County**. Water, fencing, outbuildings and a house are preferred. Contact: Elana Sitrin, elanasitrin@gmail.com.

◆ Randy Schwab is seeking to purchase 20 to 2,000 acres of tillable farmland in **south-central Minnesota (Brown, Nicollet,**

Clearinghouse, see page 19...

Renville or Sibley County). No house is required. Contact: Randy Schwab, 507-276-2453, rschwab@newulmtel.net.

◆ Dan Hanson is seeking to purchase 1 to 10 acres of farmland for vegetable/fruit production in the **Twin Cities area**. Contact: Dan Hanson, 651-222-2724, danandmarta@comcast.net.

◆ Jaclyn Cosner is seeking to buy 20+ acres of farmland in **Michigan**. Land with pasture and that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred. A house is preferred. Contact: Jaclyn Cosner, jackiecosner@gmail.com.

Farmland Available

◆ Ron Klein has for sale a 157-acre cattle farm in **east-central Minnesota's Mille Lacs County**. The land has not been sprayed for 15 years. Two-thirds of it is fenced and supports 70-100 beef cattle (it could support more if more fencing is added). Managed intensive rotational grazing has been used the past 5 years; native grasses are strong, dung beetle and worm populations are restored. There are outbuildings and a house. Klein is willing to discuss different sale options. The asking price is \$400,000. Contact: Ron Klein, 320-630-2251, rkleif@gmail.com.

◆ Yvonne Massey has 40 acres of tillable farmland for sale in **northwest Wisconsin's Polk County**. The land has not been sprayed for several years and all equipment would be included in the sale. There is a barn, pole shed, four high tunnels (24 x 72 each) and a house. The asking price is \$320,000. Contact: Yvonne Massey, 715-222-1576, massey.yvonne@yahoo.com.

◆ Ken Neu has a 240-acre farm for rent in **north-central Wisconsin's Price County**. The land has not been sprayed for several years, and has been fertilized with organic manure. Pastures are set up with interior/perimeter fence, and in general are ready for rotational grazing or conventional pasture production. There is a flat barn that has been converted to free stall with a step-up milking parlor. There is a silo with an unloader (in use), and small square bale mow with new steel roof installed in 2013. Gutters have a cleaner and manure pump to concrete slab for semi-solid storage. The rental price is set to cover taxes, insurance and upkeep. Contact: Ken Neu, 262-628-1300, ken-ehs@pctcnet.net.

◆ Timothy Kautz has for rent 420 acres of farmland in **southeast South Dakota's Hutchinson County**. Most of the land has been enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and the land is over an aquifer—

irrigation is planned. There is no house. A 70-page information book on the property is available upon request. Contact: Timothy Kautz, tkautz@kautzlegal.com.

◆ Mary has for sale a 5.3-acre farm in **eastern Wisconsin**, within easy access to Oshkosh, Fond du Lac and Fox Cities. It has not been sprayed for several years and is zoned commercial but can continue being farmed. There are over 250 conifer trees, raspberries and 30+ fruit trees. There is a large Rimol Nor'Easter greenhouse (30 x 144) with extended ground posts, natural gas heat, polycarbonate ends, double inflated poly and heated concrete capabilities. There is a second greenhouse (26 x 42) with roll-up door and sliders. There is a 32 x 18 storage shed with an 8 x 8 cooler, as well as second story storage with outside access. The asking price is \$250,000 to \$275,000. Contact: Dennis, growsureease@gmail.com.

◆ Stan and Chari Simon have for sale 20 acres of farmland in **western Minnesota's Chippewa County**. There is fencing for pastures, 15 acres of alfalfa/timothy hay, irrigation for 5 acres of gardens, ponds, a new well and septic. There are also many perennials, including apple, plum, cherry, raspberry, apricot, rhubarb and walnut. Also available are a tractor, hay racks, hay rake, mower and rototiller. There is a house as well as outbuildings. The asking price is \$40,000 for the house and garage; \$120,000 for the balance of the land. Contact: Stan or Chari Simon, 563-663-7532, 563-583-3105, stanandcharalin@outlook.com.

◆ Christian Milaster has for sale 58.65 acres of farmland in **southeast Minnesota's Fillmore County**. The land is a mix of 13 acres in pasture/prairie CRP II, and 40+ acres bluffs, woods, ponds. The home is completely off-grid, featuring solar PV, solar hot water, custom masonry stove, rain-water collection, large cistern and radiant in-floor heat. The utility bill is \$150/year with year-round occupancy. The land has not been sprayed for several years and there is a small storage shed and garage. The asking price is \$640,000. Contact: Christian Milaster, 507-951-8178, dheublein@gmail.com.

◆ Linda Stewart has for sale a 15-acre farmstead/event site **55 miles west of Minneapolis**. Adjoining parcels are available and all border the North Fork of the Crow River. The land has not been sprayed for several years; there is unfenced pasture, woods and ponds. The barn includes a 30 x 30 heated and air conditioned event space with lower level heated workspace. The pole barn has a 33 x 50 heated workshop. The house has been licensed as a bed and breakfast. The asking price is \$399,000. Contact: Linda Stewart, 952-261-7495, kingstonontheccrow@gmail.com.

◆ Marty and Peggy Carlson have for rent tillable parcels of 11 and 60 acres near Mora, in **eastern Minnesota**. The 11-acre field has not been sprayed in 16+ years. The 60-acre parcel was conventionally farmed with chemicals through the 2013 season. A river runs through the property separating the 11-acre and 60-acre field areas. The owner-occupied homestead has a separate guest quarters which may be used by the renter on occasion. The Carlsons are willing to offer a "very reasonable" rental price to the right person. Contact: Marty and Peggy Carlson, 320-679-2646 (home), 763-795-0057 (work), mpcrfarm@youbetnet.net.

◆ Rich Dykstra has for sale 15 acres of tillable farmland in **western Michigan's Mason County**. The land has not been sprayed for several years and 2.5 acres is fenced. There is a well, 32 x 60 pole barn and an 18 x 100 hoop house; no house is available. The price is negotiable. Contact: Rich Dykstra, 231-690-4625.

◆ Ken Raspotnik has for rent a 150-acre farm in **northwest Wisconsin's Bayfield County**. The land has not been sprayed for 35 years and it is fenced for rotational grazing. There is a large barn with livestock sheds, pole barn storage sheds, corn crib, grain bin, 30 x 60 greenhouse, old dairy barn and house. Contact: Ken Raspotnik, Ken@raspotnikfarm.com.

◆ Jim Gerhartz has for rent 15 acres of farmland in **northwestern Wisconsin's Barron County**. It consists of pasture and has not been sprayed for several years. It is located on a paved road, and has a sand point well and a house. Partnership/shares/rental options available. Contact: Jim Gerhartz, jimgerhartz@yahoo.com.

Seeking Farmer

◆ Ruth Hruby is seeking someone to farm her Honey Hill operation in **southern Minnesota's Le Sueur County**. She is looking for someone who is interested in practicing resilient, restorative agriculture for maximum nutrition in fruits, vegetables, field crops and animals. Contact: Ruth Hruby, honeyh@frontiernet.net.

◆ Judith Driscoll is seeking someone to farm her 30 acres of land in **northwest Wisconsin**, near Milltown. There are 20 fenced acres for grazing or gardening and another 10 tillable. The land has not been sprayed for five years, and there is no house or barn available. Driscoll is open to a range of possibilities. A partnership with an organic or permaculture farmer is desirable over a standard lease agreement. Contact: Judith Driscoll, 612-961-2199, judithadriscoll@gmail.com.

Farm Beginnings

Mike & Linda Reil

Rolling with the Prairie Punches

Every budding farm enterprise goes through that certain stage at least once—the one where setbacks outnumber successes, careful planning gets bushwhacked by forces beyond one's control and the learning curve can resemble a roller coaster headed in one direction: up. It's at that period in an enterprise's life that minimal risk is a farm's best friend—it can mean the difference between missteps becoming debilitating or just a minor trip-up on the road to eventual success.

Mike Reil calls it the “experimental/making mistakes” stage and he and his wife Linda are in the depths of it as they launch a livestock operation on the west side of Big Stone Lake, a mile-wide expanse of water that sits between Minnesota and South Dakota.

