

# The Land Stewardship



LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

35 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

## Letter

Volume 35

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How ecological agrarians are changing the farming landscape (page 21).



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- Change From the Ground Up*—
  - Join a CSA Farm in 2017*—
  - Crafting ‘Our’ Farm Bill*—
  - Inside Story of a Frac Sand Ban Campaign*—
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  - Using Cover Crops & Grazing to Hit the Trifecta*—
  - The Poetry of Soil*—



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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# Change Comes from the Ground Up

By Mark Schultz

As the staff and member-leaders of the Land Stewardship Project conduct our organization's work for stewardship and justice on the land, the central concept that keeps arising is "change comes from the ground up." Whether the subject is farming practices, public policy or community vitality, thinking about positive change in this way is enormously helpful and a constant touchstone for LSP.

But what does the idea that "change comes from the ground up" actually mean for LSP? It means we must regularly engage in active listening and the kind of conversations that bring out our members' core values and the key issues they are concerned about. It also means joining forces, learning and taking action together, to harness the power of people and ideas for positive change.

One recent example of change from the ground up is LSP's growing work in soil health. For a few years now, farmers from across the region have led a grassroots education and promotion effort to show how authentically improving soil health can increase the life and the productivity of the soil, improve a farm's profitability, mend the land's ability to manage and clean water, and store carbon.

What's more, one key element of improving soil health—farming systems that integrate continuous living cover with crops and livestock—can work for farms large and small, and even serve as an entry point for beginning farmers. That's why LSP's Jan. 12 meeting in Elgin, Minn., drew 130 farmers, and similar meetings later in St. Charles, Minn., and Caledonia, Minn., were attended by almost 200 people combined—farmers see this as an exciting way to make their operations more resilient. And as farmers make changes on their own farms, they bring forward ideas for reducing some of the significant agriculture policy obstacles—like huge crop insurance subsidies—adoption of continuous living cover faces. These farmers have creative ideas for replacing bad policy with cost-effective, smart incentives, incentives that would increase the public good that comes from good farming.

Such thinking spills over into research and market development, too. If we need dramatically more cover on the land to build the soil's health and prevent run-off and erosion, then let's get the universities researching and developing new cover crops and forages (as well as markets for them)—which is exactly what the Forever Green initiative at the University of Minnesota is doing with crops like perennial wheat, or kernza.

The same dynamic can be seen across the span of LSP's work over the years. Consider the leadership of LSP members on our Federal Farm Policy Committee—they



**A "change comes from the ground up" strategy means LSP must regularly engage in active listening and the kind of conversations that bring out our members' core values and the key issues they are concerned about. (LSP Photo)**

were unsatisfied with the 1996 Farm Bill and thought LSP could win better farm policy for family farms and the care of the land. And they followed through, developing policy and building support for it, while helping lead the effort to win the passage of the Conservation Security Program (otherwise known as CSP—now the Conservation Stewardship Program) in the 2002 Farm Bill.

CSP is now the USDA's largest conservation program, and the core ideas of LSP's farmer-leaders are still evident in it: focus on supporting farmers to implement and maintain effective conservation systems on their working lands, and reward measurable positive outcomes rather than paying to fix problems. As LSP's staff and current Federal Farm Policy Committee members focus on developing a better food and farm policy in the next Farm Bill, we are emphasizing the

ideas that LSP members have been sharing with us in large and small meetings in recent months.

Likewise, our work in partnership with Hope Community in the Phillips Neighborhood of South Minneapolis springs from listening sessions held by Hope leaders and meetings engaging LSP members over the past five years. Now "The Rose," a 5,000-square-foot garden, is being worked by people living in the community. It is a source of nutrition, education and connection, rising from the soil amid the apartments and shops of the city.

While that was going on in South Minneapolis, the citizens of Winona County themselves rose up to protect the land and their communities from the oil and gas industry's attempt to strip-mine sand for hydrofracturing operations. County residents told LSP, "You must help us, we need LSP on this." After a 17-month campaign led by

LSP members, Winona County Commissioners did their job as responsible leaders of government. They listened to the people, and in November 2016 passed what the people wanted: the nation's first known countywide ban on frac sand mining and development.

As I write this, LSP is currently hip-deep, not in snow, but in the winter organizing season. From November through February, we've already held by my count 20 organizing meetings and winter workshops of various kinds, in which more than 900 members and supporters have participated. These gatherings have dug into a range of subjects: soil health, local control, universal affordable health-care, beginning farmers and U.S. farm policy, just to name a few. The gatherings have taken place in towns from

St. Charles to St. Leo, Lewiston to Lamber-ton, and from Starbuck to Rushford.

More such meetings and workshops in Minnesota and Wisconsin are planned for this spring—just call the offices in Lewiston, Montevideo or Minneapolis to find out what's going on, or check the calendar on page 32 of this *Land Stewardship Letter* and at [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org). Another way to learn about the latest LSP events and resources is to subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter, the *LIVE-WIRE*.

Why get involved? Because change comes from the ground up, and you can be a part of it. □

*LSP executive director Mark Schultz can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or [marks@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:marks@landstewardshipproject.org).*

# Myth Buster Box

## An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

### → Myth: Commodity Checkoff Programs are Accountable

#### → Fact:

It's the basis for any financial transaction: someone forks over money, and the party receiving that payment provides a product or service in return. And when the money is required by law to be handed over, the expectation is particularly high that the recipient of those funds will be forthcoming about how they are spent. In the case of the commodity checkoff system, when farmers sell, say, a hog or a bushel of soybeans, a certain percentage of that sale price goes to commodity boards overseen by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. The idea behind this exchange of money is that these "checkoff funds" can be used for promotion and research related to commodities.

You've seen the results of this in advertising: the "Got Milk?," "Beef—It's What's for Dinner" and "Pork. The Other White Meat" slogans were all funded through checkoff funds provided by farmers and importers. Checkoff funds have also been used to promote an industrialized corporate-style system of agriculture, a fact that rubs a lot of average sized family farmers the wrong way.

In the case of the hog industry, the number of family-sized, independent pork producers has plummeted since the checkoff was made the law of the land in 1985, while large-scale, corporate-controlled factory farming has all but taken over the business.

The amount of money produced for these commodity boards can be significant. There are 22 federally-mandated checkoffs, which collect roughly \$500 million annually from producers. In 2015, for example, hog producers paid 40 cents for every \$100 worth of pork they sold to the checkoff program, generating over \$75 million in revenue for the National Pork Board. Much of that money is handed over to "contractors" who are supposed to use it for research and promotion. These contractors, such as the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), can conduct lobbying, but they're not supposed to do it with checkoff funds. See how things can get fuzzy fast?

That's why farmers and watchdog groups have long demanded transparency

around the spending of checkoff dollars.

No wonder farmers would like to know more about how their checkoff money is being spent. But the last thing commodity group executives want is accountability. They showed that last spring when 14 commodity groups were successful in getting the House Appropriations Committee to exempt commodity research and promotion boards from obeying the provisions of Section 552 of 5 U.S.C. In plain English, these groups do not want to have to adhere to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act. Known as FOIA for short, this is one of the cornerstones of transparent governance, and has been used innumerable times to shine a light on how government programs are being run. FOIA requests, which can be made by anyone, have revealed everything from minor corruption to outright illegality.

It's worth noting that the letter which prompted the legislation was not signed by the checkoff programs themselves, such as the National Pork Board and the U.S. Potato Board, which, remember, are not supposed to engage in lobbying. Rather, commodity groups closely aligned with these boards, such as the NPPC, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, American Soybean Association, the National Milk Producers Federation, United Egg Producers and the National Potato Council, drafted the memo. It was yet another sign that little separates the commodity boards from commodity groups themselves. Perhaps that's because so many checkoff dollars are eventually funneled to these commodity groups, which are allowed to lobby and have successfully carried out campaigns to, among other things, kill legislation related to country of origin labeling and outlawing packer ownership of livestock—moves that benefit large processors and mega-producers, but not the run-of-the mill farmer (or consumer).

This move to exempt commodity research and promotion boards from FOIA was prompted by an embarrassing episode in 2015, when e-mails obtained under FOIA showed the American Egg Board had waged a campaign against an egg-free mayonnaise producer. The revelation led to the early retirement of the Egg Board's CEO, and has prompted the USDA to investigate the matter.

A Senate committee eventually rejected

the language to exempt commodity boards from FOIA, and in fact federal legislation has been introduced that would make them more transparent and unable to participate in anti-competitive activities. But the bottom line is this: what do these commodity boards, and their producer group partners, have to hide? Plenty, it turns out.

There have been several revelations over the years concerning the misuse of checkoff dollars. In some cases, these funds have been used to attack the very farmers who provide them. In 1997, agricultural journalist Alan Guebert revealed how the NPPC had hired a Washington, D.C., consulting firm to spy on "activist groups." One of those groups was the Land Stewardship Project, which, working with its farmer-members, has long been active in fighting factory farms and supporting family-sized livestock operations. It came to light this spying was part of an ongoing "monitoring" campaign funded by \$100,000 in checkoff funds, which is illegal.

More recently, FOIA documents prompted a lawsuit brought against the pork checkoff over the Pork Board's \$60 million purchase of the "Pork. The Other White Meat" slogan from the NPPC. Marketing experts have found the price to be vastly inflated, especially given that no other group was bidding for the slogan (which, by the way, was officially retired in 2011 and replaced with "Pork: Be Inspired"). Parke Wilde of Tufts University, who has studied checkoff programs extensively, says the FOIA documents show that basically the slogan's sale price was pumped up to, in effect, funnel checkoff money from an entity that cannot lobby (the Pork Board), to one that can (the NPPC). LSP ally Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, along with others, filed a lawsuit over the sale of the slogan.

Perhaps the most ironic, or, more accurately, hypocritical, aspect of this whole effort on the part of checkoff boards to escape public scrutiny is the main argument they are using to justify these mandatory collections of cash. They claim checkoffs are not involved in "government speech"

Myth Buster, see page 5...



since they are funded by producers, not the government. As it happens, in 2005 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the beef checkoff was in fact “government speech” and used that as an argument to continue the program, despite calls on the part of farmers to end it. LSP and its allies paid close attention to the beef checkoff case, because previous to that the organization had worked with other members of the Campaign for Family Farms to end the pork checkoff. The culmination of that campaign was a nationwide vote by hog farmers in 2000 to terminate the program—more than 30,000 farmers voted and they chose to end the program by 5 percentage points. That vote was later thrown out in early 2001 in a backroom deal between then-Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman and the NPPC.

