

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

33 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

Volume 33

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Number 1, 2015



Neck deep in cropping systems that make the land more resilient (pages 14-20).

—Crop Insurance & Beginning Farmers—

—Snirt Alert—

—Join a CSA Farm Today—

—Environmental Review & Healthcare at the Legislature—

—Forever Green's Relay for Life—

—Breaking into a Man's World of Conservation—

—Old Wheat-Modern Story—

—Willful Blindness, Mysteries of the Driftless, American Eating—

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

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Contents

Commentary...3

- Ensuring the Future of Farming
- Good News About the LSL
- Momentum on Crop Insurance Reform
- Snirt Alert in Farm Country



LSP News...6

- Honoring Wendell Berry
- GMO Feed Mixer
- LSP Staff-Board Updates
- Sign-up for LIVE-WIRE
- LSP Farm Dreams Classes
- Join a CSA Farm Today
- Organic Farmers of the Year



Farm Transitions...21

- Not Just a Man's World
- Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse
- *Farm Transitions Toolkit*

Farm Beginnings...24

- *Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming:*
Rising from the Ashes

LSP Financial Update...27

Admin Corner...30

- Calculating Zero Waste

Membership Update...30

- M2M & Growing LSP
- In Memory & in Honor
- LSP Gift Memberships
- Support LSP in Your Workplace

Policy & Organizing...9

- MN Legislature: Environmental Review, Healthcare, Sustainable Ag, Buffers
- LSP Stewardship & Democracy Meetings
- Moving Forward on Healthcare
- Climate, Energy & Land Stewardship

Continuous Living Cover...14

- Forever Green
- Future Problem Solvers
- Cover Crop Coverage
- New Soil Health Research Initiative



Community Based Food Systems...26

- How Wheat Can Tell the Story of Ag

Reviews...28

- *A Bigger Prize*
- *Willful Blindness*
- *Mysteries of the Driftless*
- *The American Way of Eating*



Stewardship Calendar...32

Commentary?!?

Ensuring the Future of Farming

Crop Insurance is Hurting the Very People We Need for a Sustainable Future

By Jim VanDerPol

The Land Stewardship Project recently published a three-part expose of the federal crop insurance program. The white papers are titled: “Crop Insurance-the Corporate Connection,” “Crop Insurance Ensures the Big Get Bigger” and “How Crop Insurance Hurts the Next Generation of Farmers.”

The final paper title provides the key to LSP’s concern. The introduction states that concerns over the lack of available land for LSP’s highly regarded Farm Beginnings graduates drove the organization’s interest in investigation and reform. The papers should be read by every farmer, especially those who actually buy crop insurance, like me.

Though I knew or suspected much of what was in these papers, I admit to being shocked at several points. I did not know that besides the 60-plus percent of farmer premium shouldered by the taxpayer, we citizens are sponsoring a large part of the insurance companies’ administrative costs for the program. The amount approaches \$2 billion for 2008 in the example given. One particularly disturbing graph shows that administrative costs charged to the government by the companies for the program more than doubled from 2004 to 2008, while the number of policies actually written shrank by nearly 2 percent.

These companies are huge Wall Street players, their names known by most of the public. And additionally we are told that the farms benefiting are identified only by policy number, not by name. The other information required to be published makes it possible to identify the largest players in any area though, and a quick comparison of the policy payouts with the conventional government payouts on the commodity program shows that most of the support going to agriculture is now in the form of crop insurance to a few very large crop farms.

This secrecy is pretty obviously intentional on the part of big ag’s representatives in Washington, and it certainly is in keeping with recent trends. Like the Pentagon budget and the various spy agencies, big agriculture means to be free of prying public eyes.

This was deliberate; the conventional farm groups have always been furious over the idea that the Environmental Working Group publishes government subsidy amounts for every subsidy-receiving farm in the country. It is also just one more sign of how deep our political rot has gone. The spending of public money is properly always the public’s business, and any business that requires gov-

• • •

We must let the next generation of farmers in.

• • •

ernment assistance to declare a profit needs to consider itself to be in the public domain.

We know this damage. It is not news to us except in its details and particulars. We know it every time we hear of, or stand at, a land auction where acres are going at an insane price and try not to think of how impossible it would have been for us to start with that kind of land debt.

We see it every time we drive to town and see nothing but greybeards and high school kids there and sometimes not even the kids. We know it every time we go down the road we have driven all our lives and can see in our mind’s eye all the farm places that once put kids on that bus each morning, but now are no longer there.

Some of us remember the farming that took place then, the cooperation of dozens of manure spreaders to haul out each farm’s pack manure in the spring, the threshing rings, the neighbor visit to castrate or load pigs, the silo filling rings, the neighborhood dairy bull coming home a step at a time pulled by a rope attached to the nose ring behind the John Deere “B” in granny gear. And unfortunately, some of us remember the voice of the machine salesman telling us or our fathers that buying that combine meant we no longer had to put up with those balky stuck-in-the-past neighbors. So it was. So it has gone.

Wiser voices than this one have told us for a long time that the goal of government and the academic agriculture economists and other smart men has been to drive the people

out of agriculture. It started, as far as I know, with the President’s Council of Economic Advisers telling us after the Second World War that there were too many people in agriculture, and some of them needed to be forced out to move to the cities and labor in our industrial machines.

This is the nation’s real farm program, and it has been in full force from that day 70 years ago to this. Crop insurance is the latest tool. It is a handout from the public treasury every bit as much as the conventional commodity payments and every bit as vulnerable to fraud and abuse. Through the ruse of funneling the money through a “private” business such as a huge insurance company, Congress has attempted to shroud it in secrecy and remove it from the public conversation about agriculture.

But the situation has changed. The argument that the farm population could be reduced with people replaced by machines and that the surplus people were needed in the factories was always a pretty degenerate view of the function of the economy in human life, but at the outset it was at least plausible on the surface. Now, when we have so few people on the farms that we cannot do our own barn work and stoop labor coupled with people in the cities who

Ensuring the Future, see page 4...

Good News About the Land Stewardship Letter

We’ve received overwhelmingly positive feedback on the new color version of the *Land Stewardship Letter* since it made its debut in fall 2014. For the first time since it was launched in a garage in southeastern Minnesota over three decades ago, the *LSL* is able to use vivid color photographs and graphics to tell the Land Stewardship Project’s story.

Some of our members have expressed concern over whether the new *LSL* is more expensive to produce. As it happens, due to new printing technologies, publishing the *Land Stewardship Letter* in color is actually slightly *less expensive* than producing it in the traditional black and white manner.

Switching to a color *LSL* is part of the Land Stewardship Project’s commitment to communicating about ongoing efforts to keep the land and people together. If you have any questions about the *LSL*, contact the editor, Brian DeVore, at 612-722-6377 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org. His mailing address is Land Stewardship Project, 821 E. 35th Street, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407-2102.

Commentary?!?

...Ensuring the Future from page 3

cannot find any work and an industrial establishment with its work being steadily sold out overseas, it makes no sense whatsoever.

LSP has three ideas for reform. The second one is that the program needs to support, not impede, a new generation of farmers. This is critical. This goes to the heart of what we think farming is about, and in more general terms to the way in which we view the economy and the people (all of us) impacted by it. Does the economy exist for the people or the people for the economy?

Those of us fortunate enough to have had life experience with hogs, those excellent mirrors of human behavior, know something about the sow eating her own young. We have struggled with figuring out from time-to-time, when the vice pops up, what the problem is with the sow. Is she hungry, malnourished? Is she the victim of a bad diet or a bad environment that causes her to act that way? Is it the circumstance in some yet not understood way? Or is she just a bad actor that needs to go on the sausage truck?

This is a parable for our country today.

Lack of meaningful and good, or indeed any, kind of work for far too many people, a reality in some families for generations now with all the attendant and inevitable problems of decay, delinquency and policing. College outrageously overpriced for the young. No opportunity in industry. No affordable housing. No safety net. No attempt to work those dispossessed in the “Great Recession” of 2008 back into the working

LSP's Crop Insurance Report

For more information on the Land Stewardship Project's “Crop Insurance: How a Safety Net Became a Farm Policy Disaster” white papers, see the No. 4, 2014 *Land Stewardship Letter* or visit www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/cropinsurance.

More information is also available by contacting LSP Policy and Organizing Program director Mark Schultz at 612-722-6377 or marks@landstewardshipproject.org.

For more in LSP's Farm Beginnings Program, see pages 24, 25 and 32 of this *Land Stewardship Letter*.

world. No support for them while they try on their own to climb. No requirement of a decent liveable wage. Virtually no controls on or discipline for Wall Street, our major predator. Our country is that sow devouring her own.

It is beyond question that powerful people and huge overwhelming institutions have pushed us into our current circumstance on the farms. Is that our “bad environment or circumstance not yet understood?” Because it is sure that we who are on the older side of agriculture today have witnessed, and participated in some ways, in the over-mechanization of agriculture, the extreme over-pricing of the land base, the emptying out of the countryside and the resulting huge pile of capital assets into very few hands.

We need to tell our organizations and politicians to abolish crop insurance or modify it drastically. If it survives it needs to require strict conservation compliance. And it needs to tilt the table toward the young and the start-ups, not away from them. This generation carries some solutions to the problems my generation has created. We must let them in. □

Western Minnesota farmer Jim VanDerPol is a former member of LSP's board of directors and the author of Conversations with the Land. This commentary originally appeared in Graze Magazine (www.grazeonline.com), for which VanDerPol writes a column.

Federal Crop Insurance Reform Discussion Gaining Ground in 2015

When it comes to federally subsidized crop insurance, the past few months have been witness to a flurry of activity in Washington, D.C., related to reform proposals. Following the Land Stewardship Project's November/December release of our three white papers on crop insurance (*see commentary and sidebar above*), 2015 has seen continued attention to the need for major reform of this largest of agriculture-related farm bill programs.

On Feb. 3, Senator Patrick Toomey (R-PA) and Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) introduced a bill in the U.S. Senate that would cap crop insurance premium subsidies at \$50,000 per entity. That aligns well with LSP's thinking — there should be a limit to how much of these public funds any one crop operation can rake in.

Such limits are one way of diminishing the concentration of land ownership in fewer hands that is fueled by the current crop insurance program. The National Sustain-

able Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), to which LSP belongs, has a good description of the bill and NSAC's (positive) assessment of it on its website: www.sustainableagriculture.net. The Toomey/Shaheen bill is estimated to save \$2.2 billion over 10 years.

The USDA has also offered its own proposal, modifying the structure of the crop insurance program relating to prevented planting and revenue protection (“prevented planting” acres are those fields that farmers were not able to get planted to cash crops because of weather problems). USDA has not provided much detail, but the proposal, which is in President Barack Obama's budget as of this writing, was estimated to save up to \$16 billion over 10 years. □

Episode 162 of LSP's Ear to the Ground podcast features a discussion about the crop insurance white papers: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/673.

Crop Insurance Media Coverage

Upon release of its crop insurance white papers in November and December, the Land Stewardship Project received extensive regional and national coverage. Here are a few highlights:

- “Crop insurance is the new vehicle for using public funds to concentrate agricultural wealth in this country.” — *LSP's report quoted by nationally syndicated columnist Alan Guebert*
- “This is something we as farmers use, but there are some corrections that need to be made.” — *LSP farmer-member Tom Nuessmeier, quoted by Chris Clayton of DTN's news service*
- “I don't think any industry should use the government to take all risk out of it.” — *LSP farmer-member Ryan Batalden, quoted by Dan Looker of agriculture.com*

For more on this and other media coverage of LSP's work, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/media-relations/lspinthnews. □

Snirt Alert in Farm Country

To anyone driving through the Upper Midwest this winter, the images featured below should look familiar. In a sense, the black and white swirls of “snirt”—a mash-up of the words “snow” and “dirt”—have the look of beautiful impressionistic paintings wrought by a wind-borne hand.

But these photos, which, with the exception of the last one, were all taken this winter in western Minnesota, reveal an ugly truth: our land is suffering mightily from an annual cropping system that covers it well only around 90 to 100 days a year. A white snow bank has a way of showing up the previous season’s land use sins.

Why all the snirt? Once row crops like corn and soybeans are harvested in the fall, the soil is often tilled to get a jump-start on

the following growing season, leaving the land bare until May, at best. Early snows can provide a modicum of protection, but a mid-winter thaw combined with a scouring wind can fast prove how little armor the land really has. All this snirt is also a sign that the soil is so impoverished biologically—removing plant cover above ground starves microbes beneath the surface—that it can’t resist being eroded by even relatively minor weather events.

Snirt reveals that intense rains are not the only cause of serious erosion—wind on flat-as-a-pancake land can loosen immense amounts of soil. One estimate is that 40 percent of the erosion in the Great Plains is wind-caused. And blown soil is often the most fertile, since it’s made up of organic matter and lighter particles.

Much of this erosion is taking place on land that formerly was in pasture, hay or even habitat enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. Often this is land that previously would not have been cropped, since it was considered too marginal to produce a profitable corn or soybean yield.

But government initiatives like subsidized crop insurance (*see pages 3-4*) have taken the risk out of tilling such lands. The result is a landscape that, on a brisk winter day, can resemble something out of an apocalyptic nightmare.

Perhaps the most troubling photo is the bottom one on the right. It was taken on a day in May, after the winter snows had melted. That soil, which is supposed to be in an adjacent field, is instead clogging a road culvert. At a time of year when our black gold is supposed to be beginning its job of producing food, it’s instead occupying the role of messy nuisance. It’s at this point that live soil becomes dead dirt. □



The dark color of this eroded soil in Big Stone County provides a clue as to the richness of the resource being lost. (Photo by John White)



Soil deposited on a snowbank at a farmstead in Yellow Medicine County. The soybean field to the left of the trees was tilled with a disc last fall. (Photo by Julia Ahlers Ness)



Snow boots become mud boots in a Yellow Medicine County farm yard downwind from a tilled field. (Photo by Julia Ahlers Ness)



Intense tillage and unprotected winter soil makes for year-round erosion. This photo was taken in May along a road between Marshall and Montevideo. (Photo by Darwin Dyce)

What’s on Your Mind?

The *Land Stewardship Letter* welcomes letters and commentaries related to the issues we cover. Submissions can be sent to: Brian DeVore, 821 E. 35th St., Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407; 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.



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LSP News

Honoring the Words of Wendell Berry

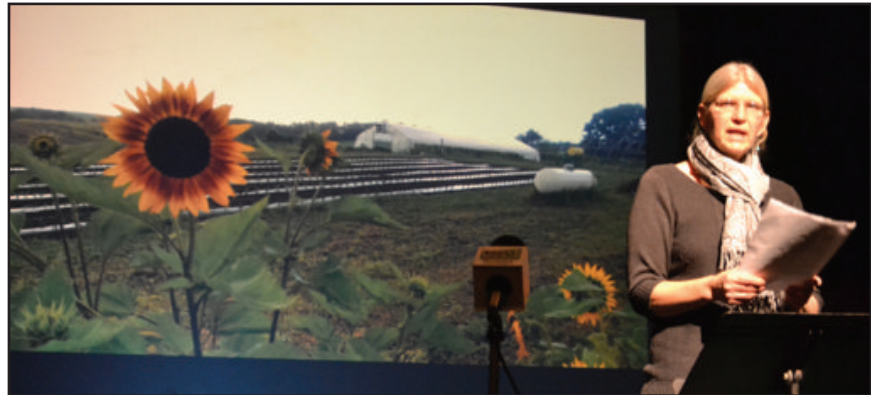
Several Land Stewardship Project farmer-members participated in a special evening in January honoring the writings of Wendell Berry, the unofficial poet laureate of the sustainable agriculture movement. Poems, essays and even a letter written to anti-frac sand activists were read during the Winona, Minn., event. During the readings, photos of local farms and residents were projected upon a screen behind the speakers. Music was provided by the Winona Fiddlers and Gravy Train. The event, which was held at the Historic Masonic Theatre, was sponsored by Sustainable Futures at Winona State University and Theatre du Mississippi. Episode 165 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast features selections from the evening's readings: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast. □



Jennifer Rupprecht of Earth-Be-Glad-Farm in Lewiston, Minn., read from three Berry poems: "The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of Rough Branch, Secedes from the Union," "To Know the Dark" and "Questionnaire." (LSP Photo)



Diane Leutgeb Munson read from a letter Berry wrote to her and other Winona area residents who are fighting frac sand mining in the region. Berry's home state of Kentucky has been devastated by mountaintop removal coal mining, which has been compared to frac sand extraction. (LSP Photo)



Sandy Dietz of Whitewater Gardens Farm in Altura, Minn., read Berry's "The Current" and "Enriching the Earth." (LSP Photo)

LSP GMO Mixer: Networking Supply & Demand



Farmers who are interested in raising or buying non-GMO grains gathered in Glenwood, Minn., for a Land Stewardship Project "Feed Mixer" in late February. There were over 40 participants in the meeting, a surprising turnout, according to LSP organizer Robin Moore. "We thought we'd get a dozen participants at most," she said. "There is obviously a lot of interest on both sides of this issue."