“Things do go wrong and it's good to figure out those things on a smaller scale so it isn't so costly,” says Mike as he and Linda and three of their five children hang out in the warm kitchen of their farm home on a bitterly cold January day. “The goal is to keep the risk small enough that the mistakes don't cause huge problems.”

So far, mission accomplished. After graduating from the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course in 2013 (see page 16), the Reils have made their first serious foray into farming. The results were mixed at best, but they are starting the 2014 growing season with the confidence that they've learned a lot about what it takes to get to the next stage.

A Return Home

While working in Minnesota's Twin Cities for 15 years—Mike in machine shops and Linda in the mortgage business—the Reils always suspected they'd eventually come back to his family's 320-acre home farm near Wilmot, in eastern South Dakota.

“It was always relaxing to come out here for the weekend,”

says Linda. “We always thought we'd retire here.”

And why not? After all, the farm is in a picturesque spot within sight of Big Stone Lake, which serves as the source of the Minnesota River before it makes the 330-mile trip to the Mississippi.

But Mike and Linda ended up making the move long before their golden years. When Mike's mother passed away, the Reils moved into a rented house in Wilmot in 2008 to be closer to his father, Loren. Mike,

Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming



who is trained as a diesel mechanic and has an associate's degree in engineering, got a job in nearby Watertown. The plan was to eventually farm the land, but at the time that was still far into the future for the couple, who are in their mid-40s.

The picture changed a bit six months after they moved to the area when Mike was laid off. That happened on a Tuesday—the Friday before they had sold their house in the Twin Cities after dropping the price significantly.

“We had everything figured out financially, but...,” says Mike, his voice trailing off.

He went to work for his brother David, who raises crops and livestock on part of the original Reil home place. This was good experience but the family knew they eventually wanted to farm on their own. This drive to make farming a full time endeavor was in part fueled by their oldest child, Tyler, who as a city kid used to visit his grandparents' place and beg to stay out on the farm.

Things progressed when the family moved out onto the home place after Loren Reil got a house closer to the lake. They had immediate access to at least 80 acres of the Reil farm, and knew they wanted to focus on livestock production, specifically raising grass-fed cattle without chemicals or antibiotics. But the Reils also knew having a dream to farm wasn't enough—they needed a clearer idea of what they realistically could do and what steps were needed to do it.

“We didn't know how in the world it was going to work, but we had the desire,” says Mike. “It's not like you go out and just feed the cattle a few bales of hay and hope it works out.”

During the winter of 2012, Mike and Tyler took the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Dreams class, a four-hour interactive workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether sustainable farming is the next step for them (see page 16).



Linda and Mike Reil, along with three of their five children: Jared, Jenna and Kadie (not pictured are their sons Tyler and Trevor). “The goal is to keep the risk small enough that the mistakes don't cause huge problems,” says Mike. (LSP photo)

Fresh Faces, see page 21...

Hard Lessons

After taking Farm Dreams, the Reils decided the logical next step was figuring out how to develop a more concrete business plan, set goals and begin networking with established producers in the area, particularly those who were raising livestock on pasture. So they enrolled in the 2012-2013 session of LSP's Farm Beginnings course, which was being taught at the time in nearby Morris, Minn.

While taking Farm Beginnings, Mike and Linda participated in sessions on business planning, goal setting and marketing. Farm Beginnings is known for its use of established farmers and other agricultural professionals as class instructors. Students also have an opportunity to visit working farms that are using innovative production and marketing systems.

Through the course, the Reils learned the importance of developing a thorough business plan that considers as many scenarios as possible—both positive and negative.

"They take you through some exercises that aren't a whole lot of fun—they make you think hard," says Mike of the planning portion of the course. "And a lot of it doesn't necessarily paint a pretty picture."

"You have to figure out if there's a market before you start producing, for example," adds Linda.

There is a growing demand in the region for pasture-raised meat and through the Farm Beginnings class the Reils met Jack McCann, whose True Cost Farm is a meat-based Community Supported Agriculture operation serving the Twin Cities. The Reils raised 500 meat chickens on pasture during the 2013 growing season. They had decided this would help get their feet wet as they learned the ropes of everything from pasture improvement to direct-marketing. The small cattle herd they've recently started—eight Lowline Angus cows and a bull—will not have beef ready for sale until 2015.

"The chickens help in that transition period," says Linda.

It turned out their modest poultry enterprise was more of a learning experience than they bargained for. Pasture production went exceptionally well, and even marketing of the birds was relatively smooth. They sold the bulk of them through True Cost Farm, as well as some directly to consumers and through the Granary Co-op, which is in Ortonville on the Minnesota side of Big Stone Lake (see page 23).

"We're not in the best location for marketing so it helps to have True Cost do the marketing," says Mike, who adds that McCann has also been helpful in providing

recommendations on chicken care. And they have documentation of the fledgling enterprise's successes that first year—as a 4-H project, their 12-year-old son Jared produced an impressive booklet complete with photos of the family's foray into poultry production.

But then one of those "uncontrollables" reared its ugly head. During the summer the chickens started getting sick; it turned out the purchased starter feed the Reils were using had too much flax in it, causing a Vitamin E deficiency. After diagnosing the problem, they were able to restore the chickens to good health, but the birds' rate of gain had been set back considerably. That brought their cost per pound up considerably, cutting into the family's profits.

Fortunately, they hadn't started out raising thousands of birds, and the Reils'

Give it a Listen

Mike Reil talks about launching a farming enterprise on episode 149 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

go-slow approach met that the feed situation was not a game changer.

Their conservative strategy turned out to be particularly prescient when it became clear the 220 acres of corn, soybeans, alfalfa and wheat they were raising on rented ground was going to take a significant yield hit in 2013 as a result of hail and drought.

"I guess we just have to roll with the punches," says Mike philosophically.

The Push of the Next Generation

Right now the family's main source of income is an on-farm machine shop Mike runs—he fixes everything from tractors to boats—and Linda's job as a school bus driver. They use his brother David's cropping equipment and they've found networking with other established farmers—something emphasized in Farm Dreams and Farm Beginnings—to be quite helpful.

"The networking has been huge—different people helping for marketing, contacts for grazing, help with cattle breed selections," says Mike. "Everybody has been really, really willing to share. It wasn't like they were guarding secrets."

One of their mentors is Cliff Millsapps, who raises grass-fed beef near Gary, S. Dak., and markets direct to consumers. "He's a wealth of information," says Mike.

And for now the Reils are sticking with their go-slow approach. Through family connections and contacts from when they lived in the Twin Cities, they will have a market

Farm Beginnings Profiles

To read more profiles of Farm Beginnings graduates, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/meetourgraduates.

for their first marketable beef when it's ready next year. They are also cautiously optimistic about the growing local demand for such products as the local food movement in the Big Stone Lake area grows.

"That's kind of another part of growing slow," says Mike. "Hopefully we can develop that market as we grow. We want to do it right the first time and give people a good product that hopefully they will get excited about as well."

But they also know the younger generation may challenge their more methodical approach. Tyler, now 20, recently wrapped up a two-year agriculture production course at Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown. Mike and Linda split the crop enterprise profits with their son last year, and he's already working on building up a cattle herd.

"Tyler is going to be growing faster than us, I think," says Mike. "He's going to be taking off whereas we have to hold back and be careful. But he's experimenting right along with us and we're trying to show him on a smaller scale what works and is profitable." □

LSP's Journeyperson Course

This year marks the second time the Land Stewardship Project has offered the Journeyperson Farm Training Course.

Journeyperson provides new farmers who are in their first few years of launching their operations assistance through mentorship, financial planning assistance, whole farm planning and peer-to-peer learning.

Participants work with both a farmer mentor and a financial adviser on their individual farm planning.

Each farm in the course also takes part in a matched savings program, where on a monthly basis participants will deposit up to \$100 in a savings account. After two years their money will be matched and they will be able to use it toward a capital improvement on the farm.

LSP is now taking applications for the 2015 Journeyperson Course. If you are interested in applying, contact Richard Ness at rness@landstewardshipproject.org, 320-269-2105. More information is also available at www.farmbeginnings.org.