This rejection of the vote began a series

of court cases. The Campaign for Family Farms and individual hog farmers, including LSP members Rich Smith and Jim Joens, argued in their lawsuit that the mandatory pork checkoff was unconstitutional because it infringes on hog producers’ right to free speech and association by forcing them to pay into a program that supports factory-style hog production and corporate control of the industry, and thus is detrimental to their interests.

Courts at the federal, district and circuit levels agreed with this argument. However, the Supreme Court’s decision on the beef checkoff trumped all those lower court arguments.

It turns out the commodity elite weren’t done suppressing freedom of expression and transparency in 2005—even if it required doing an about-face on their reasoning.

### →More Information

• The Food Politics website has extensive coverage of the issue related to attempts to sup-

press information on commodity checkoff programs. Go to [www.foodpolitics.com](http://www.foodpolitics.com) and search the term “checkoff.”

• Tufts University’s Parke Wilde regularly writes about checkoff programs at <http://usfoodpolicy.blogspot.com>.

• *Fortune Magazine* has provided extensive coverage of the legislation related to checkoffs: <http://fortune.com/2016/07/14/checkoff-program-reform-bill>.

• The April/May/June 2005 issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter* (page 14) describes the Supreme Court decision on the beef checkoff and its ramifications for the pork checkoff: <http://landstewardship-project.org/about/landstewardshipletter>.

• Other *Myth Busters* can be found at <http://landstewardshipproject.org/about/libraryresources/mythbusters>. For paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377 or [bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org).

## Voices from the Land

### Who Does the MPCA Serve?

Frederick Fredrickson

My family and I operate a dairy farm in Goodhue County’s Zumbrota Township in southeastern Minnesota. My father bought our farm in 1942, and I have lived on this land my whole life. My wife, my sister, my brother and I milk cows and raise corn, soybeans and alfalfa. We’re proud of the life we’ve built off the land, and we rely on the clean air and water in Zumbrota Township.

Last winter, I learned of plans to build a 4,700-hog factory farm with a 3.7-million-gallon liquid manure pit next door to our family farm. The proposers, the Kohlhofers, operate at least six other large facilities. Despite having all this, they want to devalue my property value and put my air and water at risk to get more. That’s wrong.

The factory farm would border my property on the north, bringing the stench of nearly 4,700 hogs to our doorstep. My family and I enjoy spending most of our days outside. I’m well-acquainted with the smell of manure, but the stench from an operation this large is different. Living next to millions of gallons of raw hog manure would ruin our lives. What’s more, the massive manure pit sits on land that is rated as highly susceptible to groundwater pollution because of our karst geology. The proposal threatens our

air, our water and our family business.

That’s why I was shocked when I learned that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s (MPCA) environmental review for this project missed my home in its maps and analysis. I’ve lived on this land my whole life, yet the MPCA failed to take my home into account in the assessment of this proposal.

But that’s not all. As I read more of the environmental review I saw that it was inaccurate and careless. In a situation where the MPCA should have been triple-checking information, basic details were clearly never fact-checked. Other critical information missing or wrong in the Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) includes:

- Four homes missing within one mile of the proposal. This basic information can be found through a simple Google search.
- Thirteen wells missing within one mile. We rely on our wells for our drinking water. Our family farm cannot survive without access to clean water.



Frederick Fredrickson brought a photo of his farm to the MPCA headquarters in January. (LSP Photo)

• Visible and well-known sinkholes missing from the karst evaluation. Sinkholes are common in our area and can form at any time. In fact, in 1992 the wastewater treatment lagoon in nearby Bellechester, Minn., collapsed due to a newly formed sinkhole, and wells were polluted. Imagine if, instead of treated wastewater, the lagoon was full of raw, liquid hog manure. The results would be disastrous.

• An inaccurate air quality report. This report got the numbers for hydrogen sulfide emissions wrong. Hydrogen sulfide is a poisonous gas with proven negative health impacts.

How can the MPCA expect the public to have confidence in a document that is so riddled with mistakes? The things we care about most—our homes, our wells, our water and our air—were neglected in this environmental review.

The MPCA has a responsibility to protect the environment and serve the people of Minnesota. So far, it seems to only be interested in issuing the factory farm permit as quickly as possible. □

*Frederick Fredrickson is one of a group of rural residents in Zumbrota Township who are expressing concerns about the proposed Kohlhofers factory farm. For more on this issue, see page 9.*



LAND  
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PROJECT

# LSP News

## Racial Justice, Food & Farming



Members of the Land Stewardship Project’s Racial Justice Cohort recently spent a day in training at the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) in Saint Paul, Minn. Here, HAFA executive director Pakou Hang (right) explains to the group the different foods available at the Hmong Village Shopping Center. For more on the Racial Justice Cohort, see page 16. (Photo by Mike Hazard/HAFA Farm)

## Everett Koenig: 1935-2016

Everett Koenig, one of the farmers who led the effort to establish one of the most successful beginning farmer training programs in the country, passed away on Dec. 16. He was 81.

Koenig, along with his wife Rosemary, raised crops and livestock near Elgin in southeastern Minnesota for many years.

Lifelong advocates of conservation and stewardship, the Koenigs were pioneers in utilizing managed rotational grazing to raise livestock and their farm was one of 25 that belonged to the Land Stewardship Project’s Stewardship Farming program in the 1980s. This was a groundbreaking initiative that promoted on-farm research and farmer-to-farmer education.

Everett was also part



Everett Koenig

of a group of farmers who two decades ago helped LSP develop a community-based beginning farmer training program called Farm Beginnings. Over the years the course has graduated several hundred beginning farmers and become a national model for community-based beginning farmer training and support.

The Koenigs’ daughter Lisa, along with her husband Eric Klein, were among the earliest graduates of the program. They now operate Hidden Stream farm on the Koenig land. In 2009, the Koenigs and Kleins hosted then-USDA Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan when she announced the launching of the national Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, which was modeled after Farm Beginnings.

For more on Farm Beginnings, see page 25. □

## Promoting ‘Our’ Farm Bill in D.C.



Land Stewardship Project members and staff traveled to Washington, D.C., in early February to talk to Congressional staffers about the need for a new Farm Bill that puts family farmers, the land and rural communities first. During a two-day period they visited nine Congressional offices representing Minnesota and Wisconsin. Pictured are (left to right): Wisconsin farmer Jody Lenz, Minnesota farmer and LSP organizer Tom Nuessmeier, Minnesota farmer Jon Jovaag, and LSP organizer Ben Anderson. See page 8 for more on LSP’s “Our Farm Bill” proposal.

## 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. Details are at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup). □

## Ear to the Ground Podcast

The Land Stewardship Project’s award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast features nearly 190 episodes focused on everything from beginning farmer issues and soil health, to policy and local food systems. Check them out at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast). □



# LSP Staff Changes

**Bobby King** has been named the Land Stewardship Project's new Policy and Organizing Program director. He succeeds Mark Schultz, who recently left the position to become LSP's executive director.

King joined LSP's staff as an organizer in 1999, and for the past decade has led work on state and local organizing and policy. During that time, LSP became a leader in, among other issue areas, advocating for local democracy and funding of sustainable agriculture research at the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

King can be reached at 612-722-6377 or [bkings@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bkings@landstewardshipproject.org).

**Julie Arnold** has joined LSP's Policy and Organizing staff. Arnold, who operates a Community Supported Agriculture farm with her family near Lindstrom, Minn., previously served as an LSP intern organizing the annual Family Farm Breakfast and Day at the Capitol. She recently joined LSP's State Policy Committee. In her new position, Arnold is coordinating rural organizing meetings related to issues LSP is working on during the 2017 Minnesota legislative session. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or [jarnold@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:jarnold@landstewardshipproject.org).

**Bryan Simon** has joined LSP's Community Based Food Systems team. Simon is a graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings and Journeyman courses, and he and his family raise grass-fed beef and pastured pork near Barrett, in west-central Minnesota (see page 21). He has a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Minnesota-Morris, and a master's degree in ecology from South

Dakota State University. Simon has worked for the Nature Conservancy and the Student Conservation Association.

At LSP, Simon is doing landowner outreach as part of the Chippewa 10% Project (see page 19), a joint initiative of LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project. He can be reached at [bsimon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bsimon@landstewardshipproject.org) or 320-492-2526.

**Sienna Nesser** recently served an internship with LSP's Policy and Organizing Program. Nesser has a bachelor's degree in environmental studies and studio art from the University of Minnesota-Morris, and has worked on numerous farms, including Moonstone in western Minnesota. In 2013, Nesser served an internship with LSP's Farm Beginnings Program. During her recent internship, she coordinated the 2017 Family Farm Breakfast and Day at the Capitol.

**Dylan Bradford-Kesti** has left LSP to become the managing director of organizing at Educators 4 Excellence. Kesti joined LSP's staff in 2013 as an organizer in the Community Based Food Systems Program. Since then, he's worked extensively on urban food and agriculture issues. Specifically, Bradford-Kesti helped advance LSP's partnership with Hope Community while organizing around food and farming justice issues related to the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board. He also helped launch urban soil health and "Good Food Purchasing Policy" initiatives.

**Andy Marcum** has stepped down as a landowner outreach specialist with the Chippewa 10% Project. Marcum, who recently moved out of state with

his family, spent the past four years working with farmers and other landowners who are seeking ways to establish more continuous living cover on the land in economically viable ways. During that time, the Chippewa 10% Project gained regional and national attention for its innovative grassroots efforts to improve soil health and water quality. □

## Allister Joins Federal Policy Committee

**Betsy Allister** has joined the Land Stewardship Project's Federal Policy Committee. She and her husband Andrew Ehrmann operate Spring Wind Farm, a 20-acre farm just outside of Northfield, Minn.



**Betsy Allister**

They raise vegetables and market primarily through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise, and also through local colleges and other wholesale accounts. Spring Wind recently hosted an LSP federal farm policy organizing meeting (see page 8). □

## Mosel & Tombers Join LSP Board

**Darrel Mosel** and **Kristin Tombers** recently joined the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors.

**Mosel** farms in west-central Minnesota's Sibley County, and has long been active in LSP's state and federal policy work. For the past few years he has been serving on the organization's Federal Policy Committee.