LSP is working to develop connections between farmers raising non-GMO grain and buyers seeking such products. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for details. For more information, contact Moore at 320-269-2105 or rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org.

Episode 164 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast features farmers, a feed mill operator and a seed dealer discussing the availability of GMO grains: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

Land Stewardship Project Staff Update

Tom Nuessmeier has joined Land Stewardship Project's staff as a Policy and Organizing Program organizer. Nuessmeier, who has a crop and livestock farm in southern Minnesota's Le Sueur County, has served on LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee since 2009. In that capacity he has participated in the development and advancement of organizational priorities on federal agriculture policy. Most recently, Nuessmeier worked with members of the media covering the release of LSP's white paper series on crop insurance (see pages 3-4). In 2014, Nuessmeier served on LSP's board of directors.



Tom Nuessmeier

In his new role at LSP, Nuessmeier will be analyzing and evaluating federal farm policy and programs from the standpoint of working family farms, serving on key committees related to federal farm policy and helping with arranging meetings between LSP farmer-members and policymakers. He can be reached at 507-995-3541 or tomn@landstewardshipproject.org.

Nick Olson has left LSP to farm full-time. Olson joined the organization's staff in 2008 as a Farm Beginnings organizer. Over the years, he has facilitated and developed curriculum for Farm Beginnings classes (see page 32). Olson was also instrumental in developing Farm Dreams, a four-hour workshop designed to help people clarify what motivates them to farm, get their vision on paper, inventory their strengths and training needs and get perspective from an experienced farmer. During his time at LSP, Olson played a major role in increasing the number and variety of on-farm learning opportunities offered to Farm Beginnings participants and others.

Olson and his wife Joan own and operate Prairie Drifter Farm (www.prairiedrifterfarm.com), a certified



Nick Olson

organic Community Supported Agriculture vegetable operation in Litchfield, Minn.

Shelly Connor has joined LSP's staff as an Individual Giving Program associate. Connor has a master's of science degree in environmental studies with a concentration in sustainable food and farming from the University of Montana. She has worked as an associate director of the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, associate director at Appalachian Voices and citizen outreach director for the Fund for Public Interest Research.



Shelly Connor

At LSP, Connor is assisting with membership renewals, new member recruitment and major donor fundraising. She can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or sconnor@landstewardshipproject.org.

Adam Keibler recently completed an internship with the Land Stewardship Project's Policy and Organizing Program. Keibler is a student at Macalester College and has served as an election judge, office assistant, athletic trainer and editorial board member of the *Macalester Review*.



Adam Keibler

While at LSP, Keibler helped develop an annual report and analysis of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), a national USDA initiative that helps community-based organizations develop and operate beginning farmer programs. LSP's Farm Beginnings program is a model for BFRDP.

Aidan Read recently served an LSP internship organizing the 10th Annual Family Farm Breakfast and Day at the Capitol. Read has a bachelor's degree in political science with a social justice minor from Hamline University. Read has worked as a political organizer, a



Aidan Read

government relations intern for the Minnesota Farmers Union, a farmhand on a sheep dairy operation and at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico.

Lynnea Pfohl is serving an internship in LSP's southeastern Minnesota office. Pfohl has a bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in environmental sciences from Luther College.



Lynnea Pfohl

She has worked as a transportation consultant, business office coordinator and as an intern for the Sierra Club. Pfohl has volunteered in LSP's southeastern Minnesota office and currently co-chairs LSP's Winona County Organizing Committee.

Pfohl is doing an internship with LSP's Policy and Organizing Program as part of a master's degree program in environmental law and policy from the Vermont Law School. □

Opportunities



Resources

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. See www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup. □

LSP's Farm Dreams

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 (see page 32).

LSP holds Farm Dreams workshops at various locations throughout the Minnesota-Wisconsin region during the year. For more information or to register, see www.farmbeginnings.org. Details are also available by contacting LSP's Dori Eder at 612-578-4497 or dori@landstewardshipproject.org. □



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LSP News

Harrington & Ready Join LSP Board

Dean Harrington and Vince Ready have joined the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors.

Harrington is a retired banker from Plainview in southeastern Minnesota and during the past several years has been deeply involved with LSP's work to transition farms onto



Dean Harrington

the next generation.

He currently serves on the Plainview Land Access Steering Committee, which is working to raise awareness of issues beginning farmers face when it comes to getting established on affordable land. This committee is seeking changes that will create a new reality of more beginning farmers farming sustainably on the land. Harrington, along with his wife Sally, have recently started a local economic development venture focused on solar energy.

Ready is a semi-retired nurse who lives on a farm near the southeastern Minnesota



Vince Ready

community of Saint Charles. He and his wife Renee raise cattle and they have participated in field days associated with LSP's work in the Root River watershed.

In recent years, Ready has been involved with LSP's efforts to fight the onslaught of frac sand mining operations in southeastern Minnesota. He has provided leadership on the state level by testifying at the Capitol, lobbying and writing letters. On the local level, Ready was key in the fight to keep Saint Charles from becoming a frac sand distribution hub, and currently serves on an LSP steering committee working to pass a ban on frac sand mining in his local township. □

Think Spring: Join a CSA Farm Today

Spring is here and eaters in Minnesota and western Wisconsin who want to receive fresh, sustainably-produced food on a weekly basis during the 2015 growing season can reserve a share in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm today. The Land Stewardship Project's 2015 Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory provides detailed information on over 65 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 "know their farmer" 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
Farm Directory
2015**

2015 Edition of the Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farm Directory

This Land Stewardship Project publication is also available at: www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/csa
Updated: Feb. 2, 2015

Greg & Mary Reynolds Organic Farmers of the Year

Land Stewardship Project members Greg and Mary Reynolds have been named 2015 MOSES Organic Farmers of the Year. The Reynolds received their award at the annual MOSES Organic Farming Conference Feb. 26 in La Crosse, Wis.

The Reynolds grow vegetables and small grains on 30 acres near Delano, Minn. Certified organic since 1994, their Riverbend Farm has a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise and also sells

vegetables to restaurants, co-ops, nursing homes, hospitals and schools. They are building resilience in their systems by selecting seeds from crops that fare best in the changing Minnesota climate. The farm has hosted LSP Farm Beginnings field days, and the Reynolds' have presented to Farm



Greg & Mary Reynolds

Beginnings classes.

MOSES (Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service) uses its annual award to recognize organic farmers who practice outstanding land stewardship, innovation and outreach. The MOSES Organic Farmer of the Year award has been presented to 13 organic farming families since it was launched in 2003. □

Minnesota Legislature

Environmental Review, Healthcare & Sustainable Ag On Tap During 2015 Session

As the 2015 session of the Minnesota Legislature went into full gear and headed for its scheduled May 18 adjournment, proposals related to environmental review, local control, healthcare and sustainable agriculture research were moving through the committee process. Here's the status of various Land Stewardship Project legislative priorities as this *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press.

Environmental Review

Despite testimony from farmers, environmental experts and citizens strongly supporting the current structure of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Citizens' Board, a House committee in mid-March approved a bill that would remove the 48-year-old Board's authority to order environmental review of major developments. The proposed legislation, which was passed out of the Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Finance Committee, is in response to the August 2014 decision by the Citizens' Board to order an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a highly controversial Riverview LLP dairy project proposed for Baker Township in Stevens County.

"Speaking as someone from out in the countryside and a farmer, we need the Citizens' Board to help us make decisions that have a positive impact on the future," James Kanne, a Renville County dairy farmer and LSP member, told the House committee before the vote. "This bill will have a negative impact on our communities and the land."

The bill undermining the Citizens' Board's authority, House File 1394 and Senate File 1683, is being proposed by Rep. Dan Fabian (R-Roseau) and Sen. Rod Skoe (DFL-Clearbrook), and is supported by corporate agriculture interests, including the Minnesota Agri-Growth Council and the Minnesota Milk Producers Association. A coalition of farm, environmental and good government organizations oppose the bill, including LSP, Minnesota Farmers Union, Minnesota Environmental Partnership and the League of Women Voters.



During a Minnesota Senate hearing on environmental review, farmer James Kanne (left) testified in favor of the MPCA's Citizens' Board and against policies that promote production, no matter what the costs. "We do not just need to focus on more and more milk; we need more and more farmers," he said. (LSP Photo)

Kanne was one of several people who testified against the bill. Also testifying was Kathy DeBuhr, a Stevens County farmer who lives within a mile of the site of the 8,850-cow dairy Riverview LLP is proposing to build. She told the committee that during the proposed operation's permitting process, she and other citizens in the area did not have their concerns about hydrogen sulfide emissions, water use and manure disposal adequately addressed. It wasn't until the Citizens' Board reviewed the proposal that the public was able to make its concerns heard, she said.

"This was my only opportunity to have input. I love the name 'Citizens' Board,' because that's who represents me," said DeBuhr. "I urge you not to remove the power of the Citizens' Board—they represent me."

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) also strongly urged the committee not to pass the bill. Michelle Beeman, deputy commissioner of the MPCA, said that the Citizens' Board is a key "translator bridge" between MPCA technical staff and members of the public who would be impacted by proposed projects. Beeman, a former member of the Citizens' Board, said it is extremely rare for it to order an EIS,

and such decisions are reserved for projects that pose a significantly large risk to the environment.

"These are the kinds of projects where transparency and citizen access to the government decision-making process was important," Beeman said, adding that the Board's role in the environmental review process "works well, particularly for highly controversial projects. [This bill] fundamentally changes the agency as it's structured by making the Citizens' Board advisory."

On a 6-1 vote in August, the Citizens' Board had taken the rare step of ordering an EIS because of the unusually high risk the 8,850-cow dairy poses to the environment. For example, it would use at least 98,969,750 gallons of groundwater annually. The deeper aquifer in the area of the dairy will reach 50 percent threshold by the 2030s at current water use levels.

As the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has pointed out, when a confined aquifer reaches 50 percent threshold, "sustainability of the aquifer is in question." The DNR found that if the proposed factory farm dairy is allowed to drill the two new wells it wants to, the aquifer will reach the 50 percent threshold "much sooner than the 2030s."

And it's estimated Riverview LLP's proposed dairy will need 6,300 acres of land to take care of all the manure it will produce. However, the dairy's owners currently have access to only 3,060 acres of land they either own or rent.

The Citizens' Board's decision to order an EIS has become a hot button issue for supporters of factory farming in Minnesota. During a Senate Rural Task Force hearing in November, MPCA commissioner John Linc Stine was grilled over the decision, and David Ward, a former Wisconsin lawmaker who now works for the Cooperative Network, described how he led legislative efforts in his home state to weaken local control of CAFOs.

At one point during the Rural Task Force Hearing, Senator Julie Rosen (R-Vernon Center), questioned the credibility of a Citizens' Board member who has a 320-acre diversified farm in western Minnesota. "That's not real ag," she said. Rather, Rosen added, Riverview LLP's Baker Dairy is her idea of "real ag."

By early in the 2015 legislative session, lawmakers such as Rosen were talking of removing the Citizens' Board's ability to order environmental review of proposed projects.

Legislature, see page 10...

...Legislature, from page 9

The issue came up again at a “Dairy Growth Summit” hosted by the University of Minnesota, Minnesota Milk Producers Association and Midwest Dairy Associates. The organizer of the meeting, U of M agricultural economist Marin Bozic, said in opening remarks that, “All dairy farmers need all dairy farmers...” and “Big and small, there’s room for everybody.” However, LSP was not invited to the event, which was held at the U of M’s Saint Paul campus and featured presentations by various college deans, as well as U of M president Eric Kaler, Minnesota Lieutenant Governor Tina Smith and MPCA commissioner Stine. Eventually, two LSP staffers and LSP farmer-member James Kanne were allowed to attend. Bozic later sent an e-mail to LSP organizer Bobby King informing him that besides being a U of M assistant professor, he is also a “paid consultant” to the Minnesota Milk Producers Association and sits on the group’s policy committee. “To be completely frank and direct, your organization and Minnesota Milk Producers Association obviously don’t see eye to eye on dairy development efforts,” Bozic wrote in the e-mail.

During the summit, Bozic gave a presentation on the need to increase “the capacity to milk more cows” in Minnesota. A short film shown during the summit featured a representative of Riverview Dairy speaking about the need to increase milk volume in the state. Bozic later made it clear that the 2,000-cow dairy is the fastest growing segment of the industry. “That is the world we live in,” he said. Eighty percent of Minnesota’s dairy farms have under 100 cows.

After MPCA commissioner Stine spoke at the Dairy Growth Summit, representatives of the Minnesota Milk Producers Association and Riverview Dairy questioned him about the Citizens’ Board’s decision and whether the body needed to exist in the first place.

Kanne later characterized the summit as, “...like sitting through a 5½ hour infomercial on why big dairy is great.” He said mega-dairies are a threat to the future of family-sized operations like his.

“And if we’re losing that family farm, then we’re losing our communities in rural Minnesota and we lose the fabric of our rural area because of it,” he said. “So we do not just need to focus on more and more milk; we need more and more farmers.”

Factory Farm Nuisance Law

Current Minnesota law exempts the vast majority of livestock farms from being subject to a nuisance claim related to, for example, odor or air pollution. The largest factory farms over 1,000 animal units in size (2,400 sows, for example) are not exempt from being sued for nuisance violations.

The Latest on the Legislature

The 2015 session of the Minnesota Legislature is scheduled to adjourn May 18 and many bills will be in flux up until the end.

For the latest on the Land Stewardship Project’s legislative priorities, see the **Action Alert** or **News** sections at www.landstewardshipproject.org. More information is also available by contacting LSP organizer Bobby King at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org. Paul Sobocinski is LSP’s lead organizer on healthcare issues, and can be reached at sobopaul@redred.com or 507-342-2323.

House File 582 and Senate File 482 would make it possible for the state’s largest factory farms to be shielded from nuisance law, even preventing state agencies and local government from pursuing action to abate a CAFO that is a public nuisance. This law, which is authored by Rep. Paul Anderson (R-Starbuck) in the House and Sen. Dan Sparks (DFL-Austin) in the Senate, would undermine the rights of citizens and governments to hold factory farms accountable.

Forever Green

Ongoing support for Forever Green (*see pages 14-17*) is an LSP priority during the 2015 session of the Minnesota Legislature.

Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield) has introduced HF 693 and Sen. Kevin Dahl (DFL-Northfield) has introduced SF 579. These bills would provide \$1,395,000 in funding for the initiative in fiscal year 2016 and again in 2017.