Community Based Food Systems

A Quarter Section of Hope

Urban Agriculture Plants itself in the Center of a New Development

By Anna Cioffi

Despite the unrelenting rain, more than 100 people congregated on the corner of Franklin and Portland Avenues in Minneapolis one day in October to celebrate the launch of the South Quarter IV development project, a part of which represents a major step forward for one community's efforts to develop a local food system that's healthy and sustainable.

South Quarter IV is the Hope Community's newest housing development. Hope's mission is to provide diverse housing options and welcoming public spaces in the Phillips neighborhood, one of the most

original founding members. It is an apt name for a building that aspires to provide not just housing, but "a place to belong" (which is Peace House's mantra) in a neighborhood once heavily plagued by drugs and violence. Construction is expected to begin this spring and apartments will be available to rent in 2015.

"South Quarter is a larger and inspirational, community-centered development model that fittingly builds on the historic transformation of this neighborhood," says Mary Keefe, Hope Community's executive director. "We're very excited that we are as close as we are to moving forward."



The South Quarter, which will be built on an open lot south of downtown Minneapolis, will feature a 4,000-square-foot urban agriculture space. (LSP photo)

diverse and economically challenged neighborhoods in Minneapolis. The development will include 120 mixed-income, high-quality apartment homes, with a percentage serving formerly homeless adults and families.

The ground-breaking program also paid tribute to Hope's humble beginnings over 35 years ago as a small women's crisis shelter on Portland Avenue. The new apartment building will be named "The Rose," a nod to the late Sister Rose Tillemans, the founder of Peace House and a close ally of Hope's

A Step Forward for Urban Ag

The Land Stewardship Project is particularly excited about one element of the new development project: a 4,000-square-foot urban agriculture space for residents and community members. This space is being designed in close collaboration with LSP members and a strong team of dedicated community leaders, who currently farm two urban agriculture spaces on land owned by Hope, just across the street from the South

Quarter IV site.

LSP and Hope began an innovative partnership in 2009, teaming up around the shared missions of place-based grassroots organizing, and an ethic of responsible stewardship when it comes to the development and preservation of land. Hope's dedication to building housing with complementary urban ag space is an innovative and timely model for building an infrastructure that encourages healthy, local food, activity and sustainability. Residents of Minneapolis are demanding plans for smarter growth that incorporates not just green space, but interactive spaces that encourage a connection to the land.

Often, urban agriculture is regarded as a cheap solution to fixing up (oftentimes temporarily) unsightly scraps of land, instead of being valued as a long-term, integral part of the city's growth. Urban farmers, community gardeners and other citizens of Minneapolis who are concerned with the environmental impact of our current food system are putting pressure on elected officials to champion a regulatory framework in the city that supports urban farmers and fosters acquisition of land for agriculture in the city. The urban agriculture amendments to the Minneapolis zoning code that were approved in 2012 are a great first step, but they don't go far enough.

We need an investment in community that fosters a relationship with land, and the heart of the city is where we need this vital connection the most. More businesses—restaurants, compost suppliers, etc.—are incorporating urban agriculture as a vital part of their business plans.

South Quarter IV comes at a good time in the city's urban agriculture movement. It will serve as a critical reminder that *all* residents, no matter what their background or economic status, deserve an opportunity to connect with their food and the land that produces it. □

As an organizer with LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program, Anna Cioffi worked with community leaders at Hope to develop programming around urban agriculture and healthy food. She recently left LSP to return to nursing school. More information on LSP's urban agriculture work is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood.

Hope Garden Video

A group of students at South High School in Minneapolis recently produced a short video on the Hope Community Garden. It's at www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0STM8HEhis.

Little Food Co-op on the Prairie

EDITOR'S NOTE: In June 2013 a storm swept through the western Minnesota community of Ortonville and destroyed, among other things, the Granary Food Co-op. As Land Stewardship Project organizer Rebecca Terk described in a previous issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter* (No. 3, 2013), this catastrophe initially looked like the death knell of the small co-op, which had been in operation in this farm town of 1,900 people since 1979.

But the community rallied around the Granary. Even before the initial shock wore off, board members and volunteers were making calls, salvaging merchandise, and inventorying available retail space to fit the co-op's needs.

Support came from across the state via offers of free or reduced price shelving, bulk bins and other fixtures. Pomme de Terre Co-op in Morris, Minn., extended their own member discounts to Granary Co-op members for the interim.

On Sept. 5, a more spacious and well-stocked co-op store was

opened ahead of the busy holiday baking season. The Granary's new location is a storefront owned by a local appliance business, Larry's Refrigeration and Heating, which remodeled the space so it could meet government regulations for housing a food co-op.

By mid-winter, the co-op had doubled its membership to 250 people and for the first time in its history it had a paid employee in the form of a general manager, Anne Tower. It does nowhere the business of a food co-op located in an urban area or college town, which is where most have traditionally been located. But the Granary's emergence from the rubble shows that co-ops can play a critical role in small, rural communities.

Tower, a native Minnesotan who just moved back from Austin, Texas, recently talked to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about the challenges of running a food co-op in a small town and the importance of reaching out to new potential members.

On the Urban-Centric View of Food Co-ops

"It is true that it is a bit of an anomaly that we have a food co-op in a town the size of Ortonville, but I think we're getting a different kind of exposure that's really exciting. People are seeing we can put healthy food on the map in this tiny town and they are really starting to talk about it. It is definitely more of an urban scene to have a co-op culture, but I think it also can be and is growing to be a small town scene as well. It's kind of the heart of the community so as our co-op grows I think we can show that it doesn't have to be only the urban culture that embraces this."

Working with Local Farmers

"Definitely the majority of our products are from outside distributors, but Land Stewardship Project organizer Rebecca Terk is very passionate about bringing in as much local product as we can source. This is so important and our community really cares about that so we're trying as hard as we can, especially in the summer and fall months when it's a lot easier to get that produce."

A Growing Co-op

"Currently we have around 250 active members and that number is quickly growing, which is really exciting. And

our projected sales for the year are around \$150,000, which in the co-op world is very small, but for the Granary is hugely moving considering where we were a year ago. So we're really excited that sales have doubled very quickly.

"Our business hours are Monday though

be a co-op member or to go into a co-op you kind of have to be a hippie, and in a small agricultural town like Ortonville I think that is definitely a barrier.

"One of the reasons I was interested in the position of general manager is that I could have those one-on-one conversations with our customers and our volunteers about how a place centered around healthy food is an important part of the community culture. I think one part of the cooperative spirit is education. A lot of people still don't know we're here at all so for me to provide education by going to trade shows, through newspaper advertisements, and in one-on-one conversations on the street is key.

"We share space with the refrigerator and heating company, so I often get to talk to the people who pass through on their way to that business. A lot of Larry's clientele probably don't step into the co-op environment normally so that part's been really fun of having one-on-one conversations with them.

"Not everyone is going to like our story and not everyone is going to want to become a member and that's completely fine. But I think the challenge of every cooperative is letting people know we're an important part of the community." □



Anne Tower: "It is definitely more of an urban scene to have a co-op culture, but I think it also can be and is growing to be a small town scene as well." (LSP photo)

Friday 9 to 5 and Saturdays 9 to 3 and those are actually longer hours than we had in our old location so as our membership increases and our sales increase we're hoping to extend those hours even more."

Reaching Out to the Wider Community

"Reaching out to new people is one thing that I am personally excited about. I think that there are myths that go around that to

Give it a Listen

Anne Tower talks about the Granary Co-op on episode 150 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

LSP & Community Based Foods in Western Minn.

For more on LSP's work to promote healthy, local food systems in Ortonville and other western Minnesota communities, contact Rebecca Terk at 320-305-9685 or rebeccat@landstewardshipproject.org.

Grazing as a Public Good

When it Comes to Grass, Farmers & Conservationists are Sharing a Mutual Goal

By Brian DeVore

As a Nature Conservancy scientist based in a Midwestern state, Steve Chaplin thinks a lot about the impact agriculture has on ecological treasures such as native tallgrass prairie.