**Tombers** is the owner of Clancey's Meats & Seafood in Minneapolis, and has long supported local farmers producing meat and other products utilizing sustainable practices. She frequently speaks about the importance of local food systems in interviews with the media and while serving on discussion panels. □



**Darrel Mosel**



**Kristin Tombers**



**Bobby King**



**Sienna Nesser**



**Julie Arnold**



**Dylan Bradford Kesti**



**Bryan Simon**



**Andy Marcum**

# Our Farm Bill

## Reimagining Farm Policy that Puts People, Communities & the Land First

By Tom Nuessmeier & Ben Anderson

The energy has been incredible. Over the past two months the federal policy team at the Land Stewardship Project has been holding Farm Bill listening meetings in Minnesota to discuss the upcoming 2018 Farm Bill. The central question has been: “What would make the 2018 Farm Bill ‘Our’ Farm Bill?” In other words, what would a Farm Bill look like that favored family farms, rural communities and the land over the largest landowners and multi-national corporations?

From Wadena to Blooming Prairie, to St. Leo, Lamberton and Northfield, the answers have been remarkably similar. People urgently want a Farm Bill that sustains and grows rural life — not one that always favors the largest farming operations and works to consolidate control of the land in the hands of fewer farmers and land investment firms. People want family farms in step with the needs of our common good—strong communities, clean water, healthy soil and abundant wildlife. The hope is that more new farmers enter the profession, not less, and that these new faces, families and businesses bring a renewed vitality to rural communities.

But along with this hope, there is also a common sense of crisis facing rural communities. Farmers face greater economic pressures, and public money flows towards the largest landowners, insurance companies and corporate executives, bolstering an agriculture increasingly detached from the values of stewardship and community. Climate change and severe weather leave agriculture more vulnerable than ever, and public farm policy pushes farmers to grow less diverse crops on more marginal land, while placing an economic disadvantage on diverse farming practices that protect our land and water. And while farm families are under stress, corporate agriculture continues to gain power over farmers’ livelihoods with

continued large multi-national mergers.

### Responding to the Crisis: Making the Farm Bill Ours

How do we create a Farm Bill that is “Our Farm Bill”—one that reflects the vision and values that so many have shared with us in recent months?

In December, the LSP Federal Policy Steering Committee, a group of farmer-members who guide LSP’s policy direction, met to decide on our goals and policy proposals. In a day-long meeting, they ham-



Spring Wind Farm in Northfield hosted an LSP federal policy discussion this winter. (Photo by Ben Anderson)

mered out a vision of the basic values that will unite and bring communities together. They also finalized ideas for policy reform in the Farm Bill that would advance those values and vision. Here are the five areas they are focusing on:

### 1) Increase funding for CSP and make sure it rewards existing conservation and delivers real environmental benefits.

Of the federal policy programs LSP had an impact on, perhaps the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) stands out as one of the most effective. Now encompassing 70 million acres of working farmland across the country, it owes its success to the efforts of LSP farmer-members who worked with allies to imagine, create and then move through Congress this forward-thinking conservation program 15 years ago (it was originally called the Conservation Security Program). The idea was that working farm-

land can be farmed in a way that produces environmental benefits for everyone, in addition to productive crops and grazing land. Diversification and innovative farming practices, coupled with a knowledge of and sensitivity to land, water and wildlife, achieves this. The results are a public good that deserves public investment and support. Like any program, it requires continued review and renewal to deliver on its promises.

### 2) Reform crop insurance subsidies and create strong conservation compliance.

An effective crop insurance program is an important part of the farm safety net, and should remain a protection that enables farmers who take hard hits from severe weather, pests and price fluctuations to plant and farm another season. Unlike all other USDA programs, the subsidy support available to farmers via crop insurance is unlimited, providing advantage to the farms with the greatest acreage. Payment limits need to be put in place, and farmer commitments to protect our land and water when receiving crop insurance protections need to be strengthened and enforced.

### 3) Increase funding for beginning farmer programs, and improve access to loans and credit.

The average age of farmers is increasing, and over 100 million acres are set to transition ownership during the next five years.

Successful programs like the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) help to train

the next generation of farmers, and deserve continued and expanded public investment. Access to credit is critical to all farmers, but particularly the next generation of farmers, who lack the equity needed to establish and grow their businesses. Farm Service Agency credit programs need to be more effective and responsive to these needs.

### 4) End public subsidies to factory farms through EQIP and guaranteed loans.

A significant amount of federal dollars goes to support factory farms through such initiatives as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the government’s guaranteed loans program. This helps fuel the increased consolidation in the livestock industry that is putting independent livestock farmers out of business. While certain features of such programs can serve

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to help family farmers and should be supported, any counterproductive flow of public dollars need to be identified and stopped.

### 5) Grow local markets, food systems and economics to revitalize rural life.

Farmers entering the profession are creating new and vibrant local food systems, providing healthy food for our bodies and bringing new vitality to our communities. Federal policy initiatives have served to support the emergence of new markets in the past, and directed efforts and funding to support and expand emerging farm-to-institution value chains should be a part of the 2018 Farm Bill.

### Next Steps

The work to make the 2018 Farm Bill

## Our Farm Bill

- Uses public resources for the public good.
- Values land stewardship and local, healthy food.
- Invests in people to build local communities vital for economic resilience.
- Rewards crop diversity and soil health as essential for our future.
- Upholds the interdependence of urban and rural communities.

“Our Farm Bill” has just begun. There are powerful interests that benefit from the status quo agricultural system. While others may say there is no hope in standing up to multinational corporate agribusinesses or commodity groups that support policies which drive small farmers out of business,

LSP believes everyday people can make a difference.

In February, LSP farmer-members traveled to Washington, D.C., to bring their stories and policy priorities directly to decision makers. While in D.C., we invited lawmakers to join us for larger LSP public meetings around the state so that our public officials can hear directly from the people.

The energy and voice of the people is strong for a new Farm Bill that puts people, communities and the land first. This Farm Bill can be ours if people show up and work together. ☐

LSP organizers Tom Nuessmeier and Ben Anderson work on federal policy. Nuessmeier is at [tomn@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:tomn@landstewardshipproject.org) or 507-995-3541; Anderson is at [banderson@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:banderson@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-722-6377.

## Township Residents Fight MPCA, County Over Proposed Factory Farm

Farmers and other rural residents of Goodhue County’s Zumbrota Township in southeastern Minnesota gathered Jan. 30 at the headquarters of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) in Saint Paul to express their frustration with an inaccurate and incomplete environmental review on a proposed factory hog farm in their neighborhood. The proposed factory farm would include 4,700 hogs and a 3.7-million-gallon liquid manure holding facility in an area highly susceptible to groundwater pollution and sinkhole formation.

In a closed-door decision on Jan. 20, MPCA Commissioner John Linc Stine denied citizens’ demands for a new and accurate Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW), despite a promise to meet with citizens before such a decision was made. The Commissioner’s decision ended any further environmental review by the MPCA of the controversial project.

Township residents and Land Stewardship Project staff members met with Commissioner Stine to highlight the many errors and omissions in the EAW.

“The EAW was missing many of our homes and wells. It even predicts that this massive facility will be odor-free, which is preposterous,” said Zumbrota Township resident and Land Stewardship Project member Kristi Rosenquist. “We can’t have confidence in a document that is so deeply

flawed, and we can’t trust the MPCA to keep our neighborhood safe.”

Residents also expressed frustration that the Commissioner’s decision was made in private. For the past two years, final deci-

Commission recommended approval of a Conditional Use Permit for the project based on documents produced at the hearing and kept from the public. Despite the problems with the proposal, on Feb. 21 the Goodhue County Board of Commissioners granted the Conditional Use Permit for the proposal.

During the Planning Commission hearing, farmers and other rural residents testified in opposition to the proposal, detailing how it will harm the community and the ways in which it violates the county ordinance. Violations include:

- Required manure spreading agreements are missing.
- The project will negatively impact nearby property values in violation of the county ordinance.
- The proposed feedlot is proposed in a high-risk karst area and will be a pollution hazard.



Residents of Zumbrota Township held a press conference in front of the MPCA headquarters on Jan. 30. (LSP Photo)

sions on whether to order new EAWs for controversial projects have resided with the MPCA Commissioner alone. Prior to that, Minnesota citizens could provide input on such decisions via the MPCA Citizens’ Board, which was instituted in the late 1960s. Corporate agriculture interests and other critics of local citizen input pressured the Minnesota Legislature to eliminate the board in 2015.

### A Rubber Stamped Permit

On Feb. 13, the Goodhue Planning

After the Goodhue County Board of Commissioners granted the Conditional Use Permit on Feb. 21, a group of Zumbrota Township residents announced they plan on filing a legal challenge to the decision with the Minnesota Court of Appeals. ☐

For more information on this and other factory farm issues, contact LSP organizer Katie Doody at 612-722-6377 or [kdoody@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:kdoody@landstewardshipproject.org).

Minnesota Legislature

# Healthcare: Short-term Relief is Here, but Long-term Reform Still Needed

By Jonathan Maurer-Jones

Healthcare has been a front-page issue for much of the past several months. Since news broke last summer that Blue Cross and Blue Shield was dropping its individual health insurance plans in Minnesota (to replace them with much more expensive plans that cover very narrow networks), the Land Stewardship Project has been calling for both immediate and long-term changes to healthcare in the state.

During the 2017 Minnesota State Legislative session, we need to keep up this work more than ever. There is growing recognition that the healthcare system we have now is not working. Across the political spectrum, people have been describing the current healthcare situation, with huge price increases, shrinking coverage and high deductibles, as a “crisis.”

But who is to blame for the healthcare crisis, and what are the ways out of it? Agreement on these questions is harder to find.

Much is on the line this legislative session, and state leaders face a stark choice for dealing with this crisis: are we going to hand more public money and control of our healthcare system over to corporate insurance companies, or do we build on our current strong public healthcare programs to ensure that all Minnesotans have a way to access quality coverage?

## Short-Term Help, But...

In January, Senate File 1 was passed by the Minnesota Legislature and signed by Governor Mark Dayton to provide short-term help for the families facing the largest health insurance premium increases in 2017. The bill will reduce premiums by 25 percent for those buying individual insurance plans who do not qualify for other help through MinnesotaCare or MNsure subsidies. This is a major help for many LSP members and other Minnesotans, saving numerous families \$5,000 or more on 2017 insurance premiums.