Ag Research Board

House File 779 and Senate File 820 would create the Agriculture Research, Education, Extension and Technology Transfer Board to oversee over \$18 million annually in public money for agricultural research and outreach. That’s the good news. But this legislation, which is authored by Rep. Rod Hamilton (R-Mountain Lake) in the House and Sen.

Dan Sparks in the Senate (DFL-Austin), sets up a governing board that does not represent sustainable agriculture organizations, minority farmers, fruit and vegetable growers or organizations focused on water quality.

However, the board would include representatives from each of the commodity groups as well as the Agri-Growth Council, which represents the largest agribusiness interests in the state. Each organization on the board would name their own representative—it is very unusual for a board that oversees large amounts of public funding to be comprised of members not selected by the governor. This board must represent all the interests and needs facing Minnesota agriculture.

MinnesotaCare

House File 1665 would eliminate MinnesotaCare, a public, low-cost alternative to private health insurance which has provided healthcare to thousands of working Minnesotans for over 20 years (88,000 are using it as of this year). LSP has a number of members who use MinnesotaCare, including farmers. Without this program, many farmers would have to go without the healthcare they need or pay prohibitively high costs for it through the private market, taking away crucial income from the farm — and in many cases, keeping beginning farmers from farming altogether. HF 1665 is authored by Rep. Matt Dean (R-Dellwood).

Buffer Initiative

First proposed by Governor Mark Dayton, the “buffer initiative” (House File 1534 and Senate File 1537) requires at least 50 feet of perennial vegetation bordering Minnesota’s waters. Buffers help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment by slowing runoff, trapping sediment with these pollutants and allowing vegetation to absorb them. The buffer initiative would allow agricultural use on the buffers as long as permanent vegetation is maintained. Haying and grazing are permitted, as well as travel on the buffer with farm machinery or other equipment. LSP sees this initiative as an important way to protect water quality on working farmland.

“As one of the most significant farmland stewardship initiatives for water quality and wildlife habitat proposed by a Minnesota governor in decades, this proposal, if passed by the Legislature, would have a lasting positive impact on rural Minnesota,” says Darrel Mosel, a LSP farmer-member who raises crops and livestock on 600 acres in Sibley County.

HF 1534 is authored by Rep. Paul Torkelson (R-Hanska) and SF 1537 is authored by Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville). □

LSP Stewardship & Democracy Meetings: Time to Make Our Voices Heard

To Minnesota dairy farmer Loretta Jaus, the “get big or get out” mantra being sounded by industrial agriculture in rural communities these days has become a bit like a song that gets repeated *ad nauseam*.

“When you see the closed down Main Streets and abandoned farms, you realize that get big or get out song has become a funeral march,” she said at a recent Land Stewardship Project meeting in New Ulm, Minn. “How do we change the song? How do we change the tune?”



Kathy DeBuhr offered advice on fighting unwanted development in a community: “Keep trying, keep going. You certainly won’t get anywhere if you don’t.” (LSP Photo)

That was the question being asked during a series of LSP “Stewardship and Democracy” organizing meetings held in three Minnesota communities this winter. Besides New Ulm, meetings were held in Saint Charles and Granite Falls. Farmers and other rural residents came together to discuss ways of “changing the tune” when it comes to the future of rural communities and our food and farming system.

Jaus, who is a member of LSP’s board of directors, said the key to bringing about positive change is for each person to figure out what niche they can fulfill so they can contribute in their own way. That can mean everything from selling a farm at a lower price to a beginning farmer to testifying at a hearing or writing a letter-to-the-editor.

The key, said LSP organizer Bobby King, is that a message be sent that it’s unacceptable for corporate interests

to profit at the expense of rural communities.

During the current session of the Minnesota Legislature, the ability of communities to control how their natural, economic and human resources are used is under attack. A prime example is the attempt to gut the power of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s Citizens’ Board to order environmental review of projects that pose a major risk to the environment (*see pages 9-10*).

Having LSP members testify at the state Capitol and contact their lawmakers directly are critical ways of sending the message that factory farm interests, frac sand mining corporations and commodity groups don’t speak for all rural Minnesotans.

“These corporations and coalitions say they represent rural interests,” said King. “Their message carries the day unless we go to the Capitol and say, ‘You don’t represent rural interests.’”

One rural resident who has made her voice heard at the Capitol this session is Kathy DeBuhr. The Stevens County farmer and registered nurse has testified before Senate and House hearings on the importance of maintaining the Citizens’ Board’s current structure, which provides a critical venue for the general public to provide input and express concerns when controversial projects are proposed. She described how early last year she learned that Riverview LLP was proposing to build what would be the largest dairy in the state within a mile of her home. She and her neighbors scrambled to learn as much as they could about the 8,850-cow dairy in a short amount of time.



“I’m a real farmer,” said Renville County dairy farmer James Kanne at the New Ulm meeting. “And because we care about our land and our cows, we care about our community neighbors. That’s what real farmers care about.” (LSP Photo)



At the organizing meeting in New Ulm, LSP members called Minnesota lawmakers and told them to keep the MPCA’s Citizens’ Board strong. (LSP Photo)

There are already 30,000 Riverview cows within a six mile radius of DeBuhr’s home. If the company’s latest proposal is approved, that would mean approximately 40,000 cows within an eight- to 10-mile radius of her home.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency staff recommended granting the operation a permit to build, despite numerous red flags related to water usage, manure disposal and hydrogen sulfide emissions. It’s not just a local issue—the Pomme de Terre River that flows through the area the dairy would be constructed in already has water quality problems related to phosphorus pollution. A new mega-dairy, with its massive production of manure, will only make that worse.

“And that flows into the Minnesota River, which flows down to you,” she told the New Ulm meeting participants.

When the members of the Citizens’ Board voted to require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the dairy, they were making it clear that there are lots of open questions that need answered, said DeBuhr.

Her advice to other residents facing similar circumstances was simple: “Keep trying, keep going. You certainly won’t get anywhere if you don’t. One thing you need to do is get involved in local government.”

Another rural resident who has been active at the state Capitol this year is James Kanne, a Renville County dairy farmer who has talked to lawmakers about the importance of public policies that encourage more farmers on the land, not just more milk production. He

Democracy, see page 12...

...Democracy, from page 11

said when lawmakers claim that diversified family-sized farms are not “real ag,” as Sen. Julie Rosen did recently (*see page 9*), they are promoting a type of agriculture that’s bad for people, the environment and communities.

“I’m a real farmer,” said Kanne, whose daughter and son-in-law are in the process of taking over his 48-cow dairy herd. “We care about our land and our cows, and because we care about our land and our cows, we care about our community neighbors. That’s what real farmers care about.”

Real farmers and other rural residents also care about practices like frac sand mining, which removes the soil and desecrates the landscape, said LSP organizer Johanna Rupprecht. “Frac sand mining is strip mining,” she said. “This is the opposite of stewardship.”

She explained LSP has been working on both the local and state level to protect communities from frac sand mining. Rupprecht described efforts to maintain local control, as well as to make sure state-level frac sand

mining regulations passed during the 2013 legislative session aren’t weakened. That’s why when LSP heard that the newly-formed Minnesota House of Representatives Mining and Outdoor Recreation Policy Committee was holding an informational hearing on the frac sand industry Jan. 27, and citizens were not being given time to testify, the organization mobilized people from rural Minnesota. While lobbyists for the industry filed in, LSP members and others gathered outside the hearing room and talked to the media about the importance of being heard. Eventually, citizens were given time on the docket to talk not only about the negative impacts of frac sand mining, but the shortsightedness of not allowing the people who are most likely to be impacted by the industry to be heard.

“Ultimately they had to hear us,” said Rupprecht.

Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield), member of the Minnesota House Agriculture Policy and Finance Committee, said part of the message that needs to get across to legislators is that improving the economy in rural Minnesota must be based on people, not just profit at any cost.

“If you want a resurgence of the outstate

economy, you need more people,” he said.

Mark Schultz, LSP’s Policy and Organizing Program director, said creating true change requires everyone doing a piece from the “ground up”—modifying a farming practice or buying locally produced food, for example. But that’s not enough.

“If we only do that, corporations will take over,” he said, adding that’s why it’s so important to take on policy reform as well. “But if you only do policy and don’t root it in what’s real, you don’t know what you’re talking about. So we have to balance these two things: policy and what’s real on farms. We’re intent on growing the power of the people in the state.”

LSP members in New Ulm, as well as at the other meetings, got an opportunity to flex that power during the gatherings when at one point they pulled out cell phones and called their Senators and Representatives in Saint Paul to tell them to oppose bills that would weaken environmental review and local control. □

*For more information on LSP’s state and local policy and organizing work, see the **Organizing for Change** section at www.landstewardshipproject.org, or contact Bobby King at 507-523-3366, bking@landstewardshipproject.org.*

Forward, Not Backward, on Healthcare

As part of Alphonse Mathiowetz’s ongoing battle with prostate cancer, he has to undergo a regular procedure at a health clinic. He prefers to do it in New Ulm, Minn., which is close to where he lives in southern Minnesota. The procedure isn’t cheap: \$9,534.95 for one injection. But when he chose to make the extra drive to Mankato to undergo the same procedure, Mathiowetz was shocked at the new price tag: \$1,200. Medicaid reimbursed him \$800 for the \$1,200 shot and \$7,500 for the more expensive shot.

“That’s only 25 miles apart and someone in there made \$8,000,” Mathiowetz said at a recent Land Stewardship Project organizing meeting in New Ulm (*see previous story*). “I think our medical system sucks.”

Such price gouging is common in a healthcare system that lacks transparency and accountability, according to LSP organizer Paul Sobocinski. That’s why the organization has been

working the past few years to reform a system that seems to be serving the corporate-controlled healthcare system, even as people like Mathiowetz suffer. Affordable healthcare is particular important for farmers and other rural residents who may have to work several jobs just to get access to insurance.

“The 99 percent should come before the 1 percent whose excess profits are draining us,” Sobocinski told the crowd of 50 farmers and other rural residents. “Everyone counts,

and everyone deserves healthcare. We need a system that has everyone in and nobody out.”

During the 2013 Minnesota legislative session, LSP worked with allies across Minnesota to help push the passage of a healthcare exchange called MNsure. MNsure is seen as a model for providing affordable healthcare for people who previously were left out of the system. It offers some of the lowest premiums in the country, expanded and improved Medicaid and MinnesotaCare programs, and is structured to hold insurance companies accountable, according to Sobocinski. He added that MNsure is far from perfect and the rollout has been rocky, but it has made insurance available for many farmers and others who didn’t have it before, and it can form an important basis for creating an even better healthcare system.

Al Kruse, who serves on LSP’s Healthcare Organizing Committee, described how when



Al Kruse (in red shirt): “We need to go forward, not backward, on healthcare reform.” (LSP Photo)

Healthcare, see page 13...

he was growing up his family had access to affordable health insurance through the dairy cooperative his father belonged to. Later he had insurance through his wife's job with the state of Minnesota. Kruse didn't realize how fortunate he was to have insurance until he had a job in the farm implement business where coverage was not provided.

"I was just one illness or accident away from needing insurance," said the Marshall, Minn., resident, adding that although MNsure and the Affordable Care Act have been receiving a lot of bad publicity, people often overlook all of the positive healthcare

options such policy changes have made available. For example, because of these policies, people now have the ability to shop around for affordable coverage, preexisting conditions must be covered, preventive care is available and students are covered by their parents' policy until they're 26.

A system where many people are forced to seek out an emergency room, even for basic treatment, is expensive and inefficient. Administrative costs through programs like Medicare are a fraction of what they are on the open market. "We need to work for a better system that provides Medicare for everyone," said Kruse. "That's the most efficient."

He agreed with Sobocinski that policies

like MNsure aren't perfect, but are a good basis to build from. Legislative efforts to dismantle or weaken the program by, for example, putting insurance companies on the governing board, should be resisted, he said.

"We need to go forward, not backward, on healthcare reform," said Kruse. "We can do that through a healthcare system that's transparent, affordable and available to everyone." □

For more on LSP's healthcare work, contact Paul Sobocinski at 507-342-2323 or sobopaul@redred.com. Details are also at LSP's Affordable Healthcare for All page at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

Climate, Energy, Agriculture & Land Stewardship in Southeastern Minn.

By Lynnea Pfohl

The Land Stewardship Project was involved in two climate and energy events in southeastern Minnesota's Winona County this winter. On Valentines Day in Lewiston, LSP hosted a winter potluck—complete with chocolates to mark the holiday—featuring Dan Breeden, a television meteorologist at WXOW in La Crosse, Wis., as well as a representative from Citizens Climate Lobby and Rod Sommerfield, who utilizes soil friendly practices on his southeastern Minnesota crop farm.

The following Thursday, Winona LaDuke headlined an extreme energy teach-in at Winona State University, which LSP helped facilitate.

I have been honored to sit on LSP's Winona County Organizing Steering Committee for the past two years, and this group believes the time to start a conversation among our membership on the topic of climate change has arrived. Climate change takes a particular and significant toll on farming and food production and will continue to do so exponentially. Although our core members will, with increasing urgency, need to confront the very serious consequences of climate change, we also want to remember the enormous role they can play in mitigating the problem.

It was in this solution-oriented spirit that a group of about 35 LSP members and friends gathered for the Feb. 14 meeting in Lewiston. Happily, if not surprisingly, those in attendance proved to be alacritous—both in their questions for Breeden and in their discussions regarding climate change. Ultimately, the meteorologist showed himself to be not only a helpful instructor on the basics of climate science, but also an advocate for

accessible renewable energy sources and, importantly, a changing conversation about climate change in the media. Within the next five years, Breeden suggested, the politically constructed controversy surrounding climate change—"political football," as he called it—will be replaced with broad acceptance of the reality of a warming world. Hopefully, by extension, the solutions that exist within our grasps will no longer continue to elude implementation.

In this way, Sommerfield, who farms near Mazeppa in Wabasha County, stands as an inspiring example of how agriculture can be part of the solution to climate change. Using strip-till and no-till farming practices that increase his soil's organic material, Sommerfield has made his land more porous and helped soil particles stick together so they don't wash off the fields and into waterways. Increasingly, improving soil health is being seen as a key way to help sequester the greenhouse gases that are contributing to climate change.

Five days later, LaDuke, the American Indian activist, environmentalist, economist and writer, delivered more inspiration. Around 100 people gathered on the Winona State campus to hear LaDuke draw the parallel between pipeline routing through wild rice lakes in northern Minnesota—the lifeblood of the White Earth Indian Reservation—with silica frac sand mining in Winona and surrounding counties. Extreme energy, though it takes different forms, plagues us all, LaDuke pointed out. She reminded teach-in participants that as a culture we must recognize that our relationship with fossil fuel is that of addicts and their drugs—completely unsustainable. She noted that while "we have stopped project after project after project, we have failed to curb our consumption and increase our

efficiency." Regarding corporate influence, LaDuke said, "I am sick of accommodating" and emphasized that hydrofracturing of oil and gas only makes economic sense if companies are not required to follow environmental laws. In this vein, LaDuke called for an Upper Mississippi Environmental Impact Statement on extreme energy.

After LaDuke's talk, Winona State geosciences professor Toby Dogwiler gave a presentation on climate science and energy implications, and Don Arnosti of the Izaak Walton League of America discussed fracking facts and impacts on natural resources, highlighting those pertaining to Minnesota. Finally, a panel of leaders from concerned local organizations, including LSP, provided additional information and updates on the frac sand issue in southeastern Minnesota. The evening ended with breakout sessions in which attendees had an opportunity to discuss motivation, commitment and action in stopping extreme energy extraction.

Indeed, we must continue our motivation for, commitment to, and action towards the larger issue of climate change mitigation in general. In Minnesota, we're not threatened directly by rising sea levels, but our farmers here will feel the effects of a significantly altered climate. Our members have clearly called for LSP to work against frac sand mining in this region. In beginning a local conversation about not only the impacts of climate change, but also how farming provides solutions, LSP has broadened that activism, and I am grateful to have witnessed this growth. □

Lynnea Pfohl is a Policy and Organizing intern in LSP's southeastern Minnesota office (see page 7).