“Other than plowing, grazing has probably been responsible for the degradation of more prairie than any other source,” says Chaplin, who is in the Conservancy’s Minnesota field office. No surprises there. But less expected is Chaplin’s next words: “We would like to see grazing on a large scale, which would mean grazing across public-private property lines. To a lot of conservationists it is probably surprising that we need more people, rather than fewer people, to improve the landscape.”

More farmers, and by extension, the cattle they manage, means more disturbance, and that’s a good thing. It turns out native prairies, other grass-based habitats and even wetlands need a little disruption of growth patterns if they are to remain healthy ecosystems, rather than scrubby patches of land covered by red cedar and other invasives. That’s why Chaplin and other natural resource experts are welcoming cattle onto lands that were once verboten to livestock: preserves, wildlife refuges and other natural tracts of real estate. One place where this trend is gaining momentum is western Minnesota, where an agriculture-dominated landscape is dotted with remnant prairies and some of the most valuable waterfowl habitat in the region.

Public agencies and private conservation groups are fast realizing that buying up land and putting up “Nature Preserve” signs won’t secure the long-term sustainability of that habitat—it needs active management, the kind that toes the line between stressing the environment and allowing it to recover.

It turns out when cattle are used to provide that well-balanced mix, the result can

be a healthier, more diverse habitat, as well as an extra incentive for farmers to keep livestock as a key part of their enterprises.

“We need to keep cowmen on the ground,” says J. B. Bright, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge specialist who works with graziers in western Minnesota. “The local economies are stronger and the perennial plant systems are stronger.”

1st of 2 articles

A Disturbing Development

In the Midwest, cattle’s return to prairies and other natural areas is a relatively recent phenomenon. Grazing of public lands has a long history out West, where large herds of cattle have been allowed to roam at will on natural areas during the entire growing season, often with little or no controls. In some cases, the result has been decimated



Natural resource managers have learned that putting up a sign on the border of a refuge isn’t enough to keep wildlife habitat healthy. (Minnesota DNR photo)

grasslands and destruction of riparian areas, resulting in destroyed wildlife habitat, erosion and polluted water.

“When you talk about the West, grazing on public lands has a black eye or two,” says Minnesota Department of Natural Resources prairie habitat ecologist Greg Hoch. In these circumstances, banning livestock from natural areas and refuges would appear to be a no-brainer. But such a rigid line in the grass can result in lands that suffer from severe

benign neglect.

“This is Minnesota—if you don’t graze or burn it, it will become forest,” says Bruce Freske, manager of the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Morris Wetland District.

Depending on the situation, grasslands require a major disturbance at least every five to 10 years, something bison and wildfires provided in days gone by. More recently natural resource experts have purposely burned off grasslands to keep woody invasives at bay and recharge green growth. But managing a burn can be expensive and it requires optimal weather conditions.

As a result, refuge managers concede they are woefully behind on burning, and they are watching with alarm as pastures purchased from farmers become inundated with cedar, Siberian elm, Russian olive and red-osier dogwood within four or five years.

Fortunately, innovations in grass-based livestock production offer a prime opportunity to bring back the kind of flash disturbances that haven’t been around since the time of the bison. Livestock producers utilizing managed rotational grazing are seeing the benefits of moving cattle frequently through numerous paddocks, rather than keeping them on the same pasture all season long, where it becomes overgrazed.

This system can extend the grass season, cut costs and in general produce more profits. Advances in watering systems, lightweight moveable electric fencing and automatic gate openers have made rotational grazing even more viable.

This type of grazing system fits well with what refuge managers are looking for: short-term impact (a few weeks) and long-term rest (a year or more), something people like Hoch call “conservation grazing.”

“The key is to hit it and rest it,” he says. “That’s how these prairies evolved with the bison. Keeping livestock on pasture year-after-year will just clobber it, but I’m

100 percent convinced that if we do grazing right, grassland diversity will increase.”

Rangeland science backs up Hoch’s contention. Studies in numerous states show that conservation grazing can as much as double plant diversity in an area—it not only prevents overgrazing but the cattle’s manure and urine helps recharge the soil’s biology. Hoch and other habitat experts working

Public Grazing, see page 25...

in western Minnesota have observed how grazing has increased native plant communities by knocking back invasive cool season plants like Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome. Such invasives tend to blanket the land with a homogeneous cover, which limits the diversity wildlife such as deer, waterfowl, shorebirds and grassland songbirds require. Such grasses also tend to go dormant in hot weather and provide limited habitat and foraging areas for pollinators. Cattle are also being used to thin out cattails and reed-canary grass around wetlands,

Minnesota preserves are being managed via grazing, and conservationists say even if the practice is expanded significantly, it's doubtful it will be present on the majority of acres. For example, of the 50,000 acres the Fish and Wildlife Service manages in the Morris District, around 5,000 acres are grazed by 35 different producers. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources uses grazing on about 10,000 acres of Wildlife Management Areas statewide and has a goal of pushing that to 50,000 acres by 2015, which would still be only 4 percent of all state refuge acreage. The Nature Conservancy grazes less than 15 percent of the

since the 1920s and 1930s.

Bright, who works with a couple dozen cattle producers who graze refuge land, says livestock producers are increasingly getting "desperate" for pasture as acres they rent are switched to row crops. "I had one guy say, 'I lost 240 acres to the plow.'"

It should be kept in mind that although wildlife managers and farmers share a common desire to save grass, they can still differ widely on what that resource should ultimately produce. Livestock producers usually pay a fee to graze refuges and other natural areas, but that doesn't give them *carte blanche*—the refuge manager's goal of protecting the resource takes precedence over profits.

"The farmer wants the feed and the natural resource manager wants the diversity of plants," says Howard Moechnig, who operates a grazing consulting firm called Midwest Grasslands. "Sometimes the two don't match."

But when they do, it can be a good way to manage an important resource on multiple levels, says Dan Jenniges, who has a cow-calf operation near Glenwood in west-central Minnesota. Jenniges, who has been grazing Fish and Wildlife Service land for eight years and Department of Natural Resources land for two, says the grazing schedule and intensity can vary from year-to-year.

"It depends on what their objectives are for their particular piece of land," he says of the refuge staffers he works with. Sometimes his cattle are brought in during the spring to knock back cool season grasses like brome and bluegrass just as they're starting growth; other times a fall grazing is called for to stymie the same grasses as they are coming out of summer dormancy.

Some of Jenniges' land is adjacent to refuge land, making grazing the public areas convenient; in other cases he has to transport the cattle several miles for a grazing season that may only last around a month. That can be a hassle, but it allows him to give his own pastures a rest and break up pest cycles while contributing to the health of the overall landscape.

"We aren't renting the grassland—we're managing it," says Jenniges. "When you're grazing that public land, you're able to take pressure off your own lands, so in general all the grasslands become better, whether it's for the grass or the wildlife." □

The next Land Stewardship Letter will examine the challenges of using cattle to manage natural areas and how grazing can play a role in "coordinated landscape management" to produce benefits across property lines — both public and private.

Private Stewards-Public Stewards

Grazing wildlife refuges and other natural areas can be a way to get access to low-cost forage for cattle while resting home pastures, but livestock producers shouldn't rely too heavily on public lands, say conservation experts.

"Refuge managers don't want to hear you're out of grass because you're overstocked or are trying to increase your stocking rate," says Jeff Duchene, a grazing specialist for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service who has done grazing plans for wildlife areas. "It needs to be mutually beneficial."

And don't grow your herd size based on getting access to public lands for grazing—contracts are generally short term. Refuge managers want to work with graziers who are taking care of their own land as well as they would a public area. Such good stewardship can help win the public over on the role

grazing can play in conservation, both on preserves and in the larger landscape.

"If you are plowing up your own prairies, don't come knocking on our door to graze — it's a non-starter," says Dave Trauba, manager of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resource's Lac qui Parle Wildlife Management Area in the western part of the state. "We need to, as a society, reward people for keeping grass on the landscape."

Interested in Grazing WMAs?