Another potentially promising part of the bill allows agricultural co-ops to form group

health insurance plans for their members. This may create another insurance option for farmers, although many details are still unclear, such as potential premium and deductible costs. We encourage people to consider this option carefully as more information becomes known.

But one part of the premium relief bill could cause major problems for Minnesota: allowing for-profit health maintenance organizations (HMOs) to operate in the state (*see sidebar on page 11*).

## Bailing Out Insurance Companies?

Allowing for-profit HMOs is troubling, and sends up red flags about a question that needs addressed during the 2017 Minnesota legislative session: do we try to deal with the

healthcare crisis by relying on and propping up the corporate insurance system, or do we build healthcare for the public good? Tax-payers need to ask who will get the money and to whose benefit?

Health insurance companies are signaling that unless changes are made, more companies are likely to stop selling individual health insurance plans. In 2018, it's possible there will be no insurance companies selling individual health plans in Minnesota. We should make sure that Minnesotans have access to good health coverage, no matter what the insurance companies do. The best way to do this? Allow all Minnesotans buying health insurance in the individual market to purchase MinnesotaCare coverage.

MinnesotaCare is a proven, successful public program that already covers about 100,000 Minnesotans. It provides quality, affordable coverage with a wide network of doctors and clinics. Gov. Dayton has proposed opening up MinnesotaCare as a quality coverage option for everyone.

The insurance industry, on the other hand, is pushing a plan called “reinsurance,” which would give hundreds of millions of

Healthcare, *see page 11...*

## A Family Farm's Future at Stake



Sheri Sexton, a dairy farmer and Land Stewardship Project member from Millville in southeastern Minnesota, spoke at a January press conference in Governor Mark Dayton's office at the Capitol about the need for health insurance premium relief. Sexton and her husband Vince buy their insurance on the individual market, and in 2017 saw their premiums go up nearly 40 percent to \$2,200 per month. Vince is recovering from leukemia and Sheri was diagnosed with stage II breast cancer in 2016, which resulted in a \$100,000 surgical bill.

Over the years, the Sextons have built up a significant amount of equity in their operation, and have worked to get their children started in farming. Sheri says that going without coverage is not an option with so much at stake.

“We cannot go without insurance, because we're not going to risk our farm business that we've built up over the past 27 years,” she said. (*LSP Photo*)



## What Will Allowing For-Profit HMOs do to Healthcare in Minnesota?

Opening the door for insurance companies to explicitly profit off Minnesotans' healthcare needs is a bad idea.

The stated reason for this change is that it may lead to more insurance companies offering individual health insurance plans. It's tempting to think that allowing for-profit health maintenance organizations (HMOs) cannot be much worse than our current situation, since so-called nonprofit insurers have doubled and tripled premiums, raised deductibles, and taken away access to doctors and clinics.

But there are major problems with allowing for-profit HMOs to take over:

→ For-profit insurance companies that currently operate in Minnesota (mostly in providing employer-backed group plans) are subject to a 2 percent tax on all the pre-

miums they collect. HMOs, because they have been required to be nonprofit, are subject to a premium tax of only 1 percent. Senate File 1, the healthcare legislation passed earlier this year by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Mark Dayton (*see page 10*), appears to allow HMOs to become for-profit, while still keeping the lower tax rate.

→ Insurance companies are subject to "guaranteed renewability" laws, meaning they cannot discontinue certain policies because of the health of the people covered. However, if a company converts from nonprofit to for-profit, it becomes a new entity and could use the transition to drop unprofitable plans and change its coverage at-will.

→ We don't know what happens to the hundreds of millions of dollars held in insur-

ance companies' reserves, stockpiled from Minnesotans' premium payments as well as tax dollars paid to help administer the programs. Can these reserves be converted into profit?

→ Senate File 1 lays out no guidelines, accountability or protections for a transition to for-profit HMOs. And it is far from certain that this change will lead to any new plans being offered. Minnesota-based UnitedHealth Group, the largest health insurer in the country, pulled out of the individual market in all but a few of the 34 states in which it had sold individual plans in 2016, saying there was not enough profit to be made. At the same time, UnitedHealth posted \$1.9 billion in profits in the fourth quarter of 2016 alone.

### ...Healthcare, from page 10

dollars of public money to the insurance companies to offset the cost of covering patients with the most expensive medical needs. They argue this is needed to lower premiums—but it looks more like a taxpayer bailout of an already wealthy industry. Any reinsurance plan needs to include accountability from insurance companies—requirements to lower premiums and deductibles and broaden access to care providers, limits on profits from other insurance pools while

taking reinsurance money, or a funding source that comes from companies themselves rather than taxpayers, for example.

If the corporate insurance companies cannot or will not provide decent health insurance coverage at reasonable prices, then we must provide a public alternative. Instead of handing hundreds of millions of dollars to the health insurance industry, we should instead put these public resources to work in our most successful public healthcare program to deliver what people need: quality medical care from the doctors you choose at

prices that are affordable. An option to buy into MinnesotaCare would be a step in the right direction. □

*LSP healthcare organizer Jonathan Maurer-Jones can be contacted at [maurer-jones@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:maurer-jones@landstewardshipproject.org) or 218-213-4008. For details on healthcare options and how you can get involved in LSP's efforts to reform the system, see the **Affordable Healthcare for All** page at [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org).*

## The End of MinnesotaCare?

As this *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press, a bill introduced in the Minnesota House (HF 1259) was threatening to eliminate the successful, long-standing MinnesotaCare program, with its affordable premiums, no deductible and wide network of care providers.

Under this proposal, people who currently qualify for MinnesotaCare would instead receive premium subsidies and tax credits to buy an individual health insurance plan — the same plans that currently have unaffordable premiums, high deductibles and extremely limited provider networks. This bill would double down on the corporate insurance system that is badly failing now.

Instead of getting rid of MinnesotaCare, the Land Stewardship Project believes it should be opened up as an option for all Minnesotans to ensure that all parts of the state have access to a quality plan that covers their local doctors.

## Other Legislative Issues: Local Control, Forever Green Research Funding

As this *Land Stewardship Letter* was going to press, the 2017 Minnesota Legislature was considering two major issues related to Land Stewardship Project priorities: preserving strong local government and funding for the Forever Green Initiative at the University of Minnesota.

Soon after the session convened, corporate interests began pushing bills to weaken the rights of cities and townships in Minnesota to effectively respond to unwanted and potentially harmful developments. Specifically, House File 330 and Senate File 201 would weaken the interim ordinance powers of townships and cities. Corporate interests have long pushed to weaken these rights because citizens have used them effectively to stop unwanted developments like factory farms and frac sand mines. Interim ordinances allow cities or townships to quickly put a temporary moratorium on major

development. This is an emergency power that is essential when a community is caught off-guard by unanticipated and potentially harmful proposals, especially those from outside corporate interests.

As the regular session headed toward its May 22 adjournment, LSP was working to defeat these bills, as well as to push through continued funding for the Forever Green Initiative at the University of Minnesota. Forever Green is doing cutting-edge research on developing cover cropping and forage production systems that are profitable for farmers while protecting soil and water quality.

For the latest updates on the 2017 Legislative session, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org). The **Action Alert** section of the website has details on how you can make your voice heard on these and other legislative issues. □

## Anatomy of a Grassroots Campaign

*How citizens in one Minnesota county put values into action to attain a win for the land and their community.*

By Johanna Rupprecht

On November 22, 2016, history was made in southeastern Minnesota's Winona County when the County Board of Commissioners there passed a ban on any new frac sand operations. It is the first known countywide ban on the production of silica sand for the oil and gas industry's use in hydraulic fracturing (also known as fracking). As the Land Stewardship Project's lead organizer on fighting frac sand development, I am privileged to have been a part of the campaign for the ban from start to finish. Following are some insights into how that victory was attained. I hope it can serve as an example for other communities of how people power can win over corporate power, in the process creating the kind of future they want.

### The Power of Shared Values

The frac sand ban was achieved because everyday people came together — from all parts of the county, from different walks of life and from across the political spectrum — and chose to make it happen. We, as Winona County residents, chose to put our shared values into action. We chose to act on our love for the land, and our belief that the land has inherent value beyond any profits that can be extracted from it. We also acted on our understanding that the hills and bluffs, although they are full of sand coveted by the industry, are precious, and they don't grow back. We chose to act on our belief that the health of the land and the health of the people are interconnected — that if we allowed this wholesale destruction of the land, we would also inevitably be harming ourselves, risking the air, the water and the healthy soil we depend on, now and for future generations. We were also energized by our belief in democracy — the idea that our government's decisions should be made based on the will of the people and the common good, not on what corporate interests want.

In short, we decided that we, as the people of Winona County, are “the experts,” and the ones who know best about whether or not a dangerous outside industry should operate here. We chose to stand up together against an industry that is simply too extreme and too harmful to people and the



Frac sand mining operations like this one in western Wisconsin rely on removing topsoil — called “overburden” by the industry — to get access to the silica sand. (LSP Photo)

land to be allowed. We chose to see the big picture: that not only is the frac sand industry clearly wrong for our communities here, but that we also have a moral responsibility not to let our sand be the source of harm inflicted upon other communities via fracking, or enable the fossil fuel industry's continued reckless endangerment of our climate for the sake of profits.

### A Growing Opposition

While the ban campaign itself took exactly 17 months from its launch to the final County Board vote, the story of local people opposing the frac sand industry begins well before that. Over the past five or more years, thousands of people in Winona County and throughout southeastern Minnesota have been taking action to stop frac sand development. Many Minnesotans witnessed the devastation inflicted upon rural Wisconsin com-

munities as the frac sand industry exploded there, going from a handful of operations a decade ago to more than 100 today. When the industry began turning its eyes to the sand beneath the hills, bluffs and farmland on this side of the Mississippi River, local people responded with fierce opposition. Amid a flurry of local organizing in 2011 and 2012 and the formation of many new, local groups like Winona County's Citizens Against Silica Mining (CASM), LSP members in the region called on our organization to get involved. It was clear that the idea of strip-mining for frac sand is fundamentally opposed to the ethic of stewardship that we seek to foster.