A Relay Race to Resiliency

Forever Green is Working to Make Land Cover a Year-Round Proposition

By *Brian DeVore*

To Matthew Ott, three words could make all the difference as to whether farming systems that protect the soil year-round become a consistent agricultural presence in the Corn Belt. “For me, the most exciting thing is to be able to use the term, ‘cash cover crops,’” says the University of Minnesota graduate student. “It’s combining environmental and financial sustainability, and you need both to have true sustainability.”

Ott is part of an innovative U of M research initiative that is out to prove environmental sustainability and financial viability can go hand-in-hand.

The Forever Green Agriculture Initiative is an ambitious, multidisciplinary approach to getting more continuous living cover on the land during that “brown period” when regular cash crops aren’t growing. That’s a big deal, considering that Minnesota’s top row crops, corn and soybeans, cover the land for only a few months out of the year. That means for six months or more, around half of Minnesota lacks any living roots or even basic vegetative ground cover, creating a long bare season during which the land is particularly prone to being washed and blown away. The most recent sign that this lack of cover is taking a toll on the land

is all of the “snirt” that stained Minnesota snowbanks this past winter (*see page 5*).

Forever Green funding provided by the Minnesota Legislature in 2014 (*see sidebar below*) has moved the initiative ahead significantly in just the past several months, according to Michael Schmitt, associate dean of the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences. Schmitt says legislative funding has made possible innovative research on, among other things, pennycress, intermediate wheatgrass, kura clover, hybrid hazelnuts and camelina.

Just as importantly, says Schmitt, it has also given numerous graduate students invaluable experience in doing cutting-edge agricultural research, helping develop a new generation of agricultural scientists.

Cover Cropping’s Public Service

Studies throughout the Midwest have shown that growing low-value cover crops, such as small grains, before and after the main cash crop season can dramatically cut erosion and runoff while building overall soil health.

“The literature is very robust on the ecosystem services provided by cover crops,” says U of M graduate student and Forever Green researcher Michelle Dobbratz. She’s seen some of these services firsthand through her research integrating kura clover as a “living mulch” into row crop systems.

A living mulch grows between the rows of crops like corn for several years in a row, providing a year-round companion cover while building soil structure. Dobbratz said she has already observed how living mulches help fields soak up heavy rains during storm events, while neighboring unmulched crop acres are flooded.

“Farmers are increasingly demanding risk management and resiliency from their fields,” she says.

And according to surveys and anecdotal evidence, farmers across the country are finding that cover crops can build the kind of soil resiliency that helps cash crops better weather extreme conditions such as drought while reducing the need for expensive commercial fertilizers.

But such economic benefits are not as immediate and direct as bin-busting yields. Integrating cover crops into a corn-soybean system costs money and can be logistically tricky. In states like Minnesota, conditions often make for a narrow window of opportunity for planting and establishing something on the edges of a standard growing season.

That’s why the Forever Green initiative is taking a multi-faceted life cycle approach to developing systems that provide the land protection year-round, according to Don Wyse, a U of M plant scientist who is helping lead the initiative. Not only is Forever Green trying to develop soil-friendly plant varieties that can grow and produce well “outside” of the traditional growing season, but the initiative’s researchers are working to figure out how to develop marketable products from cover crops, in effect giving farmers an economic incentive to plant what up until now has been seen as an economically “useless” class of commodities.

Passing the Baton

For example, one of the crops Forever Green is experimenting with is field pennycress, an extremely winter-hardy member of the mustard family that provides soil protection, uses up excess nitrogen, cuts erosion and suppresses weeds in the spring. Actually, there are numerous cover crops that provide such services. But pennycress also produces an oilseed that can be used in biofuel, among other things, and a processing byproduct can be fed to livestock.

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pennycress could potentially be grown on over 40 million U.S. corn and soybean acres without displacing those crops. That amount of acreage would yield up to six billion gallons of oil that could be converted to biodiesel—that represents

2015 Legislative Funding for Forever Green

Ongoing support for Forever Green is a priority for the Land Stewardship Project during the 2015 session of the Minnesota Legislature (*see pages 9-10*). LSP worked to obtain the initiative’s original legislative funding during the 2014 session. LSP believes that it is critical for the public to support the kind of long-term, complex research needed to balance conservation with farm profitability, says LSP organizer Bobby King.

“Land Stewardship Project sees this as a critical investment in a public good, which is what the land grant system is all about,” says King.

In the current legislative session, Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield) has introduced HF 693 and Sen. Kevin Dahl (DFL-Northfield) has introduced SF 579. This legislation would provide \$1,395,000 in funding for the initiative in fiscal year 2016 and again in 2017.

For more information on LSP’s work to get this funding approved before the adjournment of the legislative session May 18, contact King at 612-722-6377 or e-mail bking@landstewardshipproject.org. Updates are also available on LSP’s **Action Alert** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

Forever Green, see page 15...

roughly 15 percent of the 40 billion gallons of diesel consumed annually in this country.

And because pennycress begins flowering in April or May when honeybee colonies are returning to the Upper Midwest, it can provide critical food for domesticated and wild pollinators at a time when other flowers are hard to come by.

Wyse describes a scenario where a farmer could plant pennycress in the fall after corn harvest, allowing it to overwinter. The idea is to create a continuous living cover on the land through a kind of plant “relay” system where the growing seasons of two crops overlap—as one crop is winding down for the season, another is just getting started. Forever Green trials have shown soybeans can be planted into pennycress in May and then the cover crop’s oilseed is harvested in June, making way for the soybeans to grow the rest of the season.

“So that extends both seasons,” says Wyse.

That overlap can not only produce dividends for a well-protected soil, but it can increase the land’s ability to produce profitability 12 months out of the year, something scientists call “temporal intensification.” Estimates show that growing pennycress and soybeans together increases by 40 percent an acre’s overall production of oilseeds (60 bushels per acre of soybeans, 40 bushels of pennycress, for example). One estimate is that pennycress can add an extra \$300 of

per-acre profit to a soybean field.

“And so instead of just planting a cover crop for the long-term environmental benefits, the farmer can have some rapidly realized economic returns,” says Kayla Altendorf, a graduate student working on a pennycress breeding project.

Intelligent Tinkering

Forever Green researchers are benefiting from recent major strides made in identifying and selecting which parts of the plant’s DNA can produce desired characteristics. When there are multiple genes controlling a certain trait in a plant, it’s not clear the level of dominance each trait has when crossbreeding takes place. But mapping the genome of a plant can help pinpoint what best combinations will produce the desired outcome. Fortunately, pennycress and camelina are very closely related to arabidopsis, the first plant to have its entire genome sequenced.

Kevin Dorn, a U of M doctoral student doing genomic research on pennycress, says just a decade ago it would have cost tens of millions of dollars to use DNA sequencing to improve a plant species like pennycress. Dorn and others, using pennycress they harvested from a roadside south of the Twin Cities, recently mapped the plant’s genome for around \$75,000.

According to a 2014 article in the journal

Plant Science, affordable genome sequencing technologies and advanced breeding techniques have reduced the time scale it takes to domesticate a new crop from hundreds or thousands of years, to decades. The map Dorn and his team created is helping make it possible to select varieties that, for

example, flower earlier or don’t produce seed pods that shatter as easily during harvest (a common problem with pennycress). Once these traits are identified, then plants can be bred and propagated through

traditional breeding methods, which means researchers don’t have to rely on controversial genetic engineering technologies to produce the next generation of plants.

“We can do in eight years what you may have been able to do in classical breeding in maybe 50 to 100,” says Wyse. “Give us 10 years of solid funding and this Forever Green group can make a difference.”

And consistent financial support is critical if Forever Green is to advance to the point where farmers can benefit from it, says Wyse. More cropping trials need to be established in different parts of the state so that comparisons can be made between soils, weather conditions and topography, say researchers.

Chicken & Egg

Another reason Forever Green requires long-term investment is because it’s not just taking a narrow, agronomic view of how to improve cover cropping. How can the market value match the environmental value of these crops? Forever Green proposes doing this by developing incubators across the state that would coordinate the technological, economic and even policy innovations needed to make alternative crops a consistent part of the farming picture.

These incubators could help overcome the “chicken or the egg” barriers that often plague innovations in agriculture. What incentive do farmers have to plant a new crop if there is no market for it? And even if there is a market, what if there are no processing

• • •
“Farmers are increasingly demanding risk management and resiliency from their fields.”
• • •



Green pennycress covers the soil in a U of M test plot soon after snowmelt on March 13 of this year. (Photo courtesy of Don Wyse, U of M)

Forever Green, see page 16...

Give it a Listen

Don Wyse talks about Forever Green on episode 153 of LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/592.

...Forever Green, from page 15

and transportation systems available to get the product from the field to the end user?

These are big-picture questions that require working across disciplines that cover everything from plant genetics and breeding to mechanical engineering of tillage and harvesting equipment. Even food science and marketing have to be part of the picture,

says Wyse.

And that's possibly the most exciting aspect of Forever Green—land grant university research can often suffer from the "silo effect," where scientists working in different, but related, disciplines don't know what's going on in the next lab or test plot. Such a myopic way of operating can be particularly keen as competition for limited funding increases.

But several of the researchers working on

the Forever Green initiative describe how the interdisciplinary nature of the effort is allowing them to shorten significantly the time required to get basic science to the practical, on-the-farm stage. Dobbratz, the kura clover researcher, says such border crossing is key if it's to help solve the über challenge facing society: how to feed people sustainably.

"You can't just exist in your own little lab anymore," she says. "I think our team is keenly aware of the need for boundary work—that is the need for working across different disciplines. None of us have a hero complex—we're aware that we're one tiny piece of a larger puzzle." □

Covering the Future

Forever Green isn't Only Producing Innovative Research—It's Also Germinating Innovative Researchers

EDITOR'S NOTE: During a recent *Land Stewardship Letter* group interview about the Forever Green initiative (see page 14), several U of M graduate students responded to the question, "What excites you most about this research?"

New Tools Have Compressed Time

◆ **Kevin Dorn** has been mapping the genome for pennycress, which holds potential for serving as a cover "relay crop" that protects the soil while increasing overall production of oilseeds on soybean acres.

"This is a particularly exciting time to be a plant scientist because of the amazing tools and technologies that have been developed within the biological sciences that have wide-reaching implications for agriculture. The grand challenges that are before us are daunting, but the tools to address these problems are now available and the base knowledge that's been laid down before us is going to drive that work and make it feasible. It's not a 'Hopefully in 30 years...' kind of thing. It's a 'If we keep at this for another five years, we'll see some pretty amazing things happen.'"

Solutions = Opportunities

◆ **Kevin Anderson** is working on the agronomics of getting relay crops integrated into row crop systems.

"We're addressing several large scale and serious side effects of conventional agriculture and we're doing that by creating a new

opportunity in a system that can develop quickly. So you can say in five years this could change the landscape in Minnesota."

Benefits for Farmers & Public

◆ **Michelle Dobbratz** is working with kura clover as a living mulch.

"We are developing solutions for producers that can enable them to adopt practices that provide more ecosystem services. We're actually giving them options that they want, that can benefit themselves and the public."

Food & Environmental Security

◆ **Matthew Ott** is working on assessing the environmental benefits of getting winter camelina, pennycress, tillage radish and winter rye on the landscape. He is also working on developing a high yielding variety of camelina.

"Crops like camelina and pennycress are solving problems of food security too because they're not competing with the food supply necessarily. And because they are oilseeds, they actually contribute to food production. You can also get biofuels from them that, unlike corn ethanol for instance, don't compete with the food supply, which

Researchers, see page 17...



Some of the Forever Green graduate students (left to right): Kevin Dorn, Matthew Ott, Michelle Dobbratz, Kevin Anderson, Kayla Altendorf, Peyton Ginakes, Dan Raskin and Claire Flavin. (LSP Photo)



Pennycress covering the soil between soybean rows. Estimates are that growing pennycress and soybeans together can increase per-acre production of oilseeds by 40 percent. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Anderson, U of M)

much synthetic nitrogen, as well as reduce a lot of the leaching that we're seeing in the landscape. Hairy vetch flowers are also beautiful, and provide resources for pollinators and beneficial insect predators. So, how do you convince the public? I think people are starting to recognize that these environmental services really do have value, and who wouldn't like to see a little more green on the landscape?"

No-Till & Organic Weed Control

◆ **Peyton Ginakes** is working on a project to determine how to manage kura clover as a living mulch in a reduced tillage system.

"I'm really excited about providing realistic methods to farmers for management. I work a lot in organic and low input systems and when I go to a conference and start talking to an organic grower it's really hard to say to them, 'Please use no-till practices,' because it's just not realistic. If you can make these conservation practices easier to do, you're not talking past your audience anymore."

Increasing the Per-Acre Value

◆ **Dan Raskin** is working on a double crop, high value forage rotation utilizing a planted pea and barley forage mix followed by a short-season grain or silage crop.

"I think in a lot of ways, the public discourse around the benefits of cover cropping is pretty advanced. I can't speak for the willingness to actualize toward that on the part of farmers. But one thing I'm excited about is seeing all these as a suite of options, ranging from bigger new projects to smaller tweaks. The double cropping studies are an example of a smaller tweak on previously adapted systems that maybe show success elsewhere, but are adopted specifically for Minnesota. But what we found was there was research in the past showing economic or ecological benefits of a double cropping system, but it comes with a significant yield hit. And so we're trying to compensate that

yield hit by increasing the value of the forage that could work in this kind of system. The more options there are, the more likely implementation on actual farms is going to be."

Solutions, Not Just Problems

◆ **Kayla Altendorf** is working on a pennycress breeding project.

"What excites me is to have the opportunity to learn a new skill where I can improve a new species that actually has the potential to change agriculture in a positive way in a really short amount of time. I was an environmental studies major as an undergrad and I remember learning repeatedly about the problems, but there was never any discussion about the solutions. That's why I feel so grateful and so empowered to learn the skills that could allow me to actually do something about these problems." □

...Researchers, from page 16

is hugely important. And there's a real-time, cash, economic benefit from camelina and pennycress. And that real-time incentive can be a game changer as far as getting cover crops on the landscape."

Services Rendered

◆ **Claire Flavin** is working on a hairy vetch breeding project.

"I view cover crops through the ecosystem services lens. Hairy vetch, for example, can typically provide the necessary amount of nitrogen for a lot of crops, including corn. Implementing cover crops into the system and incorporating them into the soil prior to planting corn would alleviate the need for so

Pennycress matures early enough in the spring that it can be harvested just as the soybean is ready to begin its own growing season. This creates a "relay" system where the soil is continuously covered and overall productivity of the field is increased. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Anderson, U of M)



Want More Information?

After their interview with the *Land Stewardship Letter*, the Forever Green graduate students asked that their e-mails be published in the event that farmers and others interested in their research on continuous living cover wanted to contact them:

- Kevin Dorn — dorn@umn.edu
- Kevin Anderson — and01817@umn.edu
- Michelle Dobbratz — dobbr001@umn.edu
- Matthew Ott — ottxx142@umn.edu
- Claire Flavin — flavi010@umn.edu
- Peyton Ginakes — ginak002@umn.edu
- Dan Raskin — raski024@umn.edu
- Kayla Altendorf — kaltendo@umn.edu

A detailed report on the Forever Green initiative is at www.cinram.umn.edu/forevergreen/index.html.

The Good Farming Discount

Cover Cropping is Being Touted as a Way to Insure Against Disaster

By Brian DeVore

There's a lot of talk these days about the high price tag thrust upon society when publicly supported programs promote land use practices that put the environment and our communities at risk. This discussion is becoming particularly urgent as disasters connected to an increasingly volatile climate wreak more havoc across the country.