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has an online map for livestock producers looking for information on grazing opportunities available at Wildlife Management Areas in the state. Information is at <http://gis.mda.state.mn.us/consgrazing> or available by contacting Kelly Anderson at 320-808-4424, Kelly.Anderson@state.mn.us.

providing the open areas many waterfowl prefer when keeping a lookout for predators. And controlled grazing of riparian areas (*see page 5*) is proving to be an effective way to stabilize areas along waterways and lakes.

The science has become so convincing that conservation groups such as the Nature Conservancy and the National Audubon Society have changed their once decidedly negative view of cattle and now see them as an effective habitat management tool.

Right now a small percentage of Min-

nesota, 63,500 acres it owns in Minnesota.

Nevertheless, conservation grazing is seen as a potentially key tool in targeted areas. The Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, which was published in June 2011 by 10 conservation agencies and organizations, provides a blueprint on how to save and manage a resource that once covered 18 million acres of the state but is now down to 235,000 acres and shrinking fast. The authors of the report identified conservation grazing as a major method for preserving and managing grasslands.

The Prairie Conservation Plan highlights a shared threat livestock farmers and conservationists face: the plowing up of grass to make way for more corn and soybeans. The *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reported in 2013 that between 2006 and 2011, 1.3 million acres of grassland were converted to crops in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska. Such conversion rates haven't been seen

Give it a Listen

Episode 151 of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast features wildlife and grazing experts talking about the benefits and challenges involved with using grazing to improve wildlife habitat: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

Choosing to Resist Resiliency

New Data Shows Cover Crops are Paying their Way—So Why is Adoption Lagging?

By Brian DeVore

It's exciting to hear sustainable agriculture innovators like Gabe Brown and Dave Brandt talk about how cover crops build their soil health, increase profitability and in general create resiliency on their operations. But spend any time with Brown and Brandt and it's clear going against the mainstream of agriculture and challenging conventional wisdom is as natural to them as starting up a tractor. It's an important trait for innovators, but not one that always wins over the "mainstream" of the farm community.

On the other hand, when someone like Ray Gaesser starts talking about protecting his soil with small grains and other non-market crops, a whole new group of folks take notice. Gaesser farms 6,000 acres of corn and soybeans in southwest Iowa and has been 100 percent no-till since 1991. This system worked well for around two decades, especially when it came to preventing soil from eroding off Gaesser's fields.

But in 2010, he started noticing rain events that came so hard and fast they literally floated the crop residue off the field, leaving his soil vulnerable to severe erosion; even grassed waterways and terraces weren't working anymore.

Gaesser is known as an innovator in mainstream agriculture—he's president of the American Soybean Association and has long been active on issues ranging from free trade to biotechnology. Seeing nature outsmart what he considered a cutting-edge cropping system prompted him to start growing cover crops on land that normally would not have any plant life before and after the corn-soybean season. It worked, and he currently has 1,000 acres in cover crops, with plans to double that in the near future.

"Cover crops are the answer for these severe events we're having," he said in February.

Gaesser made these comments at the National Conference on Cover Crops and Soil Health in Omaha, Neb. This invitation-only event was sponsored by the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, and drew farmers, conservation experts, scientists and agribusiness bigwigs from across the country. The two-day

event provided a chance to hear about the successes people like Brown, Brandt and Gaesser are having with cover crops, as well as ruminate over big picture statistics showing how this conservation farming system is working for thousands of other producers across the country.

But participants in the conference also had to grapple with a troubling question: if cover crops work so well environmentally and economically, then why are they present on only around 2 percent of farm fields in the Mississippi River Basin?

In fact, conference sponsors expressed the wish more than once of seeing U.S. cover cropped acres grow from the current estimate of three million acres to 20 million acres by 2020. That's a daunting goal. Buf-fet, who operates a farm in central Illinois and who is using his foundation to fund soil health initiatives, told the gathered crowd

director of Extension Programs for North Central SARE. This survey is a follow-up to a groundbreaking farmer study conducted by SARE and others in the Upper Mississippi River watershed in 2012. The 2012 survey found that during that year's brutal drought keeping the soil covered with small grains, radishes and other plants helped fields preserve enough precious moisture to provide a yield bump of, in the case of corn, around 11 bushels per acre. Soybeans planted after cover crops enjoyed a yield advantage as well that year, according to the survey, which was conducted in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and the Dakotas, among other states.

It must be kept in mind that U.S. corn and soybean yields took major hits in 2012 as a result of the mega-drought. Just about any alternative farming technique that could save even a trace of precipitation had a good chance of providing an advantage. But what about in a more "normal" year?

Myers said a follow-up survey of farmers in the Upper Mississippi River watershed showed that in 2013 corn planted after cover crops produced on average 10 more bushels per acre when compared to its non-cover cropped counterparts. Soybeans after cover



Signs of erosion showed up in many Midwestern road ditches this winter in the form of "snirt"—a combination of snow and eroded dirt. This photo, which was taken in western Minnesota in January, shows the results of tilling a cornfield after fall harvest and leaving it bare. Crop fields that had even a trace of plant cover on them over the winter produced significantly less erosion. (Photo by John White)

that he has traveled the world and seen problems caused by situations where people have no choices.

"Here in this country, we have choices," he said. "We have the resources and the know-how. We should be leaders in this and we're not."

Cover Crops Pay Their Way

What makes cover cropping's lukewarm reception on the farm even more vexing is a set of new survey numbers unveiled at the conference by Rob Myers, regional

crops also yielded well in 2013—a season full of challenges but a widespread drought not being one of them.

When cover cropping starts to prove itself year-after-year in varying conditions, it builds the reputation of being a reliable farming technique. And that yield bump means that cover-cropped corn had a net return advantage of around \$35 per acre, according to Myers. That's an important figure to keep in mind because the median cost of

Cover, see page 27...

putting in a cover crop—paying for the seed and doing the planting—was around \$37, according to the survey.

“That [\$35] is close to the cost of seed and seeding, but maybe not enough to convince someone who is on the fence,” Myers told the conference attendees.

Maybe not, but as subsequent presenters made clear, the other “extras” provided by cover cropping could go a long way toward convincing more farmers to hop off that fence. For one thing, cover cropping’s ability to build soil health can provide a significant amount of “free” fertility while breaking up pest cycles and reducing compaction. Each 1 percent of organic matter holds the equivalent of \$700 in soil nutrients, according to Ohio State University’s Extension Service.

During a conference panel discussion farmers from Iowa, Illinois, North Dakota and Ohio talked about how building soil with cover crops has helped them cut fertilizer and pesticide use—in some cases significantly.

“I have used no synthetic fertilizers since 2008,” said Gabe Brown, who uses cover cropping on his North Dakota operation as part of a diverse, integrated system that involves no-till and mob grazing (*see issues 3 and 4 of the 2012 Land Stewardship Letter for more on Brown*). Dave Brandt said his Ohio farm’s soil is covered “around 360 days a year” thanks to cover crops and he also has dramatically cut his use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Myers said farmers are showing that grazing of cover crops not only recovers planting costs quickly, but adds profitability to their livestock operations.

The off-farm “public goods” pluses of cover cropping are also starting to add up. For one thing, cover crops have been shown to provide wildlife habitat while sequestering greenhouse gases. And Iowa State University research presented at the Omaha conference showed cover crops cut nitrogen fertilizer runoff and soil erosion by half.

“I lose less than 100 pounds of soil a year off my farm,” said Brandt. In a good year, a typical Midwestern farm is lucky to keep its erosion rate under five tons per acre.

Insuring Against Disaster

Another potential economic plus that was mentioned more than once at the conference has particularly significant implications given the recent passage of a new Farm Bill that is heavily reliant on crop insurance (see pages 4, 12 and 13). Wouldn’t soils made more resilient by cover cropping and

other sustainable methods be less likely to produce the kinds of crop failures that result in big insurance payouts? Perhaps farmers who build soil health could be rewarded by having to pay less for crop insurance, said Jason Weller, chief of the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service.

“If we can show actuarially that use of cover crops reduces your risk of crop failure, then that could be reflected in your premium,” he said.

A quarter of the respondents to the SARE survey said a reduction in insurance premiums would give them an incentive to plant cover crops. In fact, crop insurance’s growing clout in federal farm policy makes it one of the last remaining programs for incentivizing farmers to put in place conservation production systems like cover cropping.