Winona County has been particularly heavily targeted over the past several years

by the frac sand industry's extraction proposals, but local resistance has also been correspondingly strong. Neighbors organized with LSP to fight mines proposed in Saratoga Township and Warren Township. In 2012 and 2013, the residents of St. Charles Township and the city of St. Charles joined forces to defeat a proposal there for what would have been North America's largest frac sand processing and shipping plant. Residents of the city of Winona dealt with heavy truck traffic and other consequences of processing and shipping facilities that primarily handled sand brought over the bridge from Wisconsin. Members of the Catholic Worker community in Winona engaged in non-violent civil disobedience, using their bodies to block trucks at some of these op-

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erations in order to call widespread attention to the harms caused by this industry.

## A Bigger Step

Thus, by early 2015, the movement to oppose frac sand operations already involved many Winona County residents and had seen some significant successes. But people still felt daunted by the prospect of spending the rest of our lives fighting every individual frac sand mine or plant that might be proposed. LSP leaders, including the members of our Winona County Organizing Committee, began discussing the possibility of doing something bigger—of taking a proactive step at a countywide level. We knew there could be great power in bringing together, from across the county, people who had already been working to stop frac sand proposals in their own neighborhoods. Assessing the make-up of the County Board, we believed it was possible that a majority of Board members might ultimately vote to support a ban. Reaching out to LSP's existing base of members and supporters in the county, we found there was a great deal of interest in the possibility of a frac sand ban—in simply telling the industry that sand in Winona County's jurisdiction was off-limits.

These discussions culminated in an LSP organizing meeting held in Lewiston on June 22, 2015. Reflecting at a meeting of LSP leaders after the end of the campaign, Winona resident Jane Cowgill described that night in Lewiston as a turning point. "A lot of people wanted a ban," she recalled. "But we didn't think it was possible until we were all in the same room together." More than 90 people attended, and leaders from various parts of the county shared their stories of fighting the frac sand industry. After a group discussion, meeting participants agreed by a unanimous voice vote to the following goal: *To get the Winona County Board of Commissioners to pass a policy prohibiting any new frac sand mining, processing, or transportation operations in the county's jurisdiction.*

Thus, the ban campaign was officially launched. We had taken the leap, committing to work together to achieve something we knew wouldn't be easy, but was the right thing to do, for Winona County residents now and in the future.

Starting with so many people committing to a shared goal helped to ensure a strong and successful campaign. For the next 17 months, the goal that was drafted on that June evening served as a guiding light as the Organizing Committee and LSP staff led the campaign. (It is still taped to my office wall,

on the original piece of flipchart paper.)

All significant campaign strategy decisions were made by the committee, and were judged by how they would help us achieve the goal. We knew that building a winning campaign would take time, and it was important not to move too quickly. We also kept a frequently-changing timeline in front of us at each meeting, mapping out key goals and when we wanted to achieve them by. We knew it would take a gradual ramping-up of momentum to build the public call for a ban into something the County Commissioners could not ignore, and to show that a ban was the will of the majority of people in the county. After setting the goal at the campaign launch meeting, members took part in small group discussions to begin brainstorming tactics we could use. We made it clear that, while not everyone needed to do everything, there would be enough ways to participate that everyone could do *something* to help achieve a victory.

## Signs of Change

In July 2015, yard signs reading "Protect Winona County: No Frac Sand" were the first campaign tactic to be launched. To make a splash, volunteers placed more than 80 of them on the first day at our supporters' homes and farms all over the county. As expected, they generated quite a buzz. At the LSP office, we were soon fielding calls from strangers saying, "I'm reading your number off of this sign — I agree with you, where can I get one?" We had begun tapping into a deep vein of support among people who had never been connected with LSP before, but who cared about the land and their communities, and were more than willing to take a public stand.

In addition to building up public pressure, we knew it would also be important to have a legal element to our strategy. Previously, in other jurisdictions the frac sand industry had been able to shut down attempts to ban operations by claiming that a ban is not legal. That summer, in order to be prepared to counter such misinformation, we began what was ultimately an eight-month process of working with attorneys to release a comprehensive report explaining the clear legal rationale for banning frac sand operations. We needed to ensure that our County Commissioners, as well as the Winona County

Attorney, would understand that a ban is not only legally allowable, but is by far the most practical way to deal with this industry.

After the yard signs (which were eventually put up by 450 households throughout the county), more tactics followed, including "No Frac Sand" bumper stickers and buttons, and the first letters-to-the-editor specifically calling for a Winona County frac sand ban. By the end of the campaign, 53 people had each written at least one letter to local papers supporting the ban. Momentum began to build, as more and more county residents learned that they were not alone in wanting to simply say "NO" to such an extreme and damaging industry.

From the start, we understood that even though LSP already had a significant base of members and supporters in the county opposed to frac sand operations, we would



At a meeting launching the frac sand campaign, LSP members brainstormed tactics. (Photo by Johanna Rupprecht)

need many more to win something as big as the ban. The campaign would need to involve a major basebuilding process — contacting more and more people, identifying supporters and bringing them in, and asking them to take various actions. Along with welcoming the many new supporters who simply contacted us to, for example, request yard signs, we also carried out extensive efforts to reach out to people all over the county through a variety of methods. Such efforts included advertising on Facebook, mass mailings, telephone calls, and tabling at the Winona County Fair and other public events. This basebuilding was wildly successful—by the end of the campaign, 841 individuals who had never before been in contact with LSP had been added to our "hotlist" of supporters of the ban.

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### Changing the Narrative

Along with a smart campaign strategy and a focus on building our base, we also knew it was important to pay attention to another, sometimes overlooked component: narrative. The dominant narrative—sometimes referred to as worldview—that has been reinforced by corporate interests over many years tells people things like “land-owners have the right to do whatever they want with their land” and “anything that creates jobs and brings in money is good.” It tells people they should oppose any government action limiting “property rights.” Framed through this dominant narrative, the frac sand issue has often been presented as “environmentalists” opposing something that brings jobs and economic benefit.

For the frac sand ban campaign, rather than confine ourselves to trying to work within the limits of the dominant narrative, LSP members lifted up our own narrative, grounded in our own deepest values and beliefs. Framing the issue differently, we offered people an alternative way to see it. We advanced our belief that the land has inherent value and that what harms the land, also harms people and the whole community.

We lifted up the reality that frac sand mining is destructive and volatile and cannot be part of the kind of economy we truly need. Over and over, we said that the proper role of government is to listen to the will of the people and to protect the common good for both people and the land. Knowing that how we talked about the need for a ban was as important as anything else we were doing, we offered people a choice to reject what the dominant narrative told them about the frac sand industry, and to tap into their own deepest values instead.

LSP leaders agree that this focus on our own narrative was a deeply powerful aspect of the campaign. Organizing Committee member and St. Charles resident Tessa Schweitzer believes it was appealing to a diverse group of people because “people want to feel like they have permission to say *no* to something” like frac sand mining when they feel it is wrong—“not just because of ‘environmental concerns,’ but because of the inherent value of the land itself.”

As Organizing Committee member Joe Morse of Wilson Township puts it: “This campaign gave people a real chance to talk about their own values about the land and



LSP signs like this one were displayed by 450 households throughout Winona County. (Photo by Johanna Rupprecht)

community, in a way that people are too rarely invited to do.”

By the late fall and winter of 2015, it was time to bring the campaign to the next level by asking people to directly contact the County Commissioners. People began calling key Commissioners to ask them to support the ban, and sent them color-coded postcards explaining their individual reasons for supporting it. The intent was for Commissioners to start hearing, in more-and-more ways, that the people of Winona County wanted them to ban frac sand operations. In February 2016, we brought that message to them even more directly when people began speaking out in the public comment time at regularly-scheduled County Board meetings. From then on, at every meeting for several months, at least one person, and often three or four or five people, spoke up to call for a frac sand ban. Residents from all over the county participated—43 different people, by the end of the campaign.

This new tactic quickly drew increased media attention, and the campaign’s momentum kicked up several more notches. In March 2016, the report on the legal basis for a ban was ready to be released publicly. It included model language for a suggested amendment to Winona County’s zoning ordinance by which the ban could be enacted. The drumbeat of calls for the ban continued to build. In April, we knew we had reached a significant point when a Commissioner made a remark to several LSP leaders to the effect that it was getting a little awkward sitting at each meeting listening to people ask for a ban without doing anything about it. Later that month, the campaign took a huge step forward when the County Board officially introduced the ban for consideration,

asking the County Attorney to use our model language as a starting point.

### Official Consideration

By taking time to build up the campaign, we had ensured that by the time the county’s official process began, we already had a huge amount of momentum behind us. Once Winona County officials formally asked for public input, people were more than ready to speak up. The official process of considering the ban, carried out in the summer and fall of 2016, included two public hearings and two written comment periods.

On average, 80 percent of the testimony and comments favored a frac sand ban. Hundreds of people attended each hearing. County residents spoke and wrote eloquently and passionately, giving a wide variety of reasons for supporting the ban, grounded in our own narrative about why it was the right thing for our government to do. At the final public hearing, we also released a letter signed by 47 local businesses and organizations in Winona County in favor of the ban.

The process was not without a few bumps in the road. Representatives of the frac sand industry, particularly lobbyists for the Minnesota Industrial Sand Council, vigorously opposed the ban, and some county officials were more willing to listen to them than to the clearly expressed will of most people in the county. In August, by a 5-3 vote, the Winona County Planning Commission, which plays an advisory role in the process of amending the zoning ordinance, recommended an amendment that would allow some frac sand operations, instead of insti-

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tuting an outright ban. This proposal would have allowed up to six frac sand mines to operate at a time, with no limit on frac sand processing or transportation operations. Some Planning Commission members attempted to sell this move to the community as a “compromise” between pro-frac sand interests and those calling for the ban. Organizing Committee member Lynnea Pfohl, a Homer Township resident who also served on LSP’s staff during part of the campaign, recalls that at that moment, it was especially helpful to be working from our own narrative. “We were nervous when we knew how the Planning Commission vote was going to come down,” she says. “But we just went right back to saying, ‘The government works for the people,’ and we moved right along.”

Indeed, the Planning Commission’s proposal was ultimately rejected—both by members of the public who supported an outright ban and later by the County Board, which had final control over the decision. On Oct. 25, a majority of County Board members voted to turn down the Planning Commission’s recommendation and instead instructed the County Attorney to finalize the language for a ban. On November 22, the ban was passed on a 3-2 vote.