So perhaps it's no surprise that in October, the U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) took aim at the one government program that has more influence than any other on what crops are planted where, and even which farming practices are used to grow those commodities: federally subsidized crop insurance. A GAO analysis blamed crop insurance, along with the National Flood Insurance Program, for inflating the cost of recovering from disasters by increasing risky behavior. "...while federal law prohibits crop insurance from covering losses due to a farmers' failure to follow good farming practices...some of these practices maintain short-term production but may inadvertently increase the vulnerability of agriculture to climate change through increased erosion and inefficient water use," concluded the GAO.

In other words, by taking the risk out of planting row crops on land that normally would be considered too erosive, wet or otherwise marginal to produce a profitable yield, crop insurance is subsidizing farming practices that are making our land less resilient.

As it happens, a White House executive order has directed federal agencies to reform policies that may increase the vulnerability of "economic sectors" or "communities" to climate change. That would seem to make crop insurance a prime candidate for major reform.

Unfortunately, as the Land Stewardship Project's recent white papers on crop insurance (see pages 3-4) show, because of the convoluted nature of a program that allows insurance companies to dump economic risk

onto the public while raking in administration payments that are neither transparent nor accountable, the industry has little incentive to reward farmers for "good farming practices." Or, as the Natural Resource Defense Council's Claire O'Connor puts it, "...there are very few market signals that private insurance companies can send to farmers to make risk-reducing choices."

This has produced some decidedly negative results for the public at large when it comes to economic viability of rural com-



Farmers in Burleigh County, N. Dak., utilize cover crops to build the kind of soil that can preserve as much moisture as possible—an important resource in an area that receives roughly 16 inches of precipitation annually. (LSP Photo)

munities, support of beginning farmers and, as the GAO points out, stewardship of the land.

Blanket Coverage

This last shortcoming of crop insurance—its promotion of bad conservation—holds perhaps the best promise for reform in the near term. That's because there are a myriad of proven sustainable farming practices that could be incentivized through an enlightened insurance program.

And an increasing number of agricultural policy and conservation experts are saying one of those practices, utilizing cover crops to protect the soil before and after the regular cash crop growing season, is particularly primed for getting a helping hand via tweaks

to the insurance program.

A nationwide survey of farmers released in November by the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) provides the latest evidence that cover cropping makes farming a less "risky" endeavor. According to the survey, cover cropping farmers reported an average corn yield increase in 2013 of five bushels per acre; the soybean yield boost was two bushels. That's a significant statistic, given that cover crops have long had the reputation for actually reducing commodity crop yields.

Cover crops really shine when extreme weather sweeps in. When SARE-CTIC conducted a similar survey the year before, they found that during the extreme drought that hit many states in 2012 corn planted after cover crops produced a yield boost of 11 bushels. Evidence of cover cropping's ability to preserve moisture and build soil resiliency on a field-by-field basis is mounting.

Farmers are increasingly integrating cover cropping into no-till production systems to help build soil health and thus help reduce the yield drag that can come with giving up tillage. In January, the journal *Nature* published one of the most extensive analyses of no-till farming ever done. It examined 610 studies that compared no-till production with conventional tillage practices across 48 crops and 63 countries. The analysis found that utilizing no-till in combination with practices like cover cropping can minimize yield drag, particularly in areas suffering from low rainfall. Such a combination "may become an important climate-change adaptation strategy for ever-drier regions of the world," concluded the paper.

Cover cropping's ability to dramatically cut erosion and the amount of nitrogen, fertilizer and other farm chemicals that make it into lakes, streams and rivers is well documented. And it's looking like cover cropping can help our planet manage risk on a big picture level as well. Late in 2014, the University of Illinois released numbers from a 12-year study showing cover cropped plots sequestered a significant amount of organic carbon. In fact, when compared to non-cover cropped plots, no-till fields protected with hairy vetch and rye sequestered 30 percent more carbon. Even when the plot was moldboard plowed, the carbon gains with cover crops were 18 percent. That's good

Covered, see page 19...

news in the battle to keep greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere, where they can cause the kind of climate change that produces crop-disrupting extreme weather events in the first place.

Unfortunately, cover cropping is far from the norm on most farms. The latest SARE-CTIC survey estimated cover cropping adoption increased by 30 percent a year from 2010 to 2013. But according to the latest U.S. Census of Agriculture estimate, there were still only 10 million acres of cover crops in the country as of 2012, which is only about 2.5 percent of total tilled acres.

The bottom line is that unless a farmer has livestock which can use cover crops as cheap forage, producers receive little direct economic incentive for planting anything before and after the typical corn and soybean growing season. Unpredictable weather can make planting windows narrow and many farmers simply don't have much experience with systems involving rye or tillage radish.

Research being done through the University of Minnesota's Forever Green initiative (pages 14-17) is attempting to find ways to provide farmers a direct economic incentive for establishing more continuous living cover on the land by attaching a market value to the cover crops themselves. LSP is launching an on-farm research initiative this summer on integrating cover crops into corn (see page 20).

Insuring More Cover Crops

The reality is it will be awhile before the marketplace provides a major incentive to plant cover crops. In the meantime, the quasi-public crop insurance program could be a natural mechanism for getting more of the land covered—after all, reducing erosion and farmland runoff, as well as sequestering more carbon, are all public goods.

In the real world, a company that sells insurance should be interested in reducing its risk of making a high claim payment, called an indemnity. That's why car insurance companies provide "safe driver discounts" and homeowners who install alarm systems can qualify for lower premiums. But because of government subsidies that protect insurance companies from major losses, the program exists in a parallel universe where risky behavior is rewarded, no matter how much the negative results of that behavior come home to roost. And this risk-taking is becoming increasingly expensive. From 2001 to 2010 crop insurance indemnities averaged \$4.1 billion a year. In 2011, a new record was set when \$10.8 billion in payouts were made; a year later that record was shattered with

\$17.3 billion in indemnities going out the door.

The Natural Resource Defense Council's O'Connor provides a glimpse at just how much risk reduction could be achieved with cover cropping. For example, during 2012 farmers in states most severely impacted by that year's drought—Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas—received around \$4 billion in indemnities because of the dry weather. Using the SARE-CTIC survey figures, O'Connor shows that there's a good chance many of the farmers who used cover crops wouldn't have even qualified for a weather disaster insurance payment because their use of continuous living cover provided a good enough yield boost.

The program's apparent inability to recognize and reward innovative farming systems is one more reason crop insurance



West-central Minnesota farmer Jerry Morical shows off a cocktail mix of cover crops he seeded into standing corn as a way to build the kind of soil health that can help reduce yield reductions when switching to no-till. (LSP Photo)

is in need of a major overhaul. But short of that, there are also smaller steps that can be taken to make it a true risk management program and a supporter of resiliency. Insurance companies may lack the incentive to reward farmers for utilizing innovative systems that involve cover cropping, conservation tillage and other techniques, but the USDA's Risk Management Agency, which administers crop insurance, is a different matter. As a public, tax-funded agency, it supposedly has every incentive to promote practices that are in the public good—and soil-friendly farm-

ing systems definitely fit in that category.

Both Datu Research and the Natural Resources Defense Council recently highlighted conservation farming practices such as cover cropping and no-till as good risk management techniques that should be encouraged through crop insurance incentives. Just a few months ago, economists from the International Food Policy Research Institute added their voices to the call for tying proven conservation farming practices to subsidized crop insurance.

Sixty percent of the farmers who answered a SARE-CTIC survey question about crop insurance said that reducing insurance premiums for growers of cover crops would be an incentive for increasing such plantings. With cover crop establishment costs—including the cost of seed and planting—averaging around the \$40 per-acre mark, a little economic incentive could go a long ways toward establishing farming systems that have wide-ranging benefits.

Giving Monsanto a BYE

There's a precedent for using crop insurance to promote certain farming practices. In 2007, Monsanto talked the Risk Management Agency into giving farmers a discount on crop insurance premiums if they planted the company's triple-stacked GMO corn.

Through the so-called Biotech Yield Endorsement (BYE), farmers who planted the GMO seed received a discount of around 13 percent to 20 percent on their insurance premiums. According to a report released by Datu Research in 2014, in the end the discount ended up being applied to DuPont Pioneer, Syngenta and Dow stacked hybrids. (The BYE was discontinued in 2011 because triple-stacked GMO hybrids were so widespread by then that there was no longer any basis for offering a special discount to adopters, according to Datu.)

The BYE example opens the door to perhaps making crop insurance a true risk management strategy—one based on sustainable, resilient production systems, rather than one based on increasing sales of a highly controversial product.

"On our farm we've built enough soil resiliency that we don't need crop insurance," says Burleigh County, N. Dak., farmer Gabe Brown, who experienced many a crop failure before he started using a system that combined cover crop cocktails, no-till and mob grazing of cattle. "Just tie crop insurance to soil loss and you'd have 20 million acres of cover crops just like that." □

For more on the Land Stewardship Project's work related to crop insurance reform, see pages 3-4.

Continuous Living Cover

Corn, Cover Crops, Cows & Community Food

A New LSP Research Initiative Takes a Practical Look at Soil-Friendly Farming

By Caroline van Schaik

We already know that covered soil and managed livestock grazing result in healthier soil, and better food and farm finances. But, what does it look like when implemented on a Midwestern corn field? Beginning this summer, on-farm research by the Land Stewardship Project and partners will try to illustrate an answer. The goal of this multi-year research project is to demonstrate how and why to build multi-species cover crops and rotational grazing into corn production systems.

One of the principle issues of concern is that corn grain harvest typically begins in October, while the ideal planting window for cool season cover crops such as cereal rye, tillage radish, oats, turnips, rape and field peas is August to September. Furthermore, the biological benefits to soil and the resulting financial benefits of integrating cover crops — let alone managed livestock — into a row-cropped field are not known or at least acknowledged by many Midwestern farmers.

Seed selection, seeding rates, planting times, equipment needs, enterprise analysis, yields, impact on livestock gain or the volume of milk in the tank, and what happens to the health of the soil will be scientifically measured, observed, photographed and recorded for two years on Minnesota and Iowa crop farms. Comparable data from neighboring conventionally managed corn fields will



A new LSP on-farm research initiative will examine how to integrate soil-friendly practices into a corn production system. (LSP Photo)

provide a frame of reference for the changes cover cropping and rotational grazing produce in the soil.

The research, which will be conducted by staff with LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program, complements ongoing work to teach and advocate for all manner of practices that render soil in better shape long into the future. We are committed to making this information as user-friendly and field-friendly as possible; results will be shared with farmers and the general public through field events and handouts.

The work segues with LSP's long range goals for prosperous, diversified, resilient family farms managed according to stewardship values. It is one of several components of work by Community Based Food Systems Program staff designed to shift landscape management and the agricultural narrative toward profitable food production with a land ethic firmly in practice.

Research project farmers include southeastern Minnesota dairy grazer Olaf

Haugen, who will follow this year's corn harvest with a four- to six-species mix of cover crops to be grazed in late fall and the following spring before the field is once again planted to corn. Haugen operates a 180-head dairy in a milk-share transition arrangement with his parents, Bonnie and Vance Haugen.

We are going to pursue a similar on-farm research initiative in western Minnesota with crop and livestock farmer Jim Flower. We will work with Flower to monitor the results from cover cropping and grazing a piece of land on his farm that has been in row crops for many years.

Partners include the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota and Practical Farmers of Iowa. Seed supply partners to date include La Crosse Seed and Albert Lea Seed House. The Wallace Center at Winrock International is overseeing a USDA Conservation Innovation Grant that is funding this initiative through the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Land Stewardship Project staff are part of the Wallace Center's Pasture Project, which is convening organizations promoting grazing in the Upper Midwest to accelerate grass-fed beef production for healthy soils, farmer/rancher profit, and engaged farmers and landowners. □

Caroline van Schaik is an LSP organizer working in the Root River watershed in southeastern Minnesota. She can be reached at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

Do Livestock & Water Mix?

The Land Stewardship Project has been working with farmers and conservation experts on utilizing managed rotational grazing of livestock to improve riparian areas such as those along trout streams and other sensitive waterways. As a result of this work, LSP has developed a fact sheet on riparian grazing and a colorful "Trout-fishing with Livestock" summary of how one farm in the Root River watershed is showing that managed rotational grazing of cattle can improve habitat for trout (and other species) while providing the livestock producer economic benefits.

Both resources are available at www.landstewardshipproject.org on the **Root River: Promise of Pasture** page. Paper copies are available by contacting Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

LSP & Continuous Living Cover

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.

In western Minnesota, this work is centered around the Chippewa 10% Project, a partnership of LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project. For details, contact Robin Moore at 320-269-2105, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org.

In southeastern Minnesota, this work is focused on the Root River watershed. The contact person there is Caroline van Schaik, 507-523-3366, caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

More information on this work is at www.landstewardshipproject.org in the **Stewardship & Food** section.

Not Just a Man's World

An LSP Gathering Makes it Clear Women Play a Pivotal Role in Stewarding Farmland, Even if it Means Questioning the Status Quo

By Rebecca White

What is the prairie's "polar bear?" What species can capture the public's imagination and help raise a rallying cry over the loss of prairie? How do we get more kids off "devices" and out on the land, gaining an appreciation for smaller scale family farming and the landscape, animals and plants that surround them?

Those were some of the big questions that surfaced in a Women Caring for the Land gathering in Benson, Minn., in late January. In recent years, the Land Stewardship Project has developed "Women Caring for the Land" learning circles and support networks in the Chippewa (western Minnesota) and Root River (southeastern Minnesota) watersheds. They are modeled after a program developed by the Women, Food and Agriculture Network of Iowa and are focused on bringing together women who own land and rent it out for agricultural production, and who are interested in learning more about conservation—grassed waterways, field windbreaks, strip tillage, grazing, cover crops, etc.

During the most recent gathering, close to 20 women landowners and farmers came together to discuss management strategies for pasture, prairie and grassland they own in and around the Chippewa River watershed.

Speakers at the gathering included Marybeth Block and Judy Schulte of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Sara Vacek of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Rick Gronseth of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

While the agenda focused mainly on programs to help landowners better manage their grassland acres, the larger questions of landscape-level change and community kept surfacing, along with women's own stories about their connection to the prairie landscape and their farming communities.

In keeping with the traditional format

we've used at other Women Caring for the Land gatherings, after a brief welcome participants devoted the first hour to intensive introductions, which allow the women to share stories about the land and their connection to it, as well as their goals for its care and maintenance.

The number of attendees required splitting up into groups facilitated by me and LSP organizer Robin Moore and Chippewa 10% Project grassland outreach specialist Mae Rose Petrehn. While a couple of the women present had participated in other Women Caring for the Land gatherings, most of the participants were new to the program, and expressed both surprise and pleasure at a format that went beyond brief

"who, where, how many acres" introductions typical of most ag-related meetings.

In one group, an Appleton, Minn., woman expressed gratitude

that, thanks to her late husband, she'd been exposed to the "men's world" of the grain elevator and soil conservation office early on in her marriage.

"I hated going there," she recalled of the elevator. "It was all men, and they just stared at me. But my husband had me do it, so I would know more about the business. I know a lot of women who were never exposed to that side of it, and they don't even

• • •
"I hated going there. It was all men, and they just stared at me."
• • •



Left to right: Bea Telford, Verna Peterson, Sandy Bessingpas and Kristi Vadnais discussed land and ways of making sure it's managed in a way that fits their stewardship ethic. (Photo by Rebecca White)

know where to go or what to do when their husbands pass."

Another group member observed that her experience made her a great role model for other women who are nervous about entering that "man's world."