“Just tie crop insurance to soil loss and

LSP & Soil Health

The Land Stewardship Project is working in western and southeastern Minnesota to promote diversified farming systems that build soil health, are economically viable and improve the environment. For details, see www.landstewardshipproject.org and follow the links to the **Chippewa 10%** page and the **Root River: Promise of Pasture** page. More details are also available by calling our office in southeast Minnesota at 507-523-3366 or Montevideo at 320-269-2105.

More information on LSP’s soil health work is also available on the **Soil Health, Profits & Resiliency** page on our website.

you’d have 20 million acres of cover crops just like that,” said Brown, adding that the current crop insurance program impedes innovation in agriculture by taking away the incentives for farmers to try things beyond the typical corn-soybean rotation. “On our farm we’ve built enough soil resiliency that we don’t need crop insurance.”

However, the Risk Management Agency (RMA), which administers the crop insurance program, has its hands tied because cover crops aren’t recognized as a “best farming practice,” said an RMA official who attended the soil health conference. He added that RMA defers to university extension research on what is considered a sound, low-risk farming practice.

Crop insurance reforms that recognize healthier soil as a lower risk to the public coffers may be one way to promote cover cropping. Yet another is outright payments to farmers who agree to protect their fields with off-season plantings.

By the 1990s, the Chesapeake Bay was

turning into a dead zone as a result of algal blooms caused by excessive nutrient runoff from farms. In Maryland, which has corn and soybean farms as well as large chicken operations, cover cropping was promoted as a way to reduce runoff, but did not really gain traction among farmers until a “flush tax” was imposed on every property owner in the state. The tax provides millions of dollars for paying farmers directly to plant cover crops—mostly rye grass. Maryland is now 70 percent toward its goal of reducing nutrient runoff.

“We really didn’t do the farmer education piece of promoting the benefits of improved soil health,” said Ken Staver, a researcher at the University of Maryland’s Wye Research and Education Center. “We basically got the general public to pay money to improve water quality.”

Staver concedes that the Maryland example is somewhat unique. For one thing, there are relatively few farmers in the state compared to the Midwest—the entire state of Maryland only grows a million acres of corn while Minnesota alone has more than eight million acres. In addition, residents there see the direct result of excessive runoff into the Chesapeake—a far different relationship than what’s found in the Midwest, where the Gulf of Mexico’s dead zone is caused by farms more than 1,000 miles upstream—out of sight, out of mind.

Choosing Soil Health

Myers said that farmers who adopt cover crops and stick with them tend to use them as part of other innovative practices, like no-till or managed rotational grazing. Using such a comprehensive systems approach to build soil health makes it more likely a farmer will make such practices a permanent part of an operation.

In fact, one surprising finding in the latest SARE survey was that 63 percent of respondents had not received financial assistance to plant cover crops, and 14 percent said they had gotten funding in the past but continued to cover crop after the payments stopped.

“To me, this explodes the myth that people will only plant cover crops if the government pays for it,” said Myers.

To Buffett, such results offer a glimmer of hope that farmers will take advantage of the choices they have before such choices are no longer available.

“The heavy stick of regulation is inevitable in the Midwest if we don’t get proactive,” warned Buffett. “I think the most important message to farmers is we have an opportunity to deal with this problem our way, or we can be told how to do it.” □



Leaving Rollingstone

By Kevin Fenton

2013; 206 pages

Minnesota Historical
Society Press

www.leavingrollingstone.com

Reviewed by Andria Williams

As someone who has left the village for the city, I find myself wondering what I have taken with me,” Kevin Fenton writes in his memoir, *Leaving Rollingstone*, “and what I lost forever when I left Rollingstone.”

Much was lost for Fenton — the family farm, his father, the nurturing community in which he was raised in the southeastern Minnesota town of Rollingstone — but much was also retained, as this honest, generous portrait of a family and a place shows.

To be born in Rollingstone in 1959, Fenton recalls, was to be born into a very particular place and time. The town got its name from a Dakota word, “E-yan-o-min-man-wat-pah,” which translates to “a stone that had been rolling.” The town, founded and populated by Luxembourgers, was 100 percent Catholic, and though Fenton’s family was also devoutly Catholic, they sometimes felt like outsiders because they were of Irish descent, not Luxembourger. The only school in town was the parish school. A handful of surnames dominated the slim telephone book (my personal favorite being

the Rivers family, who ran the creamery and who named their son Butter Rivers).

When Fenton’s dairy-farmer father was a teenager, he had been in a car accident. He had spent five years in hospitals, recovering, and a lifetime fighting the increasingly disruptive and painful damage done to his body. The event and its far-reaching aftermath “felt like a creation myth” for Fenton and his family; it was how his parents met (his mother was one of his father’s nurses), but it made the normal hard work of farming even more difficult for Fenton’s father, and its consequences would affect each member of the family every day.

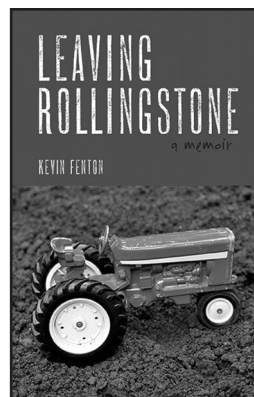
Fenton, who was a classmate of mine in graduate school at the University of Minnesota, felt that he was born into his family’s Golden Age, a period that he remembers as happy. Fenton offers a fascinating insight into how a child’s perspective can differ from his parents’, because, as he writes, “one year in the late 1960s, at the time that I was hauling in my share of Christmas loot, our family income was \$8,000 and our medical bills were \$300,000.” His father had his hip replaced 12 times in that decade; he endured 47 hospitalizations. Nothing worked for long and the strain on the rest of the family was enormous, particularly for Fenton’s older brother, Dennis, who emerges as a quiet hero of the memoir, and his mother, who ran the dairy farm when her husband was in the hospital, cared for her five children, and maintained the family’s spiritual life, all while working full-time as a nurse in Rochester, a 40-mile drive away. “The dominant chord of my childhood was this: All of us were trying as hard as we could,” Fenton

writes. “It just wasn’t enough.”

And yet, despite all this, *Leaving Rollingstone* is the story of what endures. Fenton’s childhood is a good one, suffused by a deep sense of family as a working unit, “intact and industrious,” flawed but dynamic, trying their best. “Our place was like a city: people moved around me without much noticing me, occupied with their luminous tasks,” Fenton writes. The town of Rollingstone, like his family, digs in its heels against the growing pains of inevitable change as the parish school disbands, which, Fenton recalls — for students accustomed to a small, rural, religiously homogenous village — felt like a divorce. But in both cases, Fenton’s recurring theme is clear: where one might at first see only loss, there is so much more that endures.

“A house is a promise kept, again and again,” he writes, describing the last time his family lived on the farm before, under staggering debt, they were forced to sell. “It is there on the horizon, but it is such a subtle promise that you never think about it.” In the same way, Fenton’s book is its own promise: that the making of meaning out of loss has a purpose; that the human effort to live good lives matters; that the people and places you have cared about still remain. The things Fenton has loved come alive when he writes about them, and they live on for his readers, vibrant and luminous as the family and farm he left behind. □

Land Stewardship Project member Andria Williams is a former organizer and volunteer for the organization’s Policy Program.



Sunlit Riffles & Shadowed Runs

Stories of Fly
Fishing in America

By Kent Cowgill

2012; 170 pages

University of Wisconsin Press
www.uwpress.wisc.edu

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

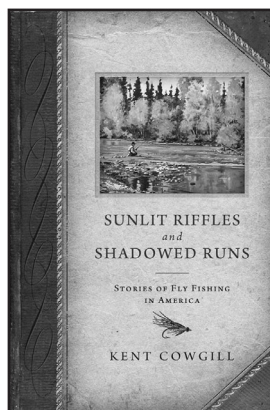
Sunlit Riffles and Shadowed Runs: Stories of Fly Fishing in America is an excellent collection of fictional fishing stories by southeast Minnesota author and trout advocate Kent Cowgill.