The majority of Board members had heard our message, listened, and held firm, despite continued threats and pressure from the frac sand industry. In public statements, those Commissioners who ultimately supported the ban made it clear that they did so because it was what the people wanted them to do. In this case, democracy worked the



Over a 17-month period, LSP members showed up at numerous meetings to express their opinions. Here, members rally before the first public hearing on the frac sand ban. (Photo by Kaitlyn O’Connor)

way it always should.

It was incredibly moving to see how our victory inspired people both within Winona County and well beyond it, giving them hope about what organized people can accomplish. Reflecting on what has changed because of this ban campaign, Wiscoy Township resident and Organizing Committee member Kelley Stange says, “I think people feel more empowered. People have the feeling we can do something.” By connecting all the people who came together to work for this goal, Stange says, “We made what seemed impossible, possible. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.”

Now, the work continues: to keep spreading the word about the ban, to invite our new

supporters to engage with LSP’s work in more ways, and to use this victory to build toward more positive change in the community. In examples like this, we have proof that organizing works. We need to continue sustained and committed organizing to combat corporate power with people power. We must not let up until all the decisions made at all levels of government look more like this one — until corporate profits are never valued above what is right for people and the land. □

LSP organizer Johanna Rupprecht can be reached at 507-523-3366 or [jrupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:jrupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org).

## Wear Your Land Stewardship Project Pride

Show your support for the Land Stewardship Project with an official LSP cap. The baseball-style cap is union made in the U.S. of high quality 100-percent cotton. It comes in black with LSP’s green and white embroidered logo featured on the front. A fabric strap and brass clip on the back make this a one-size-fits-all cap. The price is \$15.

Caps are available in LSP’s offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) and Minneapolis (612-722-6377). They can also be ordered online at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/store](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/store).



## Scholarship for SE MN College Students

Land Stewardship Project members Dag Knudsen and Deirdre Flesche have launched an “Environmentally, Socially and Economically Sustainable Agriculture & Forestry Scholarship” for students entering their junior or higher year in collegiate agriculture or forestry studies during the fall of 2017. Eligible applicants must be from one of the 10 counties in southeastern Minnesota.

The scholarship award will be \$5,000 to one individual and is to be used for tuition, books, testing or research related fees associated with the recipient’s enrollment at their institution of higher learning. The deadline for the 2017 scholarship application is April 17. Details are at <http://protectourresources.org>.



## Institutional Racism's Erosive Impacts

*LSP Farmer-Members Lead Effort to Listen, Learn & Take Action*

By Nick Olson

When I joined the Land Stewardship Project staff in 2008, I came with a formal education background and five years of teaching experience. It was a great fit to jump into facilitating classes for the Farm Beginnings course (see page 25). During the past nine years, I have had multiple opportunities to acquire experience and training in community organizing. As a result, I have seen firsthand the power that people have when they come together around shared values on a common issue.

Recently, my role at LSP has shifted and I am now using my newly acquired skills and passion to engaged in grassroots organizing with members of the organization. My current organizing work is built on years of relationships that I have built with members through the Farm Beginnings Program. In late 2015 I hit the road and visited 30 younger farmers on their farms to listen to their joys, frustrations, challenges and hopes for themselves, their farms, their families and their communities. I hoped to learn from younger LSP member-leaders about issues that were important to them and how we might engage our members in these issues. During these visits, a common thread that emerged was concerns around racial justice issues.

In response to this interest, in 2016 LSP, working with Voices for Racial Justice and the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AOR-TA), held three racial justice trainings involving over 100 LSP members and staff. The majority of participants in these trainings were farmers living in rural communities. Through these initial workshops, LSP members gained clarity about how the current food and farming system is not serving their needs.

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*No matter what barriers white beginning farmers face, the structural racism that exists within the food and farming system makes barriers for farmers of color even greater.*

• • •

Insights were shared around how infrastructure, community attitudes and public policies combine to pose significant barriers to beginning and diversified farms.

But was also made clear during these trainings is that no matter what barriers white beginning farmers face, the structural racism that exists within the food and farming system makes barriers for farmers of color even greater.

Out of these initial racial justice trainings came the first ever LSP Racial Justice Cohort. This cohort consists of 17 LSP member-leaders and three LSP staff members. The purpose of this cohort is to make LSP more effective at advancing racial justice by training and elevating LSP farmer-leaders to advance a just food and farming system and advocate for racial justice. Starting in December 2016 and running through April 2017, the Racial Justice Cohort has been meeting monthly to learn about privilege, power, structural racism, self-interest and land rights. The trainings are led by ally organizations working with Latino/a, Native and Asian-American farmers.

The cohort is learning firsthand about the additional structural barriers that beginning farmers of color face within the current food and agricultural system. In future *Land Stewardship Letter* articles, we will hear directly from members involved in the cohort. Stay tuned for opportunities to engage with members of this cohort around issues of racial justice. □

*LSP organizer Nick Olson, who farms near Litchfield in south-central Minnesota, can be reached at [nicko@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:nicko@landstewardshipproject.org) or 320-269-1057.*



LSP's Racial Justice Cohort recently met at the headquarters of the Hmong American Farmers Association in Saint Paul, Minn. Pictured are front row (left to right): Cella Langer, Amy Bacigalupo, Elizabeth Makarewicz, Sara Fried and Nick Olson. Back row (left to right): Caroline Devany, Ben Doherty, Annelise Brandel-Tanis, Julie Arnold, Molly Schaus, Andrew Ehrmann, Hannah Breckbill, Tyler Carlson, Klaus Zimmerman, Nolan Lenzen and Scott DeMuth. Not pictured but part of the cohort: Paul Fried, Jason Montgomery Riess, Julie Montgomery Riess, Margaret Hanson and Katie Doody. (LSP Photo)



# A New Narrative Around Race

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Autumn Brown is with the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA), a worker-owned cooperative of facilitators and consultants that helps organizations doing social justice work be more effective. Brown, who lives in rural central Minnesota, has recently facilitated workshops with Land Stewardship Project staff and members around the issue of racial justice (see page 16). During these trainings, Brown leads participants through discussions centered around this country's racial history and the long-term, systemic impacts of myths related to race, poverty and wealth. Brown recently talked to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about some of these issues. Below are excerpts of that interview. Episode 188 of LSP's *Ear the Ground* podcast features more of this conversation: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/933](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/933).

## The Timeline of Race in America

"During workshops I present a timeline as a way to see the history of race in this country through the lens of white identity. The timeline continues to evolve as I learn more about the background to this issue. For me as a mixed-race person—I have both white ancestry and African-American ancestry—it's been an important part of my own development to understand what it means to be holding these multiple lineages.

"And one of the things that I found really interesting in my research was that white, as an actual legal identity, doesn't even appear in a legal document for the first time until like 1691.

And the first time we see it appear, it's very explicitly in relation to who can own land within the colony of Virginia. And so from the late 1600s on through the 1700s and into the 1800s, we see this evolutionary process whereby the colonial governments and eventually the state governments are really trying to develop a system that when it comes to the right to own land, the right to vote, the right to access educational opportunities, the right to marry—those rights are afforded to some, and not others.

"And that process is what creates racialization in this country. So it's not like everyone showed up here having a race. This was a process."

## Bootstrap Boondoggle

"There was this really interesting research that showed that it takes between 10 to 15 generations for a family to move from wealth to poverty, or from poverty to wealth, without any direct intervention. And that translates to about 300 to 450 years. When you think about how recently people were enslaved in this country, as recently as the 1860s, then you wouldn't expect people to

actually be accumulating wealth without direct intervention until the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> Century.

"So then you look at this sort of American mythology that we have that if we just work really hard, if we truly make an effort and get ourselves educated, then we can change the trajectory of our family's history. During one generation a family, if a lot of things fall into place—a lot of those things

being luck and tokenization—*may* be able to gain a certain amount of financial stability. And *maybe* if they're able to buy a home, or buy land, then that will give them the opportunity to pass that on to their children, and that's where that wealth accumulation begins. But that's the exception.

"The myth that we can work really hard and change the trajectory of our lives and the lives of our progeny without direct intervention I think is especially dangerous.

That myth is really used as a weapon against communities of color. Such a myth makes it really hard to see the reality of how hard it still is to actually accumulate wealth."

## The Power of Narratives

"It's really, really hard to connect the dots when you have really powerful, cultural narratives that are telling a different story about race and immigration. And so one of the things we look at in workshops with LSP is, 'What are some of the cultural narratives that reinforce this picture that's not a true picture, and intentionally obscure what's happening?' When I've done organizing work out here in central Minnesota, one of the things that's been hardest to fight is the story people have of why communities of immigrants come here, about what they're contributing or not contributing, about what it means to be an American, what an American looks like."

What we have to do is figure out how to

tell a different story, and tell a really powerful story. A story that's uplifting and shows all that we have to gain from cooperating with each other. And those stories are there, those stories of victories, of wins, they're there. And they have to be intentionally uplifted.

"So that's what we started to see as more and more of these beautiful national campaigns recently took off. Like the campaign to fight the Dakota Access Pipeline—obviously it's a very local campaign, but it's also a national campaign and the narrative is so powerful, the narrative that, 'Water is life and we're protecting the water.' That is a powerful narrative that everyone can understand, right? It's not like, 'We're fighting these evil people.' It's rather, 'We're protecting the water, the water's our ancestor too, right?'"

## Diversity is Strength

"There's really something there of thinking about human ecology as connected to the ecology of the land. I think that could be a useful story for people who are doing farm and land and agricultural work.

"And too I think in relation to the 'Water is Life' narrative, I think in rural Minnesota there's just so many communities of faith here that are deeply rooted in a sense of the sacred. And I think narratives that are uplifting the sacredness of life, and including land in that, those are very powerful. And I think they have traction here because people are really grounded in a sense of the sacred, in a sense of what it is that we're here for, and what it is that we're here to protect."

## Building Local Wealth

"I do believe there is a way to build the financial health of rural communities that goes beyond this idea of revitalization, and is centered more around, 'How are we actually building wealth? How are we getting to keep our profits in our rural communities?' And that requires pretty systematic disinvestment from these multinational corporations that are sucking our communities dry. And so it requires a cooperation strategy."