Courage to Stand for the Land

In another discussion group, a repeat attendee of Women Caring for the Land gatherings reported that she'd ended her relationship with a long-time tenant who was unwilling to try some new ways of management on her land, including diversifying the rotation on her row crop acres beyond corn and soybeans. While she encountered some resistance and even a little bullying, the contacts, resources and information she'd garnered from participation in the women's-only learning circle gave her the confidence to stand her ground.

"I would never have had the confidence to do this without Women Caring for the Land," she said, and reported that she was finalizing a lease arrangement with a young farmer who is open to working with her to implement more conservation practices in his farming.

As for the bigger questions of landscape and prairie preservation, those came as a result of a discussion about the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, which was published in 2011 by 10 conservation agencies and organizations as a blueprint on how to save and manage a resource that once covered 18 million acres of Minnesota, but is now down to 235,000 acres and shrinking fast. During the meeting, a map contrasting the original tallgrass prairie ecosystem in Minnesota overlaid with a sparse scattering of dots showed what remains. Block, a grassland expert with the Department of Natural Resources, talked about why prairies matter, and what governments and private landowners can do (and are doing) to help preserve them.

Participants in the day's program hungry for even more hands-on information about programs and management strategies were encouraged to contact their local Soil and Water Conservation District offices to get started, and to keep watching for upcoming field days and events in their areas. □

Rebecca White is an LSP Community Based Food Systems Program organizer. For more information about LSP's Women Caring for the Land work in western Minnesota, contact White at 320-305-9685 or rwhite@landstewardshipproject.org. In southeastern Minnesota, contact Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland in the Midwest? Or are you an established farmer/landowner in the 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 Dori 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.

Farmland Available

◆ Lyn Horness has for rent/sale/share 9 acres of farmland near **Winona in south-eastern Minnesota**. No chemicals have been used on the land and it includes a small barn, fencing, large garden and a four-bedroom farmhouse. Contact: Lyn Horness, 507-452-5199.

◆ Cynthia Lane has for rent 3-4 tillable acres in **Wisconsin**. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it was used to produce CSA vegetables last season. There is a pole barn, an indoor storage area and a house that would be available for rent. There is a water source near the fields and the land sits next to 100 acres of prairie and forest. The rental price depends on the arrangement. Contact: Cynthia Lane, cynlane@live.com.

◆ Marilyn Klinkner has for sale 2 to 10 acres of farmland in **west-central Wisconsin's Trempealeau County**, near Galesville. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it has fertile soil, two prairies, a small spring, trees and a southern exposure. There is an old chicken coop in poor shape and a house and garage would possibly be available. The price is negotiable. Contact: Marilyn Klinkner, 608-738-1397, hazel7260@gmail.com.

◆ Renae Mitchell has for rent 40-50 acres of farmland in **Wisconsin**. The land has not been sprayed for several years and includes a high tunnel hoop house (96 x 30), greenhouse, sheds, a house, some fencing, water and buffer zones. The asking price is \$500 to \$750 per month. Contact: Renae Mitchell, 262-225-9296, ourfarm@netwurx.net.

◆ John Koivisto has for sale 10 acres of farmland 50 miles west of **Minneapolis, Minn.** The land has not been sprayed for at least 10 years. It includes an older dairy barn, 3+ car detached garage, a house and two ponds. The property is on a recently rebuilt county road. The asking price is \$230,000. Contact: 612-741-2017, johnkoivisto1@gmail.com.

◆ Brad Schmidtkecht has for sale 135 acres of farmland in **western Wisconsin's Buffalo County**. The land has not been sprayed for several years and there is a 24-stall barn with some lean-tos, two 60+ foot silos, a 3,000 square-foot calf barn, a 2,300-square-foot two-story garage, a 48 x

96 pole shed and a house. There is a marsh, two to three small ponds and a creek. Another 35 acres directly adjacent to the farm will be available for lifetime rental to buyer. The asking price is \$6,000 per acre (buildings included). Contact: Brad Schmidtkecht, 715-308-1914.

◆ Linda Ruddle has for sale 20 acres of farmland in **southeastern Minnesota's Goodhue County**. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it includes pasture, a shed, small barn and a house. There is perimeter fencing around the pasture and water lines to the pasture paddocks. Contact: Linda Ruddle, 952-292-1936, Lkruddle@yahoo.com.

◆ Heidi Morlock has available 25 acres of certified organic pasture for cattle grazing in **Minnesota's Scott County, south of the Twin Cities** (Belle Plaine Township). There are custom grazing or rental options. High-tensile fencing was installed in the last five years and water lines are in place. The land was certified organic under previous renter's certification. Contact: Heidi Morlock, 952-492-5314, sevenstoryfarm@gmail.com.

◆ John Hutchinson has for sale 24 acres of farmland in **south-central Minnesota's Sibley County**. The land borders Washington Lake and is 50 miles from downtown Minneapolis. It includes 15+ acres of fenced pasture and the land has not been sprayed for 18 years. There is a 40 x 60 heated outbuilding and an older three-bedroom house. Details are available at <http://minneapolis.craigslist.org/ank/reo/4836339172.html>. The asking price is \$229,900. Contact: John Hutchinson, 952-223-1020, john.hutchinson@results.net.

◆ Nicki Tabb has for sale 4.2 acres of farmland in **east-central Minnesota's Isanti County**, near Cambridge. The land has not been sprayed for several years and there are herb and vegetable plots. The fields are planted in cover crops, perennial herbs, garlic, daffodils, etc. A plant list with map and property pictures is available upon request. Buildings include a small storage building, old large fallen barn (to be salvaged), new 22 x 45 hoop house, new 10 x 12 wood frame shed (currently black plastic walls) on concrete pad, new metal tool shed, an old concrete pad, and a three-bedroom house. The asking price is \$160,000. Contact: Nikki Tabb, nicki.tabb@gmail.com.

◆ Helen Davis has for rent farmland in **western Wisconsin's Trempealeau County**. The land has not been sprayed for 20 years and it includes prairie, grassland, woodland and wetland habitat. There are various opportunities for sustainable farming methods to be used on the land. The total number of acres available for rental, as well as the rental price, are negotiable. No house is available. Contact: Helen Davis, 507-454-6176, hdavis68@hotmail.com.

◆ Douglas Piltingsrud has available for rotational custom grazing 66.5 acres of pasture in **southeastern Minnesota, near Eyota**. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it has high tensile woven wire perimeter fence with a hot top wire. Water is piped to all paddocks with five wire separation fences. A grazing agreement involving rotational grazing services has been used. Grazing charges would be based on pounds of gain for feeder cattle. Contact: 507-272-9050, dougiltingsrud@gmail.com.

◆ Katie Felland has for sale 10 acres of farmland in **southern Minnesota's Steele County**. The land has not been sprayed for at least eight years and there is pasture, as well as a 2-acre, 150-tree apple orchard that's starting to produce. There are also 100+ raspberry plantings, bee hives, animal fencing, and working water hydrants in the orchard, by the barn and by the chicken coop. There is a recently updated four-bedroom house. Contact: Katie Felland, fellandfarm5@yahoo.com.

◆ Dan Sheild has 1 to 2 deer-fenced tillable acres in **Chisago County, near Minnesota's Twin Cities**. The land could be made available to a farmer in exchange for occasional labor and produce. Water and access to a pole barn can be negotiated; no house is available. Contact: Dan Sheild, 952-240-5066, dansheild@earthlink.net.

◆ Linda Stewart has for sale an organic (two years into certification) farm in **south-central Minnesota's Meeker County**. There are 83 acres with an option to purchase smaller acreage. There is 25 acres of tillable land with the remaining acres in unfenced

Clearinghouse, see page 23...

pasture, woods, wetlands, creek and ponds. The farm is located 55 miles west of the Twin Cities on the North Fork of the Crow River. The 1900s vintage restored house has been licensed as a bed and breakfast. A 100 x 33 pole barn has a 50 x 33 heated workshop. The original 50 x 30 dairy barn has a 30 x 30 heated and air conditioned event room, new roof, new wood siding, new windows and a 30 x 30 heated workshop/animal space (lower level). The asking price for the 83 acres is \$449,000—or \$399,000 for 40 acres with farmstead. Contact: Linda Stewart, 952-261-7495.

Seeking Farmland

◆ Adam Hinrichs is seeking a minimum of 20 acres of farmland to rent in *Minnesota*. Land with a barn and house is preferred. Contact: Adam Hinrichs, 651-410-3212.

◆ Jeremy McAdams is seeking to buy 2 acres of farmland in the *Twin Cities region (Minnesota or Wisconsin)*. Land with pasture, water, small barn and a house is preferable. Pine plantation land or alternately pasture/tillable would be ideal. Contact: Jeremy McAdams, 612-729-5472, cherrytreehousemushrooms@gmail.com.

◆ Sam Karns is seeking to buy or rent long-term 30+ acres of farmland in *western Wisconsin*, within a 30-mile radius of the Menomonie-Eau Claire area. A diverse landscape—pasture, woods, tillable—is preferred, along with basic infrastructure such as electricity and a septic system. Outbuilding and a house are optional. Contact: Sam Karns, sam.karns@gmail.com, 612-817-1910.

◆ Jenny Allman is seeking to rent 5-10 acres of farmland in *east-central Minnesota's Isanti or Pine County*. Land with pasture, fencing, water, electric, an outbuilding and a house is preferred. Contact: Jenny Allman, 320-438-9155.

◆ Jinelle Markham is seeking to rent 5-10 acres of farmland in *south-central Minnesota*. Land with pasture is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Jinelle Markham, jinellemarkham@gmail.com.

◆ Mike is seeking to rent 5 acres of farmland in *northeastern Minnesota, near Duluth*. Land with pasture, water and road access is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Mike, Solomon621@msn.com.

◆ Joe is seeking to rent 30-50 acres of farmland in *northeastern Iowa's Winneshiek County*. Land with pasture is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Joe, 563-419-8651, joecas_1200@hotmail.com.

◆ Paul Huber is seeking to rent or buy 5-20 acres of tillable farmland *within a 30-mile radius of Fond du Lac, in eastern Wisconsin*. He and his wife have been farming for the past eight years and will be starting their third season running their own organic vegetable CSA in 2015 (www.sharedseasonsfarm.com). They have an established market in Fond du Lac and have outgrown their current land rental situation and need a larger space. They are looking to rent, although they may be interested in purchasing. Contact: Paul Huber, 920-251-5908, sharedseasonsfarm@gmail.com.

◆ Doug Van Tongeren is seeking to buy 10+ acres of tillable farmland in *Michigan*. He prefers land next to a farmer that will want to lease land; no house is required. Contact: Doug Van Tongeren, 248-990-1468, dvantongeren@email.com.

◆ Josh Hutson is seeking to buy 50-150 acres of farmland within a *50-mile radius of La Crosse, in southwestern Wisconsin*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years, and includes pasture, water, outbuildings and a house, is preferred. Hutson's goal is to raise organic, pasture-based livestock. Contact: Josh Hutson, 802-498-8837.

◆ Nicholas Fernholz is seeking to buy 1-10 acres of farmland in *western Wisconsin's Saint Croix or Pierce County*. A fixer-upper with outbuildings and a house is okay. Contact: Nicholas Fernholz, 612-850-5123.

◆ Clint is seeking to purchase 60+ acres of tillable farmland in *southern Minnesota's Rice or Steele County*. He is also willing to rent or lease farmland to expand his current small operation. No house is required. Contact: Clint, 507-213-9344.

Seeking Farmers

◆ Shodo Spring is seeking a farmer to join her 17-acre operation in *southeastern Minnesota's Rice County*. The farm is currently in transition to perennial woody polyculture. She is seeking someone who can implement permaculture design cooperatively, manage planting and care of perennials and annuals, supervise apprentices and volunteers, maintain records, and buy and maintain equipment. Pay is negotiable. Contact: Shodo Spring, 507-384-8541, shodo.spring@gmail.com.

◆ Avodah Farm is seeking a beginning farmer looking for experience setting up and starting a small, diversified vegetable and livestock operation during the 2015 growing season. Avodah is in *western Wisconsin's Pepin County*. Farmers who return for a second season could incubate at Avodah with access to the land and buildings needed to start their own farming enterprise. Housing is available and pay is \$500 per month, plus room, board and an opportunity to earn money through independent enterprises. Contact: Martha or Geoffrey Black, avodahfarm@gmail.com.

◆ Foxtail Farm has available a farm apprenticeship "incubator" situation for two people. Foxtail, which is located in *western Wisconsin's Polk County*, raises year-round vegetables for a winter CSA, stores 80,000 pounds in root cellars and processes produce in a licensed commercial kitchen. Housing is available and the pay is a combination of hourly pay, revenue from a local farmers' market and incubator farm resources. Contact: Chris Burkhouse, 715-417-2346, foxtailcsa@yahoo.com.

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 sustain-



able 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. An online version of the *Toolkit* is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmtransitionstoolkit; paper versions can be purchased by calling 800-909-6472. □

Farm Beginnings

Rich & Carol Radtke

Rising from the Ashes

Not long ago, Rich and Carol Radtke were on a bit of a roll. They had graduated from the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course and felt the program had provided them a solid basis for developing a profitable farming operation on land they and their three children moved to in 2008. Before taking the class, they had gotten the land, which they rent from a family trust, certified organic and had set up a rotational grazing system.

By early last year, they had a USDA beginning farmer loan and were in the midst of remodeling an old barn so it could serve as a milking parlor for a herd of cows they were ready to bring onto the farm. In short, they were closing in on their ultimate dream: operating a grass-based certified organic dairy.

But on March 4, 2014, disaster struck. That barn they were remodeling burned to the ground, taking with it thousands of dollars worth of equipment, as well as the money the family had invested in remodeling it. To make things worse, they later discovered the barn wasn't insured. It appeared

the family's farming dreams had gone up in smoke.

"We thought, 'We're headed to town—this whole thing is over,'" recalls Rich.

A little over a year after that fateful fire, the Radtkes, while not exactly on a roll, are also not headed to town. In fact, they are back on track toward their ultimate goal of making a living on the land while helping feed people healthy food. One morning in early February, Carol and Rich took a break after the morning milking to reflect on the fact that just a few days prior they had shipped their first load of milk to the Organic Valley Cooperative.

"We're selling our milk and people are eating cheese and butter made from our milk," says Rich while sitting in his living room, a new milking parlor visible through a picture window. As he says this, it's clear he's barely able to hide his amazement, given where the family was at a year ago.

The Radtkes rose from the ashes through a combination of innovative fundraising, creativity, hard work and plain old grit. But the couple maintains that the glue holding

Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming



this comeback effort together is the people outside the operation who believe in the idea that having more family farmers on the land is good for the community.

Milk Fever

When they first moved to the 159-acre farm in western Minnesota's Kandiyohi County, the Radtkes literally had to start building the operation from the ground up. Rich was born on the farm and spent his younger years there, but by 2008 the former dairy and crop operation had not been a home for people in quite some time. It had been rented out for cropping and years of intensive tillage had taken a toll on the thin, sandy soil, which is highly erosive; even the pastureland was in poor shape, overgrown with weeds and invasives.

While living in Raymond, Minn., the Radtkes had grown a big garden and raised chickens and turkeys while pursuing various lines of work. Rich has done web design, worked as a disc jockey at a radio station, sold used city buses on eBay and run a small parking lot painting company. Carol, who has a nursing degree, has worked in home health care. But their small experiment growing their own food gave them the farming bug, although Rich was certain he was immune to one strain of the contagion.

"Kids from dairy farms either stay on the dairy farm or run like hell," says Rich. "I ran like hell."

But the Radtkes realized they needed to bring livestock onto the farm both for the soil disturbance and the manure-activated biological activity needed to improve it to the point where it would provide a sustainable living. They obtained USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding to put in fencing for a rotational grazing system on 65 acres and began using goats and a neighbor's beef herd to clear out the weeds. In recent years they've improved the pastures to the point where they were able to add a month to the grazing season and more than triple the number of animal units that run on each acre. In 2011, the land became certified organic.