This collection of 16 stories is by turns descriptive, comical and reverent. These stories also cover a wide span of geographic locations, from Minnesota and Wisconsin to South Dakota, Nebraska and Montana—even Scotland and Mexico.

Sunlit Riffles contains vivid and detailed descriptions of everything from the scenery to individual trout flies, giving it the flavor of other great trout writers like Norman Maclean, Ernest Hemingway and David James Duncan, indicating the range of the author’s writing skill and knowledge of this subject.

Another important element

of this collection is the author’s obvious Midwestern roots. He provides an excellent description of a bitterly cold Minnesota winter day in the first story of this collection, “Day of Mourning.” It’s an account of a group of friends who go fishing after the funeral of a friend who left them a prized fishing rod. Writes Cowgill: “Wheezing, the angler stopped a few feet short of what only a winter-shocked Bedouin could have called a pool. His breath hung in crystallized shards from the ski mask. The seam stretched for a hundred narrow yards ahead of him like a crevasse on a glacial field.”



Riffles, see page 29...

Another tale describes a young serviceman on leave from a military base who finds himself trout fishing in the most unlikely of places: rural Nebraska. Although the settings of these stories are not entirely Midwestern, the region's influence, especially the rural landscape, flows through the book like a winding trout stream.

The Sixth Extinction An Unnatural History

By Elizabeth Kolbert
2014; 319 pages
Holt & Company
<http://us.macmillan.com>

Reviewed by Brian DeVore

I originally downloaded the audio version of Elizabeth Kolbert's new book, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, to simply keep me awake during a long wintry drive across the southern part of Minnesota and through the heart of Iowa. But by the time I arrived at my destination—a national conference on cover crops and soil health in Omaha—I realized Kolbert's message was all too relevant to what I was experiencing on this road trip: mile-after-mile of formerly diverse prairie now sitting idle until spring, when it will be planted to corn or soybeans, which will grow a few months before being removed, leaving the soil impoverished above and below ground.

The loss of the prairie, considered the most substantial decline of any major ecosystem in North America, is what Kolbert would call a sign of humans imposing major alterations to the planet at an unprecedented rate. And it's one of the drivers of a "mass extinction" that we are in the midst of, a catastrophic event that threatens to eliminate 20 to 50 percent of all living species on Earth by the end of this century. Mass extinctions are nothing new: scientists think the planet has experienced five such events during the past 3.8 billion years. The last one was caused by a miles-wide asteroid smacking into the earth and sending so much debris into the atmosphere that the entire climate was turned upside down, rubbing out the dinosaurs, among other species.

And that's the point made by the many scientists Kolbert interviews and spends time with for her book: change is inevitable, but what makes mass extinctions so devastating is the *rate* at which change occurs, eliminating the opportunity for plants and animals to utilize the basic rules of evolution

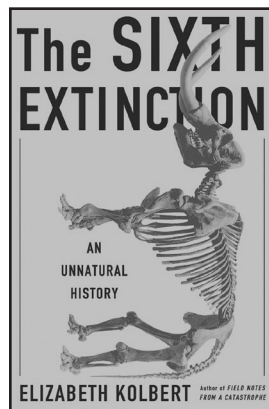
Sunlit Riffles and Shadowed Runs is an excellent choice for anyone interested in the outdoors or good agrarian literature. The characters are very real and approachable—a middle-aged couple, a young boy on a family vacation, grieving friends, people that we encounter everyday. They are all caught up in the challenge and mystique of trout fishing, an endeavor enjoyed by many in southeastern Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin and

northeastern Iowa and threatened—much like sustainable farming and tourism—by the economic pressures of frac sand mining and housing developments. □

Avid angler Dale Hadler volunteers frequently on Land Stewardship Project efforts to protect the driftless region of the Upper Mississippi River Valley.

to adapt. But it doesn't always take an asteroid or a volcano to bring about such sudden, devastating shifts. Sometimes it just takes "one weedy species" that has the ability to not only outright kill, but also to modify everything from the climate to the content of the very water, air and soil we depend on. We are that weedy species. Neanderthals lived in what is now Europe for 100,000 years and left no more impact on the planet than any other large vertebrate. Now consider the impact *Homo Sapiens* have had in just the past two centuries alone. Humans so dominate the earth today that some scientists have suggested we rename the current Holocene (from the Greek for "entirely recent") era the "Homogenocene era."

The author travels the world to see firsthand the impacts we are having on everything from amphibians and birds to coral reefs and forest systems. She combines



firsthand accounts with references to the latest science to paint a fascinating picture of the world that's been, the world that is, and the world that will be (if things don't change fast). Kolbert's clear, descriptive writing style makes a mountain of what could be overwhelming

information quite digestible—although I'll admit a lot slipped by me in the audio version while I was trying to navigate through ground blizzards.

And what all that evidence points to is one inevitable conclusion: our drive for ever more food, energy and space is making the world simpler, and thus less resilient. It's not all bad news. Kolbert acknowledges that there are numerous examples of humans trying to turn the hands back on the extinction clock. She describes a "frozen zoo" where cell lines of threatened species are stored in liquid nitrogen. Such efforts are an important acknowledgement that we've

messed up and we are somehow responsible for fixing things. But they do not take into account the even bigger issue at hand: true mass extinctions don't just weed out the weak and unprepared, they wipe out everything. Kolbert cites example-after-example from the geologic record of species that were quite well adapted to their environment, but were caught off guard when that environment changed dramatically.

"Among the many lessons to emerge from the geological record, perhaps the most sobering is that in life, as in mutual funds, past performance is no guarantee of future results," Kolbert writes.

In other words, we aren't just the agents of this mass extinction—we may also be one of its casualties. For example, our takeover of the nitrogen cycle and destruction of the plant diversity that keeps our soil healthy is starting to show signs of threatening our very ability to produce food, particularly in an era of unpredictable climate events.

I thought about that during the soil conference in Omaha, where farmers, scientists and conservation experts discussed ways of bringing resiliency back to the land. Kolbert would have seen this conference as an example of humans seeing the writing on the wall—unprecedented erosion events, the Gulf of Mexico dead zone, superpests, unexpected crop failures—and attempting to take steps to head off disaster.

But are such discussions just another example of people trying to prove we have the ingenuity needed to survive a little longer, or are they rooted in the acknowledgement of a basic truth: developing solutions that fix isolated, immediate problems don't matter in the big scheme of things if they end up limiting long-term resiliency? No other species has the ability to decide what evolutionary paths remain open, and which are closed.

Asks Kolbert, "Isn't the whole point of peering into the future so that, seeing dangers ahead, we can change course to avoid them?" □

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.



LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Admin Corner

The Team Behind LSP's Public Face

By Joe Riemann

I lock my bike outside of the Land Stewardship Project office building in Minneapolis and fix a pot of coffee before the telephone starts ringing and the e-mails pile up. With administration, you can start your day planning for ABC, and by the end of the day you've only worked on XYZ.

Pick up any *Land Stewardship Letter* and you'll see the exciting work we are doing—the meetings, actions, farmer outreach to name a few. That's the "public face" of LSP. Just as critical to our work is the behind-the-scenes administrative infrastructure.

Without a good administrative structure, you lose the foundation for staff: payroll, check processing, internal and external financial reporting, forecasting, budgeting, mailings, functioning office equipment and a variety of other personnel and program assistance. Many nonprofits have failed not because their program work wasn't great, but because they lacked a solid internal structure. Not having good administration is like building a house with no framing, plumbing or electricity. Karen Benson, Amelia Shoptaugh and I make up that administrative team for the Land Stewardship Project.

Karen works part-time in our Lewiston office. She's been with LSP for over 15 years. She offers a depth and breadth of experience, and has a vast amount of institutional knowledge of our organization's history. We own the office building in Lewiston, so outside of program support work and office management, Karen also facilitates building maintenance needs (like the kitchen sink we'll be installing soon). Outside of the office, Karen stays pretty close to the work as her family now owns a farm that her son Tyler operates.

"I am part of a great team. We believe in good communication, support one another, and have a shared sense of 'admin humor,' a great work ethic and a commitment to LSP's work," says



Joe Riemann and Amelia Shoptaugh

Benson.