## When We Fight, We Win

"I have had those moments of despairing for my life and the life of my children. But I think there's an incredible awakening, and I don't think it's melodramatic to say that this is the moment. And this is the moment where we fight, or we lose. And so I believe, based on what I'm seeing, that we have the capacity to fight. And I know when we fight, we win." □



Autumn Brown

# Seeking a Trifecta of Success

*Prioritizing Profitability, Lifestyle & the Environment When Planning a Rotation*

By Jon Luhman

**D**ry Creek Farms has been farming certified organic crops since 2001 and presently consists of me and my wife Terri, along with our son Jared, who recently returned to the farm after attending college. We have registered Red Angus cattle and recently Jared has added Polled Herefords as well. The cattle are raised on an all-forage diet, and they are central to a system where we're working to build both soil and profitability. We manage about 630 acres, of which 430 acres has fencing and water available for our grazing system. Profit per acre is our goal, not production per acre. Economics is not our only criteria—how our farming affects our family and lifestyle, as well as the environment we live in, is equally important.

Up until the past few years, we had mostly a four-year rotation on the non-grazeable acres, which consisted of a small grains/alfalfa seeding, followed with one year of hay. That was fall deep-tilled and followed up with spring tillage and corn. A cover crop of winter rye would sometimes go in during the fall and be followed up with a late May planting of soybeans. Our cover crop rarely was out of the ground before fall freeze-up, and there would usually only be 6 to 8 inches of growth in the spring before we disced it under for soybean planting near the end of May.

This is a common rotation for many Midwestern organic farmers. However, I have grown to not like it. First, I believe it draws much fertility away from the land. This fertility is then exported when hay is sold, or fed on other land, without the manure returning to the land from whence it came. Secondly, under this system the land is tilled every year. In an organic system tillage is quite common, but I feel we need to try to

reduce tillage frequency and depth as much as possible. I think it is becoming widely understood that tillage destroys soil biology and oxidizes organic matter. Third, like many organic and even conventional farm-



**Three generations of Luhmans: Jon, his father David, and his son Jared. The cattle are grazing a rye cover crop before black beans are planted in the field.** (Photo courtesy of Jon Luhman)

ers, for us giant ragweed has become a major problem and an impediment to sustained crop production. In organic production, it has become almost devastating to the system that we and many others have been using, which relies on planting all crops early in the season. It is important to shake things up and never get in a rut, or the weed population continues to adapt to your management.

The final reason I don't like this rotation is there were only one or two years where the ground had a living plant—the hay crop, and sometimes the fall planted rye—present on the land throughout the winter. The biology of the soil greatly suffers without the root exudates of a living plant, and I now see

my cover crops not only as soil holders but as a cheaper way of improving soil fertility than importing fertilizer into the system.

We are still in a process of change and I don't know where it will end, but that's what keeps life exciting. We have changed our crop mix and rotation, as well as attempted to improve our lifestyle. As most organic farmers can attest to, June is a crazy month, and we have not been able to do as good of a job as I would like given the work involved with the crop and hay production, as well as cattle duties. We used to produce quite a bit of quality dairy hay that we sold to local organic dairy farmers. With the wet

weather that we have been experiencing the past few years, I came to believe it was just not worth the time and expense to produce hay when it was greatly affecting my row crop production and quality of life. I had become accustomed to working long hours, but it had become borderline insane. If I wanted to have the next generation enjoy a life on the farm, some things needed to change. And change they have.

There's no doubt what we are doing now is quite possibly different than what we will be doing in five years. But for now, the changes outlined below have been positive in the way we measure all three criteria for success on our

farm—profitability, lifestyle and environmental health:

- **We now plan to sell no hay.** We'll only produce what we cannot graze directly with our cattle. We no longer worry about the quality of our hay. Beef cattle don't require high quality feed and now we make hay when we have the time. We will even shred it with a mower and feed the soil when we are too busy to harvest it. If I raise annual cover crops to improve soil health, then what is wrong with using my perennials like alfalfa and grasses as soil improvers too?

*Trifecta, see page 19...*

### Cover Crops? Grazing? Rotations? Give the Calculator a Try

The Chippewa 10% Project has developed the Cropping Systems Calculator, a tool for estimating the costs and benefits of adopting various cropping and grazing systems, including those involving cover crops. It's at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/chippewa10croppingsystemscalculator](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/chippewa10croppingsystemscalculator). Give it a test drive—we welcome feedback.



Hay production is a resource-consuming practice and few realize how costly it is in terms of fertility, money and time.

• **We purchased used 12-row planting equipment, replacing our six-row equipment.** This has been a big time saver. On paper, we don't have enough acres to financially justify the need for this bigger equipment, but timeliness is essential, and it greatly helped us get the cultivation and harrowing done in a timely manner.

• **We changed our cover crop rotation.** We have raised year-long cover crops like Italian ryegrass, along with red clover or forage chicory as part of our rotation. We now prefer to use a cover of mostly BMR sorghum/Sudan as it provides much more tonnage to graze in the dormant season. This mix is also less susceptible to being covered by snow and rotting in a wet fall. We let the cows eat the best half and return more carbon to cover the soil. Forfeiting a cash crop is a hard decision to make when I could be raising a high-dollar organic crop. But leaving the soil undisturbed for the season and grazing multi-species cover crops that allow us to extend our grazing season deep into winter has benefits for the whole system.

The full-season cover crops substitute for hay feeding and allow for the manure and urine to be returned to the spot where the feed was grown—adding fertility at a cheap

cost. This moves labor from high-cost hay production and hauling to low-cost grazing management.

• **We raise short-season crops.** For us, that has meant raising organic dry edible beans, sweet corn or peas. It allows us to raise more cover crops that get closer to full biomass production before termination. It also has made giant ragweed less of an issue, as this weed germinates early and is usually finished by the summer solstice. Giant ragweed that grows along with spring oat cover makes a wonderful cover crop to feed the soil when we rotavate (shallow tillage of just a couple inches) it under by mid-June.

• **We purchased a rotavator and stalk chopper.** This allows us to terminate a cover crop or hay crop in one or two passes, and to harrow our crops without plugging up. That means we can avoid fall-tilling the soil while allowing the cover crop or former hay crop to accumulate more growth in the spring.

• **We've moved the cowherd from March/April calving to May/June calving.** Summer calving requires less labor and matches the nutritional needs of the cow with the highest quality and quantity of grazing forage. It allows us to winter the cows on cover crops longer and reduces our labor and expenses considerably. Additionally, we attempt to raise cattle that are bred to be fertile as opposed to being fed to be fertile. We sell bulls and females to other producers who are looking for cattle that mimic nature and do not rely on significant

supplements (protein or grain), substitutions (hay) or other props to maintain fertility or production. We monitor which cattle do well in a grazing situation that has them out on the land all year-round, and let nature decide which ones to keep for breeding.

### Fitting a System to Our Goals

I have used cover crops off and on for years but never experienced significant benefits until we developed a system that works for us. Previously, our cropping plan was full-season crops, which left little time to see a cover crop grow before termination. Too much tillage negated the benefits. With short-season food crops and full-season cover crops, we are getting improved results. None of the practices we do are new. We just pick and choose those practices which fit our goals and situation best. Many of our practices may not fit the needs and situations of everyone, but hopefully there are some things we do that can be useful for others. □

*Jon Luhman farms near Goodhue in southeastern Minnesota. His son Jared is a member of the Land Stewardship Project's Southeastern Minnesota Farmer Soil Health Team. For more information, on LSP's soil health work in southeastern Minnesota, contact Doug Nopar (dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org) or Shona Snater (ssnater@landstewardshipproject.org) at 507-523-3366.*

## Cover Crops, Grazing & Profits

Winter grazing of cover crops and its role in building soil health and improving water quality in row-cropped fields was the subject of a recent workshop in west-central Minnesota's Pope County. The workshop featured grazing experts Dr. Allen Williams and Kent Solberg, who spoke about the connections between soil health and grazing, as well as what seed mixes work well in a grazing system. There was also a presentation on the Land Stewardship



Project's Cropping Systems Calculator (*see page 18*). During the afternoon session, participants visited the Dan and Linda Jenniges farm to see a winter grazing system firsthand. The event was sponsored by LSP/Chippewa 10% Project, the Pasture Project, Practical Farmers of Iowa and the Sustainable Farm-

ing Association of Minnesota.

For more information on the Chippewa 10% Project's work in west-central Minnesota, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/chippewa10project](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/chippewa10project) or contact Robin Moore at 320-269-2105, [rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org).

### Give it a Listen

On episode 187 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast ([www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/907](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/907)), grazing expert Dr. Allen Williams talks about soil health, livestock and "compounding, cascading effects."

# Connecting Farmers, Connecting Soil

By Shona Snater

*“Upon this handful of soil our survival depends. Husband it and it will grow our food, our fuel, our shelter, and surround us with beauty. Abuse it and the soil will collapse and die, taking humanity with it.”*

The above quote was taken from the Vedas Sanskrit Scriptures, which date back to 1500 B.C. For a long time, cultural groups across the world have understood and communicated our vital connection with the soil. Yet, the voice of wisdom is still ignored in favor of the agribusiness dominated system that sacrifices the health of our soil for money. This dollar-driven, production-at-all-costs mindset has cost much in loss of biodiversity, land degradation and human health.

Today, farmers are growing our much needed food amidst this broken ecological system. We’ve been able to prop up this system with chemicals and energy-intensive systems. Yet, mounting research in soil health suggests the promotion and maintenance of soil microbial life is critical to the long-term resiliency of our crops. This is a reaffirmation of the idea that life begets life, and the introduction of more plant matter into the agricultural landscape brings a return in biological life and ultimately, sustainable yields.

Because of the potential benefits for both the environment and our farmers, The Land Stewardship Project started the Bridge to Soil Health initiative to explore the role biological life plays in farming. As part of this initiative, I have spent the past several months talking to farmers in southeastern Minnesota about some of the revelatory practices they are implementing.

One of the most promising and widely adapted techniques is the introduction of cover crops into the row crop rotation, whether it be a single species or a multi-species mix. For example, Aaron Welti of Plainview noted an immediate response in terms of improved soil structure and weed suppression with just a single species of cover crop. Cover-cropping expert Sarah Carlson of Practical Farmers of Iowa reports that some Iowa farmers are interseeding a single line of nitrogen-scavenging tillage radish between rows to act as an early fertil-

izer for the next year’s corn crop. It is coming to light that cover crops have the ability to reduce herbicide and fertilizer usage, while retaining monetary value for both the soil and farmers’ checking accounts.