By the time they had taken LSP's Farm Beginnings course in Hutchinson, Minn., during the winter of 2011-2012, the couple



Carol and Rich Radtke were able to build a new, low-cost milking parlor utilizing mostly funds generated by an on-line campaign and help from local businesses and individuals. "A community helped us build our barn and achieve our dream here," says Carol. (LSP Photo)

Fresh Faces, see page 25...

was convinced that the class would serve as simply a way to fine-tune their farming goals and they'd be off and running upon graduation.

"We thought it was going to be a ready-made, this-is-easy kind of class," says Rich. "It turns out it is anything but a helping hand. You've got to work. You can't start a business without a plan."

During the class, established farmers and other agricultural professionals from the region presented on how to set financial, environmental and quality of life goals and develop business and marketing plans that would help reach them.

The Radtkes particularly like the holistic planning aspect of Farm Beginnings, which requires participants to constantly reevaluate whether particular decisions will keep the farm on track toward reaching overall, pre-determined goals.

"Without that you're just aimlessly going out there and making decisions, hoping you'll get the outcome you need," says Rich.

Carol says it was critical to take the class together—they shared a common goal of making a living on the farm, but differed slightly on the best way to attain that.

"Farm Beginnings helped us narrow down what enterprises were a good fit for our goals," she says.

Through the discussion groups, presentations and homework, the Radtkes slowly came to a realization that surprised the couple, given Rich's earlier pronouncements of what was off-limits: the enterprise that made the most sense for improving the soil and providing a steady enough income for the family to stay on the farm was dairying.

Rich is 50 and Carol 48—they are well aware that getting into a physically demanding career like dairying at their age is not easy. "We're a little younger than the average dairy farmer," Rich says with a laugh.

All joking aside, the couple has approached this enterprise with one eye on how to make it pay and another on how to do it in a way that it doesn't exact a heavy price on their bodies. Farm Beginnings helped them research the organic dairy market, which has avoided the wild price swings of its conventional counterpart in

recent years, and Kent Solberg of the Sustainable Farming Association's Minnesota Dairy Initiative took them on tours of dairies of various sizes which have found ways to reduce the labor involved with managing and milking cows.

Resiliency & Recovery

Given all that careful planning and hard work, the 2014 barn fire came as a particularly tough blow. But after the initial shock, the resilient Radtkes bounced back.

Some friends suggested they try an online fund-raising campaign. Rich, who administers a raw milk Facebook page, got the word out about their situation via various social networks. Carol designed and sold t-shirts with sayings like, "I helped build a barn" on them. The response was overwhelming. Contributions began pouring in from around the region—even relatives from Sweden helped out. A local business owner donated tens of thousands of dollars to the cause because he wanted to see a sustainable dairy farm get started in the area.

"I was amazed at the amount of people that stepped up and said, 'Hey, we want to help you. You guys are really trying to do something important,'" says Carol.

Within a few months they had raised enough money to build a small parlor. The Radtkes estimate that of the \$61,000 it cost to build the structure, over 80 percent was

LSP's 2015-2016 Farm Beginnings Course

The Land Stewardship Project is now accepting applications for its 2015-2016 Farm Beginnings course. The early bird discount deadline is Aug. 1. See page 32 for details.

covered by in-kind and cash donations.

"The main thing they gave us was hope," says Rich of this community of supporters.

It's also given hope to the next generation. Launching the Prairies Edge Organic Family Farm dairy has gotten Carol and Rich's 16-year-old daughter, Madison, excited about pursuing a career in farming. She's involved in 4-H and FFA and has talked about eventually starting a goat dairy on the farm after she graduates from high school in 2016.

When they designed their new milking parlor, they did so not only with cost in mind, but also ease of operation—after all, they didn't get any younger during the year they had their dairy farming dream deferred. The parlor, which is housed in a modest 32 x 48 steel building, is based on a low-cost pit design out of Iowa State University that boasts a 2:1 labor efficiency over a stall barn

Farm Beginnings Profiles

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

in typical situations. So far, it's lived up to its billing on the Radtke farm—one person can milk 21 cows in less than 35 minutes.

On a wintry morning, the couple shows off their own small modifications that make the parlor even more labor efficient. Rich hits a garage door remote that slides the cow exit door back and forth. "That makes a two-person job a one-person job," he says as a blast of February air knives in. They wanted the parlor to be small and efficient enough that one person could manage it, but also flexible enough to accommodate more cows per hour as they grow.

"Our business plan is to pay it off," says Rich of the parlor, adding that for bigger dairies in the neighborhood that have recently built multi-million dollar confinement facilities, "Their business plan is to stay ahead of the payments."

Adhering to their holistic planning strategy, the Radtkes don't buy any equipment unless it contributes directly to their ultimate goal. Their implement line consists of an old 1850 Oliver tractor and a skid steer loader, and they hire their haymaking done. "We hay three times a year and it's a half million dollars of equipment here and gone in less than 24 hours," says Rich. Last year the custom haying service cost approximately \$3,000; this year, it will be considerably more, as they have added more hay acres.

The Radtkes have a lot of work to do before the farm evolves into a consistently profitable enterprise. They want to eventually milk at least 35 cows, which is what their land base can handle. Rich substitute milks for a neighboring dairy and Carol provides home care for their 29-year-old handicapped daughter, Chastiti' (they also have a 25-year-old son, Austin).

Their hope is not only to succeed enough to stay on the farm and support the family, but to prove to all the people who believe in them that such confidence is well placed.

"We couldn't have done it without the connections we made, the Farm Beginnings training and people saying, 'You know, it's not over yet. Just hang in there,'" says Rich. "This is one way a community let a family stay on the farm and now we can build something from it." □

The Radtkes welcome inquiries about starting a dairy and are willing to host barn tours. They can be contacted at www.prairiesedgefarms.com or 320-599-4142.

Give it a Listen

In episode 163 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Rich and Carol Radtke discuss how Farm Beginnings guided them in making their farming plans, and how they bounced back from their disastrous barn fire: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/692.

Heritage Wheat's Modern Story

Marita Bujold

From Iraq to Turkey via Ukraine, Scotland, Ontario and southern Minnesota to our table—the bread we eat has roots (literally) half a world away in the ancient world's Fertile Crescent where communities first domesticated wheat, barley, lentils and other grains thousands of years ago.

Last summer, I and the other members of the Food Justice Committee of St. Frances Cabrini Church in Minneapolis began our own journey by mapping a plan to find sources for heritage varieties of wheat, bake bread, and share what we learned. By September, we had arranged to purchase 100 pounds of Red Fife wheat berries from the Good Earth Farm and Mill in Good Thunder, Minn. We also purchased two mills—one electric and one hand-cranked—to supply flour to the community for baking bread.

Brought to Ontario by immigrant farmers in the 19th century, Red Fife wheat adapted well to the soils and climate of many regions of North America, providing a reliable, nutritious source of flour produced and milled locally for decades. With changes in public policy and investments of public money, heritage varieties were replaced by modern hybrids, beginning in the 1940s. Today, a handful of farmers are reviving the cultivation of ancient grains for their many desirable qualities, including their resistance to drought conditions.

We chose the story of this ancient grain to engage our community because it offered a familiar food (bread) and a lens through which to examine the larger picture of our global food economy and the implications for local communities.

The story resonated with our community, and milling flour and baking bread has forged new connections among members. We introduced our project with Heritage Wheat Sunday in November, recruiting bakers from the community to provide a selection of breads for hospitality after the morning service. We set up the hand mill to give the kids a chance to try milling flour. After trying the bread, community members who bake bread at home inquired about buying the flour. In response, we arranged to make a bulk purchase of 200 pounds of Red Fife flour for resale in five-pound quantities. We invited bakers to contribute to our second Heritage Wheat Sunday in February.

Each time we share heritage wheat bread offers an opportunity to engage the community in dialogue about our food system.

Heritage Versus Modern

Researching heritage varieties revealed not only the story of wheat, but the history of food over a period spanning 10,000 years. Heritage varieties are part of an extraordinary legacy of grains and seeds adapted to local conditions and climate by communities inhabiting every conceivable landscape. With deep root systems, the ancient varieties provided stability during heavy rainfall and captured water sources and nutrients



Pictured with some of the heritage wheat flour they work with: Connie Bowen, Ruth Olson, Marita Bujold and Sue Eschenbacher. (Photo courtesy of St. Frances Cabrini Church)

well below the soil's surface during times of drought. Communities managed fields by planting several complex, complementary varieties together. This practice increased yields and contributed to overall diversity. Each variety features distinct flavors, textures and colors. Stored in the right conditions, wheat berries can last many years. Once milled, the flour must be kept cool.

Modern hybrids, on the other hand, were bred for uniformity, industrial-scale production, cultivation with chemical fertilizers, ease of harvest with large machines and transportation over long distances. Often flour milled from hybrid wheat contains added ingredients to increase shelf life.

Another distinction has recently caught the attention of the public. Both modern and heritage varieties contain glutes, but as concerns about gluten intolerance has emerged in recent years, so have reports of people who find that they are able to digest

the glutes contained in heritage varieties.

Currently, farmers cultivating heritage grains/wheat do not receive the subsidies granted to large-scale producers of modern wheat. Flour milled from heritage wheat is not widely available and the cost is considerably higher than the taxpayer-subsidized flour generally marketed in stores.

The history of heritage wheat reveals a pattern common in the history of food: communities organized food economies adapted to climate conditions and local ecosystems. This co-evolution of seeds and communities generated a wealth of knowledge and the diversity essential to sustain life. The combination of diverse sources of seeds, local ecological knowledge and practices designed to protect natural systems served as an insurance policy against climate uncertainty. Today, seed banks contain samples of the collected legacy of 10,000 years of small-scale, agricultural communities — nearly two million seed varieties.

History shows that fishing communities and pastoralists operating by the same principles protected diverse sources of animal species.

In the last century, this pattern of climate-adapted, localized food economies was disrupted. A new chapter in our food story emerged as an industrial approach to production reshaped the landscape, economic norms and the food system. This latest chapter was not inevitable.

Leaders chose to advance this approach, granting the industry an economic “right of way” with a powerful combination of public money and public policy paired with trade agreements and seed laws written to create a market for the industry's products. Today, that “right of way” continues to fuel the success of the industry and the food chain it serves with opportunities for expansion to locations across the globe. Such expansion comes at a cost.

As the industry expands, the foundation for a climate-adapted food economy erodes—a foundation comprised of biological diversity, healthy ecosystems and small-scale communities organized to cultivate food wisely.

Our community plans to continue to bake bread, but we also plan to pose this challenge: Where is the economic “right of way” we need to shape local food systems that will sustain communities and the earth's vital ecosystems? □

Land Stewardship Project member Marita Bujold is a member of the Food Justice Committee at St. Frances Cabrini Church. The committee can be contacted at foodjustice@cabrinimn.org.



Expenses by Operational Area

Policy & Organizing	26%	\$724,488
Food Systems	29%	\$795,775
Farm Beginnings	21%	\$588,706
Farm Legacy Initiative	<1%	\$5,883
Membership/Outreach	7%	\$186,105
Communications	2%	\$62,720
Other	<1%	\$4,610
Management & General	8%	\$216,251
Fundraising	6%	\$155,736
Total	100%	\$2,740,274

Temporarily Restricted & Unrestricted Operating Revenues

Religious Grants	3%	\$105,000
Foundations & Corporations, Including Released from Restriction	55%	\$1,756,396
Government Grants	20%	\$646,105
Membership & Contributions	15%	\$474,412
Fees & Sales	5%	\$176,320
Other	1%	\$38,758
Unrealized Investment Gains (Losses)	1%	\$19,330
Total	100%	\$3,216,321

Statement of Financial Position (As of June 30, 2014)

Assets

Cash & Investments.....	\$942,399
Board Restricted Long-Term Reserve.....	\$489,650
Property & Equipment.....	\$890,384
Grants, Contracts & Pledges Receivable.....	\$857,500
Inventory.....	\$3,031
Account Receivable.....	\$287,413
Other.....	\$54,429
Total Assets.....	\$3,524,806

Liabilities & Net Assets

Total Liabilities.....	\$681,727
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Net Assets:

Unrestricted.....	\$854,652
Board-Controlled Long-Term & Short-Term Reserves.....	\$489,650
Temporarily Restricted Grants for Future Fiscal Years.....	\$1,498,777

Total Liabilities & Net Assets.....	\$3,524,806
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- From audited statements based on generally accepted accounting principles for nonprofits, which book temporarily restricted net assets raised for future use in the year granted.

- Unrestricted operating revenue includes income from matched individual saving accounts for qualified beginning farmers, that will be spent in future years: \$86,245.

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

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

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



A Bigger Prize

Why Competition Isn't Everything
& How We Do Better

• • •

Willful Blindness

Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Peril

By Margaret Heffernan

A Bigger Prize: 2014, 448 pages

Willful Blindness: 2011, 304 pages

www.mheffernan.com

Reviewed by Julia Ahlers Ness

Author and international business leader Margaret Heffernan cannot write a book without a happy ending. Heffernan is not a fiction writer. Instead, she delves bravely into the gnarly territory of human behavior and the wide-ranging, interconnected ripple effects when that behavior goes unexamined or unchecked.

That she cannot write a book without hopeful examples and antidotes to the tough problems she tackles enables me to highly recommend Heffernan's most recent books. *Willful Blindness: Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Peril* examines the common human tendency to ignore that which makes us uncomfortable and the breadth of harm that choosing not to see — or to not speak up when we do see — causes. Its sequel, *A Bigger Prize: Why Competition Isn't Everything & How We Do Better*, dares to challenge deeply embedded, cross-cultural beliefs about competition and external rewards as prime human motivators.

After devouring both books, I am convinced that Heffernan's analysis of both issues offers much insight into the challenges facing agriculture. Even more, I am certain that her antidotes to willful blindness and her illustrations of the virtues of collaboration over competition can richly guide the work of re-visioning and re-creating agriculture as an ecologically enhancing and socially and economically just human endeavor.

In *Willful Blindness*, Heffernan argues that, "...the biggest threats and dangers we face are the ones we don't see — not be-

cause they're secret or invisible, but because we're willfully blind." She examines "willful blindness" in the Catholic Church, Nazi Germany, Bernard Madoff's investors, BP's safety record, the military in Afghanistan and the "dog-eat-dog" world of subprime mortgage lenders. Heffernan describes how easy it is to succumb to willful blindness in our private and working lives and provides commonsense mechanisms, structures and strategies to counter and mitigate for it.

In *A Bigger Prize* Heffernan shows how competition and the pursuit of external rewards bring their own form of willful blindness. "We expect them to identify the best, make complicated decisions easy and to motivate the lazy and inspire the dreamers," writes Heffernan. In reality, competition and external rewards regularly produce what we don't want: rising levels of fraud, cheating, stress, inequality, political stalemate and profound waste. Using examples from around the globe and multiple life arenas, Heffernan builds a strong case for internally motivated collaboration, showing how "the future belongs to the people and companies who have learned that they are greater working together than against one another."

To briefly demonstrate the applicability of Heffernan's work to agriculture, I want to spotlight an issue that no physically sighted person in western Minnesota could have missed during and since the ground blizzard in my community on January 8.

Since moving to western Minnesota in 2009, I am dismayed annually by the amount of "snirt" — snow dirtied by topsoil displaced by wind erosion across tilled, unprotected crop fields — that mars this former prairie landscape (see page 5). A common response to my dismay is, "Oh, that's just normal for around here." It's too often said with a tone of, "There's not much we can do about it." I also hear the "explanation" that farmers have to till the heavy soils of western Minnesota in the fall to be able to get the crop planted in time come spring.