Amelia Shoptaugh is new to the LSP staff in Minneapolis. She comes from a diverse background of administrative work, and has long had a passion for environmental issues. Outside of cutting checks, office and building management—we own the Minneapolis office building as well—and overseeing IT for the organization, there's plenty of program support work Amelia provides.

"I feel very lucky to be part of this team and this organization," she says. "We work so well as a team already and I am so thrilled to be supporting all the amazing work that LSP does."

I worked with LSP as a communications intern about eight years ago and stayed in close contact ever since. I came on staff here in Minneapolis in 2010 and took over as the finance and administration director in 2012.

I maintain finances, assist with budgeting and reporting, and oversee our annual audit, as well as manage LSP's administration and human resources work. My experience at LSP has also served me well in my role as a board member for Seward Community Co-op. Much like Amelia and Karen, I'm happy to be able to lend my skills and interest to supporting the work of the Land Stewardship Project.

This "Admin Corner" article will be a continued feature in the *Land Stewardship Letter*. It will provide a way to introduce the other individuals that help move our organization forward. From the invaluable volunteers to the local vendors, they all make up the Land Stewardship Project community. As with any nonprofit, we are only as strong as all of our parts and LSP is growing stronger every day. □

Joe Riemann, LSP's director of finance and administration, can be reached at 612-722-6377 or joer@landstewardshipproject.org.



Karen Benson

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 150 episodes online and are adding more each month. To listen in, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast. □

In Memory & in Honor...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gifts made to honor or remember loved ones, friends or special events:

In Honor & Memory of Mary Catherine Sexton Miller

◆ Margaret & Gene Gregor
Family & Friends

In Memory of John Anderson

◆ Renata Rislow

In Memory of Art Redig

◆ Vicki English

In Memory of Dan Specht, Steve O'Neil & Art Redig

◆ Doug & JoAnn Nopar

In Memory of Wayne Langevin

◆ Loretta Jaus

In Memory of Delbert Schumacher

◆ Charlie & Barbara Prokop

In Memory of David Eekhout

◆ John Hoffman

In Memory of Kenny Guy

◆ Diane Crane & Bets Reedy

In Memory of Coleen Frey

◆ John Tanquist

In Memory of Al Karding

◆ Mary Lou Stursa

In Honor of Jenna Sandoe & Alex Paulhe

◆ Collin Sandoe

For details on donating to LSP in the name of someone, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

Membership Questions?

Have questions about your Land Stewardship Project membership status, need to change an address or want to give a gift membership? Contact LSP's Membership Program at 612-722-6377 or aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Get Current With LSP's

LIVE **WIRE**

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* e-letter to get monthly updates from the Land Stewardship Project sent straight to your inbox. To subscribe, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup. □

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 (mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org) or Abby Liesch (aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org) at 612-722-6377.

Want to Volunteer for LSP?

Thanks to all of our volunteers who help the Land Stewardship Project out in all aspects of our work. LSP literally could not fulfill its mission without the hard work of our volunteers.

Volunteers help us do everything from stuff envelopes and make telephone calls to enter data and set up logistics for meetings. If you'd like to volunteer in one of our offices, contact:

- **Montevideo, Minn.** — Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105, tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org.
- **Lewiston, Minn.** — Karen Benson, 507-523-3366, karenb@landstewardshipproject.org.
- **Minneapolis** — Megan Smith, 612-722-6377, megans@landstewardshipproject.org. □




LSP volunteers, among other things, help welcome and register people who attend our various events throughout the year. We couldn't put on our workshops, classes, field days and member get-togethers without such valuable help. (LSP photo)



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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **APRIL 11 — Environmental Impacts of Hydraulic Fracturing**, 7 p.m.-9 p.m., Assisi Heights, Rochester, Minn. Contact: Angie, 507-280-2195, ahsc@rochesterfranciscan.org, <http://tinyurl.com/frackingfriday>

→ **APRIL 12 — Environmental Impacts of Hydraulic Fracturing**, 1 p.m.-3 p.m., Assisi Heights, Rochester, Minn. Contact: Angie, 507-280-2195, ahsc@rochesterfranciscan.org, <http://tinyurl.com/frackingsaturday>

→ **APRIL 12 — Seward Co-op Twin Cities CSA Fair**, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Minneapolis, Minn. (see page 6)

→ **APRIL 14-17 — Food Sovereignty Summit**, Green Bay, Wis. Contact: www.firstnations.org/conferences/2014/food/summit.html, Bill Vervoort, 920-496-7423, wvervoort@oneidanation.org.

→ **APRIL 22 — Deadline for signing the LSP petition to Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton calling for restrictions on frac sand mining** (see page 10)

→ **APRIL 26 — “Introduction to Small Ruminant Husbandry” workshop**, Paradox Farm, Ashby, Minn. Contact: SFA, www.sfa-mn.org, 612-605-9269

→ **APRIL 26 — LSP Farm Dreams Workshop**, Iron Range Earth Fest, Mountain Iron, Minn. Contact: Cree Bradley, LSP, 218-834-0846, creeb@landstewardshipproject.org (see page 16)

→ **APRIL 27 — LSP Farm Dreams Workshop**, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., Menomonie, Wis. (see page 16)

→ **APRIL 30 — Deadline for MDA specialty crop research & development proposals**. Contact: www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx, Michael Crusan, 651-201-6629, michael.crusan@state.mn.us

→ **MAY 4 — LSP Farm Dreams Workshop**, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., La Crosse, Wis. (see page 16)

→ **MAY 31 — Biological Monitoring with Holistic Management**, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Michael Natvig farm, Decorah, Iowa. Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, 507-523-3366, caroline@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **SUMMER — LSP Driftless Region Cookout-Summer Celebration** (details to be determined), southeast Minnesota. Contact: 507-523-3366

→ **JUNE 14 — LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on Urban Ag**, Growing Lots, Minneapolis, Minn. (see page 16)

→ **JUNE 20 or 22 — LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on Multi-Species Livestock Production**, Hidden Stream Farm, Elgin, Minn. (see page 16)

→ **JUNE 22 — LSP Farm Dreams Workshop**, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn. (see page 16)

→ **JULY — LSP Twin Cities Cookout & Summer Celebration** (details to be determined), Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: 612-722-6377

→ **JULY 16 — LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on Fruit Production**, Sam Kedem Nursery & Garden, Hastings, Minn. (see page 16)

→ **JULY 24 — Burleigh County Soil Conservation District Dakota Lakes Research Farm Bus Tour**, Pierre, S. Dak. Contact: www.bcsd.com, 701-250-4518, Ext. 3

→ **JULY 27 — LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on Vegetable Production**, Sweet Beet Farm, Watertown, Minn. (see page 16)

→ **AUG. 3 — Gardens of Eagan/Organic Field School**, Northfield, Minn. Contact: www.organicfieldschool.org, 507-645-2544

→ **AUG. 10 — Minnesota Garlic Festival**, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Hutchinson, Minn. Contact: SFA, www.sfa-mn.org/garlicfest, 320-543-3394

→ **AUG. 10 — LSP Farm Dreams Workshop**, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., LSP office, Minneapolis, Minn. (see page 16)

→ **AUG. 16 — LSP Farm Beginnings Beef Grazing Field Day**, Compton Farm, Dassel, Minn. (see page 16)

→ **AUG. 17 — LSP Farm Dreams Workshop**, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., Viroqua, Wis. (see page 16)

→ **AUG. 24 — LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on On-Farm Education Events**, Deep Roots Community Farm, La Crosse, Wis. (see page 16)

→ **SEPT. 1 — Deadline for LSP's 2013-2014 Farm Beginnings course**. (see page 16)

→ **SEPT. 14 — LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on Vegetable Production Start-up**, Living Land Farm, Saint Peter, Minn. (see page 16)

→ **OCT.-NOV. — 2014-2015 session of LSP's Farm Beginnings course begins**. (see page 16)

→ **NOV. 23 — 2014 Farm Art Bowl (fundraiser for LSP's Farm Beginnings Program)**, Bryant Lake Bowl, Minneapolis. Contact: Nick Olson, LSP, 320-269-1057, nicko@landstewardshipproject.org

Check www.landstewardshipproject.org for the latest on upcoming events.