That snirt is viewed as an inevitability shows us that even as a problem slaps us in the face, we can still remain blind to its real causes, costs and possible solutions. And, when status quo beliefs and practices go unexamined and the voices of dissent are dismissed, where is the motivation for individual farmers and landowners or the larger community to figure out how

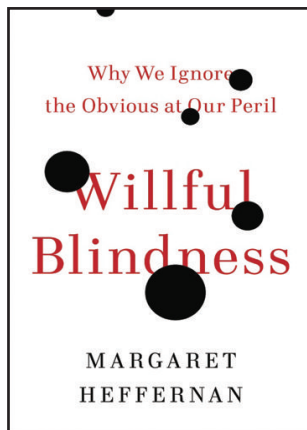
crops can be grown with a greater level of environmental, economic and social sustainability?

Snirt is nothing more and nothing less than a clear indicator of an agricultural system deeply flawed and failing in both vision and practice. But I know for certain that snirt is far from inevitable in row crop farm country. And if Heffernan were seeking a hopeful story related to agriculture, I would point her to North Dakota's Burleigh County, where an extraordinary team of farmers, scientists and soil conservation experts chose to no longer remain willfully blind to a degraded soil resource.

Members of the Burleigh County Soil Health Team, which you have read much about in the *Land Stewardship Letter*, chose instead to exercise their personal power and freedom to find a better way than the Band-Aid approach typical of many conservation efforts. Most importantly and instructively, they embarked on the soil health path from a place of *internal motivation*, from a deep conviction that there had to be a better way to farm, a way that advanced the overall health of the soil resource, which is after all the very foundation of any individual farm and, indeed, of the whole of human civilization.

Creating the conditions that cultivate and support internally motivated behavior within people and organizations is a dominant theme in *A Bigger Prize*. A large body of psychological research with a 40-year track record of rigorous substantiation supports this theme: offering motivators such as monetary payments or fines, prizes, privileges and other external rewards to promote ethical behavior nearly always *irreparably* thwarts the internal motivators that actually drive and sustain a higher level of behavior, motivators such as love of learning, responsibility to family and community, a sense of fairness or personal integrity. External motivators and controls are also proven "killers" of creativity and collaboration within classrooms and organizations.

Consider the implications of this research as applied to common strategies used to get farmers and farmland owners to adopt conservation or stewardship practices. Is paying farmers or landowners to do good or fining them when they cause harm really resulting in a strong and lasting high level of stewardship? Or have we actually created the conditions, as seen during the recent period of high commodity prices, where stewardship and community values are easily set aside and conservation dollars cannot compete



Heffernan, see page 29...

when greater market rewards are available? Perhaps we should question the wisdom of an approach proven to fuel community-destroying competition, promote gaming the system and quell collaboration and creative problem solving.

Here again the Burleigh County Soil Health Team practiced exactly what Heffernan preaches. They chose to support their internally motivated path by deliberately

Mysteries of the Driftless

By Dan Bertalan & Rob Nelson
2013; 27 minutes

[www.untamedscience.com/
mysteries-driftless-zone](http://www.untamedscience.com/mysteries-driftless-zone)

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

Mysteries of the Driftless is an excellent short film describing the ecology, as well as human and natural history of the unglaciated region known as the Driftless bluffs of the Upper Mississippi River Valley. The film describes in great detail the formation and development of this unique region that

The American Way of Eating

Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields and the Dinner Table

By Tracie McMillan
2012; 319 pages

www.traciemcmillan.com/books

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

The American Way of Eating is an account of the food system of the United States from farm fields to big box grocery stores and restaurants. Award winning journalist Tracie McMillan went undercover to work in each of these settings so she could get a better feel for the lives of the workers who provide us with our food. She describes the working conditions of migrant farm workers in California, Walmart employees in Michigan and restaurant workers at an Applebee's in New York. She describes a world of low pay, difficult hours, exploitation and abusive employers.

The book begins at the source of our food: the farms of America, specifically the

creating a collaborative atmosphere in which it was safe to question, to fail, to explore "crazy ideas" and to argue and debate. I've visited Burleigh County and seen firsthand how this innovative, thinking group of farmers and natural resource personnel have learned, persevered and succeeded, despite all the naysayers.

From my involvement with sustainable agriculture and Holistic Management these past 30 years, I am convinced more than ever that agriculture can be a positive ecological, economic and social activity on

spans four states—from the southeastern suburbs of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-Saint Paul to just north of the Iowa-Illinois Quad Cities. Through the use of aerial photography, bluffside shots taken from kayaks, photos of caves and underwater footage of trout streams, directors Rob Nelson (a biologist) and Dan Bertalan (a geologist) explain the environmental sensitivity and historical significance of this region, including unique regional features such as goat prairies and the extensive underground system of waterways that lie just beneath this unique ecosystem.

Appreciating this ecological gem is more important than ever, what with it being threatened by frac sand mining

vegetable plots of California and the lives of the migrant workers who toil in these fields. The author explains that this type of work requires those who pick the crops to move from one farm to another to find work, work that is often influenced by the whims of weather and crop conditions. It is also a world where workers are frequently cheated out of their pay, find themselves vulnerable due to language, immigration status and over-crowded housing, the very issues that groups like the Land Stewardship Project and Centro Campesino have been trying to address in Minnesota for several years.

In spite of all these problems and issues, the author acknowledges that these migrants are able to form little communities and support networks that enable them to find work, transportation and housing. One such community welcomed McMillan and helped her learn the skills needed to work in the difficult conditions of California's farm fields.

McMillan then describes the working conditions she encountered in a Walmart store in her home state of Michigan. She helps the reader visualize a world dominated by a large food distribution system, with

this planet.

Humanity can rise to this challenge, but we need to willfully take off our blinders, find what deeply motivates us and consciously choose collaboration over competition. Heffernan's books show us how to make great strides in this direction. □

Former Land Stewardship Project staff member Julia Ahlers Ness is a writer and educator who lives in rural western Minnesota.

and other unsustainable development. As ecologist Abbie Church explains, once a property in the Driftless is mined or paved, it can't be returned to its original state. She doesn't want to look back 20 years from now and say to herself, "I could have done something" when it comes to development that threatens the Driftless region. She'd rather look back and say, "I did do something." □

Frequent Land Stewardship Project volunteer Dale Hadler lives in the heart of the Driftless region. To purchase the film, contact the Mississippi Valley Conservancy at www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org or 608-784-3606, ext. 3.

managers who frequently have little or no experience in food science or management, where once again workers are poorly paid, discouraged from socializing with each other and where the food is oftentimes wasted or improperly handled. It's not a very attractive image for those of us who frequent big box grocers and an image that should be of concern to anyone seeking a food system that is just for farmers, workers and consumers.

The author then moves on to an Applebee's in New York City, where she learns the processes of working in a restaurant, including kitchen maintenance and food preparation. It's a setting that is probably not as exploitative as the farm fields of California and the aisles of a Michigan Walmart, but still a world of low pay, poor hours and sadly, sexual assault. Such a system is unsustainable from the bottom up.

"So far as I can tell, changing what's on our plates simply isn't feasible without changing far more," writes McMillan. "Wages, health care, work hours and kitchen literacy are just as critical to changing our diets as the agriculture we practice or the places at which we shop." □



Zero Waste & LSP

By Amelia Shoptaugh

The Land Stewardship Project has been selected to receive a Business Recycling Grant from Hennepin County to help us improve the recycling and waste systems in our Minneapolis office. The goal of this project is to create a more comprehensive system for achieving nearly zero-waste within a year.

To reach our goal, we are introducing composting to the Minneapolis office by partnering with Eureka Recycling. Eureka Recycling is a nonprofit organization focusing on reuse, recycling, composting, waste reduction, producer responsibility and more.

We have given all employees a clearly labeled desk-side recycling bin and have replaced individual desk trash cans with larger trash, compost and recycling bins in the main areas where trash and compost will

be collected.

This is meant to encourage recycling by making it easy. This system will also increase awareness of how much and what is being thrown away by requiring employees to seek out a main trash can. This has been a joint effort by myself and Megan Smith from LSP's Individual Giving Program. This project also includes the other tenants in LSP's building: Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association and Full Cycle.



In our Twin Cities office, LSP has clearly labeled desk-side recycling bins, and has replaced individual desk trash cans with larger trash, compost, and recycling bins in the main areas. (LSP Photo)

This zero waste initiative program is just getting started and we are excited to see how far we can take it. Watch for an update toward the end of the year on how the project is going. ☐

Amelia Shoptaugh is LSP's operations manager and manager of its Twin Cities office. Contact her at 612-722-6377 or amelias@landstewardshipproject.org.



LAND
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Membership Update

M2M: A Formula for Growing LSP

By Mike McMahon

One of the strategic initiatives identified in the Long Range Plan the Land Stewardship Project developed in 2014 (www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/history) is growing LSP's power to make the change we seek. As part of advancing this initiative, more than 30 LSP members participated in a new effort last spring — a member-to-member membership drive, or M2M. This inaugural drive generated more than 100 new memberships.

Many of the people who joined had little contact with LSP before they were asked to become members. But even without a long relationship with the organization, people did join. They joined LSP for two primary reasons: 1) they believe in the work that LSP does for family farms, rural communities and the land and 2) they were asked to join by someone they know.

People get asked to join LSP in lots of different ways. Sometimes they are asked in a letter that comes from an LSP staff person, or they might be recruited to join by a volunteer through a telephone bank. Just as importantly, they might pay their membership dues for the first time

after listening to another member make a pitch to join at an organizing meeting, field day or presentation.

All of these are important ways that people become members. But probably the

M2M, see page 31...



LSP sees member-to-member membership drives as key ways to grow the power needed to make the change we seek. (LSP Photo)

most powerful and persuasive way people are convinced to join LSP is when they are asked by someone they know personally.

That's why LSP is going to run a M2M membership drive again this spring. I'm grateful to the members who participated last year and I hope some of you will join in the effort again, but we also are looking for new members to take part.

Later this spring, the drive will bring members together to set goals, get training, grow LSP's membership and celebrate our accomplishments at the end of the drive. Planning and preparation for the drive are taking place now and there will be more information available in the coming months.

In the meantime, If you've got questions about the drive or how to ask one or two people you know to become LSP members, please give me or a member of LSP's membership team a call. We'd appreciate the opportunity to talk.

And if you just can't wait to ask someone to join, share with them the envelope in the center of this *Land Stewardship Letter*. They can simply send it in with their dues and become members right away. □

Mike McMahon, LSP's Individual Giving Program director, can be reached at mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.

Help With the M2M Membership Drive

For more information or to sign up for the Spring 2015 Land Stewardship Project M2M membership drive, contact LSP's Shelly Connor at: sconnor@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.

In Memory & in Honor...

LSP is grateful to have received the following gifts made to honor or remember loved ones, friends or special events:

In Memory of Jack Bouska

◆ Carol Bouska & Jeremy Iggers

In Memory of Violette Lecher

◆ Cherie Hales

In Memory of Walter William Burmester

◆ Joyce Burmester

In Memory of Chuck Fred

◆ Jenny Fortman & John O'Malley

In Memory of Lois Swenson

◆ John Dregni & Merideth Sommers

In Memory of Ivan & Lillian Stade

◆ Ian Stade

In Memory of Erwin Schultz

◆ Carolyn McDonnell

In Memory of Henry & Violette Lacher

◆ Kelley O'Neill & Cindy Wolf

In Memory of Robert Perry Jr.

◆ Jan Perry

In Memory of Paul Wellstone

◆ Mary Todd Maitland

For details on donating to LSP in the name of someone, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org. Donations can be made online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate.

In Memory of Dean Ernst

◆ Gift membership to Mike Stensland from Judy Ernst

In Memory of Dad

◆ Rose & Frank Fondell

In Memory of Myra Briest

◆ Vicki & Keith Poier

In Memory of Dad

◆ Melonie Rieck

In Memory of Lowell Haugen

◆ Keith & Vicki Poier

In Memory of Mark & Katie McManus

◆ Richard and Marjorie McManus

In Honor of Amy Wash

◆ Lois Berkart

In Honor of Anne Sawyer-Aitch

◆ Judith DeLaittre

In Honor of John Wahlin

◆ Mary Elise Miller

In Honor of Bill & Lorraine Delehanty

◆ Ann Delehanty

Give a Gift LSP Membership

Know someone who would enjoy becoming a member of the Land Stewardship Project? Give them a gift LSP membership. We can send a special card describing the gift, along with a new member packet. For details, call 612-722-6377 or see www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate. □

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 details, contact LSP's Mike McMahon (mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org) or Abby Liesch (aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org) at 612-722-6377.





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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

- **APRIL 22—Red Stag Supperclub Earth Day Benefit Breakfast for LSP**, 7 a.m.-11 a.m., Red Stag, 509 1st Ave. NE, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: Dylan Kesti, LSP, 612-722-6377, dylank@landstewardshipproject.org.
- **APRIL 26—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day: Greenhouse Management for Beginning Vegetable Growers**, 2 p.m.-4 p.m., Prairie Drifter Farm, Litchfield, Minn. Contact: Dori Eder, LSP, dori@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-578-4497
- **JUNE 17-19—Midwest Farm Energy Conference**, WCROC, Morris, Minn. Contact: Michael Reese, 320-589-1711, reesem@morris.umn.edu; <http://z.umn.edu/mfec2015>
- **JUNE 28—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day: Integrating Livestock with Organic Perennial Fruit Production**, 1 p.m.-4 p.m., Hoch Orchard, La Crescent, Minn. Contact: Dori Eder, LSP, dori@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-578-4497
- **JULY 10-11—Simon Lake BioBlitz**, Pope County, Minn. Contact: Robin Moore, LSP, 320-269-2105, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org
- **JULY 12—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day: Cut Flowers for Market Growers**, 2 p.m.-4 p.m., Humble Pie Farm, Northfield, Minn., Contact: Dori Eder, LSP, dori@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-578-4497
- **AUG. 1—Early Bird Discount Deadline for LSP's 2015-2016 Farm Beginnings Course** (see sidebar on this page)
- **AUG. 16—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day: Multi-Species Livestock Farming**, 12:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m., Together Farms, Mondovi, Wis. Contact: Dori Eder, LSP, dori@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-578-4497
- **SUMMER—LSP Summer Celebrations in southeastern Minnesota & the Twin Cities** (dates to be determined)

LSP's Farm Beginnings Accepting 2015-2016 Applications

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course is accepting applications for its 2015-2016 class session. The early bird discount application deadline is Aug. 1; the final application deadline is Sept. 1.

There will be two classes—one in Amery (western Wisconsin) and one in the Glenwood-Starbuck area of west-central Minnesota. In 2015, LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its 18th 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 2016, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 700 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.

The Farm Beginnings class fee is \$1,500, which covers one "farm unit"—either one farmer or two farming partners who are on the same farm. A \$200 deposit is required with an application, and will be put towards the final fee. Payment plans are available, as well as a limited number of scholarships.

For application materials or more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org or call 507-523-3366.

Meet 2 Farm Beginnings Grads

The *Land Stewardship Letter's* latest "Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming" profile (page 24) features a pair of Farm Beginning graduates who bounced back from a devastating dairy barn fire.

- **SEPT. 1—Final Deadline for LSP's 2015-2016 Farm Beginnings Course** (see sidebar on this page)
- **SEPT. 27—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day: Tractor & Implement Maintenance**, Big River Farms, Marine on St. Croix, Minn. (Two Sessions—Beginner & Experienced: Tractor 101 for Beginners & Tractor Troubleshooting). Contact: Dori Eder, LSP, dori@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-578-4497

- **OCT. 1—Deadline for LSP's 2016 Journeyperson Program**. Contact: Richard Ness, LSP, 320-269-2105, rness@landstewardshipproject.org, www.landstewardshipproject.org

Check LSP's Upcoming Events at www.landstewardshipproject.org for the latest workshops, classes, field days and deadlines.