There is also a lot of excitement around the work that farmers Bob Mierau of Caledonia and Curt Tvedt from Byron are trying with crimping their cover crop of rye while no-till drilling soybeans in the spring. The soybean crop benefits from the rye mulch because it is a weed suppressor and contributes to the soil’s organic matter. Another important note: this practice reduces the kind of tillage which has been shown to collapse soil structure and destroy mycorrhizal fungi networks. Tillage also exposes microbes to oxygen, which they readily utilize in their



**The voice of wisdom is still ignored in favor of the agribusiness dominated system that sacrifices the health of our soil for money. (LSP Photo)**

decomposition of carbon matter, resulting in the release of greenhouse gases. Such examples show me that our goal of reversing climate change and rebuilding healthy soils can become an actuality.

In the grazing realm, there are a number of practices being incorporated to increase soil health. It seems that the closer we mimic our grazing systems to that of a herd of bison crossing a prairie, the more we build soil. This past summer, Kaleb Anderson of Goodhue seeded warm season annuals into his cool season pastures to diversify his feed source, and then utilized the mob-grazing rotation to return a large amount of plant matter to the soil. He is not only feeding the microbes in his cattle’s rumens, but also the microbes living beneath his feet.

Tom Cotter of Austin has been cover-cropping for 15 years and has just recently started to incorporate livestock back onto his

land. He was initially worried that he would not be able to find a market for his meat, but once it was shared on social media that his grass-fed beef would be sold at the local butcher’s shop, people claimed all the meat before the cattle were even unloaded.

Such good news from the land comes at a time when soil scientists and farmers around the world are expressing alarm that our soil universe is on the verge of collapse. I have a background in wildlife biology, and have learned what happens when such an ecosystem collapse occurs.

For example, consider a triangle of standing dominos, with each domino representing an animal species placed in the triangle according to its trophic level, or mode of energy consumption. The predators sit at the triangle’s top, or apex, and the plant community makes up the foundation, with our soil the foundation’s basement, so to speak.

With a single push to the top keystone domino, representing, for example, the wolf population, there is an expanding collapse right down to the base of the biological community, right down into the soil itself. There might be a few populations left standing, including humans, but the overall balance and structure of the system is compromised.

But it’s becoming increasingly clear we can reverse the trend of sick soil, and build a healthy biology right on our own farms, field-by-field, pasture-by-pasture, returning stability to the overall structure of our agricultural systems. No matter whether you farm row crops, graze cattle, run a dairy, or just consume food, everyone has a part to play in improving soil health.

We are at a critical moment.

Farmers have an opportunity to start nurturing back our ecological base, the soil. However, they will need the support of the entire community to accomplish this, because we are not only asking them to change their mindset but their business plan, farming techniques and machinery as well.

We cannot rely on a movement of this proportion to originate with the powers that be in the form of policies. It will take a grassroots-led effort. Farmers are the caretakers of our land. Let’s not commend them only for growing the most corn on a single acre, but promote a system that nurtures a healthy ecosystem rich in biodiversity. □

*Shona Snater can be contacted at 507-523-3366 or [ssnater@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:ssnater@landstewardshipproject.org). To read blogs written by some of the farmers she references in this article, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/soilquality](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/soilquality).*



# High Impact Farming

Refusing to Make the 'Either-Or' Choice When it Comes to Ag & the Environment

By Brian DeVore

A few years ago, Bryan Simon returned for a visit to his alma mater, the University of Minnesota-Morris, and ran into one of the professors he had studied under while getting a bachelor's degree in biology at the school.

"He asked me what I was doing, and I said, 'Oh, I'm farming.' And you could just see the look on his face," Simon recalls. "It's like, 'Oh, what a waste—you have a liberal arts degree in biology and now you're farming.' And I was like, 'But you've got to understand what kind of farming I'm doing.'"

As he says this, Simon and his wife Jessie are sitting in the kitchen of a former hunting lodge on 195 acres of farmland in west-central Minnesota's Grant County while their two children, Charlie, 4, and Annella, 2, play in the yard on a wet July morning.

Beyond the yard is a farm characterized by a mix of restored prairie, rotationally grazed livestock pastures and oak savanna habitat, broken up here and there by small wetlands. The farm thrusts peninsula-like out into 900-acre Cormorant Lake, where ducks, along with Canada geese and pelicans, can be seen floating on the water. It's clear the kind of farming the Simons are undertaking blends the principals of ecological restoration, wildlife biology and yes, good old-fashioned agronomy and animal husbandry.

But as is evident by the view beyond the Simons' driveway, a different kind of agriculture dominates the majority of the Midwestern landscape: acre-after-acre of annual row crops like corn and soybeans, a duo-culture covering soil just a few months out of the year on land once dominated by prairies rich in hundreds of different species.

And as evidence mounts that everything from grassland songbirds and waterfowl to pollinator insects and amphibians, not to mention water quality, is suffering as a result of loss of habitat at the hands of industrialized row crop agriculture, conventional farming is not exactly seen as friendly to long-term environmental health.

Given all that, it's not surprising a professor dedicated to teaching about natural resources protection would be disappointed to learn a former student had gone into farming. Perhaps it's akin to an art major becoming a highway engineer. The Simons' Lakeside Prairie Farm ([www.lakesideprairie.com](http://www.lakesideprairie.com)), with its emphasis on biodiversity, is definitely not the norm in corn-soybean country, and it would be easy to dismiss it, and its farmers/stewards, as quirky outliers. But the Simons aren't as unique as it would first appear.

It turns out a surprising number of people with academic and professional backgrounds in the natural resources field are returning to the land as farmers, rather than as wildlife refuge managers, conservation officers or ecological scientists. No official numbers

1<sup>st</sup> in a series



Jessie, Bryan, Charlie and Annella Simon stand in a recently restored prairie/pasture on the land they farm. "I took the position that the farmer could have the greatest influence on the landscape," says Bryan. (LSP Photo)

are available, but interviews conducted by the *Land Stewardship Letter* show a striking number of people are entering agriculture after receiving training and working in the fields of environmental science, wildlife biology, ecological restoration and other areas related to protecting the environment. They aren't buying into the narrative that farming and a healthy ecosystem don't mix. In fact, as a result of advances in sustainable agriculture and innovations related to everything from grass-based livestock production to cropping systems that build soil health, there's a new generation of farmers—let's call them "ecological agrarians"—who feel producing food and cultivating a healthy natural landscape go hand-in-hand. Some originally came out of college with the thinking that working for a natural resource agency or an environmental nonprofit was the only place to put into practice their passion for the environment. But now they are seeking a future in agriculture with the same attitude as Bryan Simon, who says, "The best way I can impact the land ecologically is to farm."

After all, in practice, farming and natural resource management aren't so very different. Both involve the stewarding of ecosystems. Good farm management takes this fact into consideration in its decision-making.

"Ecology is all about seeing the big picture and not focusing on only one aspect," says Bryan. "Agriculturalists that are able to look beyond simply the number of bushels produced per acre and take a more holistic approach will be more successful and resilient in the long run."

So which came first, the farmer or the ecologist? As the farmers featured in a new *Land Stewardship Letter* series being launched in this issue prove, that may be a moot point. Farmers like Bryan and Jessie Simon

are blurring the boundaries between the wild and the tame, with exciting results.

## Inspired by Wilderness

In some ways, the Simons' passion for nature was sparked about as far away from the farms and small towns of west-central Minnesota as one can get. A biology teacher

Ecological Agrarians, see page 22...

...Ecological Agrarians, from page 21

at a high school they attended in St. Cloud, Minn., would regularly lead teens on month-long canoe trips into the Canadian wilderness. Both Bryan and Jessie participated in these trips, which went as far north as Hudson Bay (they were a few years apart in high school, and didn't meet until after graduation).

"That made me want to get into conservation," recalls Bryan, 35, of those trips. "Being in a pristine ecosystem with no visible human impacts—to be able to observe that and live that for a month was eye-opening."

The Simons carried that passion through high school and into college. Jessie ended up getting a master's degree in environmental education from Hamline University and now teaches second grade, where she uses her environmental background as much as possible in the curriculum.

"I try to do things with my students that get across the message that your actions affect more than just you," says Jessie, 32. "I try to be intentional about going out as a class and taking note of phenology throughout the year."

After getting his biology degree at U of M-Morris, Bryan did seasonal work with the Student Conservation Association, which placed him with the U.S. Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management in places like Idaho, Texas and Hawaii. Through that work, he led crews of interns, doing invasive species control and native seed collection. Bryan later worked for the Nature Conservancy in eastern South Dakota, where he did fire management and plant monitoring.

The ideal natural resource career trajectory, right? But nestled back in Bryan's mind was a seed of an idea about the role working farmland conservation could play in restoring and maintaining habitat. Yes, he had seen pristine wilderness untrammelled by humans, and yes, he had worked for organizations that protected natural areas. But while growing up in St. Cloud, Bryan had frequently visited his grandparents' farm near Morris. There he realized that the environmental fate of a majority of the Midwestern landscape is in the hands of farmers, who are out there working the fields on a daily basis.

One day there was a discussion going on in a college landscape ecology class about whether consumers or farmers have more responsibility for the way food is produced

and its environmental impacts.

"I took the position that the farmer could have the greatest influence on the landscape," recalls Simon. "They have the most control over land use and they ultimately decide how well the land is taken care of."

Later, while pursuing a master's degree in ecology at South Dakota State University, Bryan conducted research at EcoSun Prairie Farms near Brookings, which had been set up by one of his professors as a working lands "experiment" to determine if grass-based farming could make returning prairie to the landscape a profitable venture. Bryan, by this time passionate about prairies, was



**Bryan and Jessie Simon are converting former crop fields into grazing areas using a combination of prairie grasses and forbs and domesticated pasture forages. (LSP Photo)**

inspired by the experience.

"I got the idea that you can have both: there's a place for wildlife and natural habitat, and that can also be a place of significant food production," he says.

Bryan was also intrigued by the 2002 book, *The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems*, which was co-edited by former Land Stewardship Project associate director Dana Jackson. It described farms in Minnesota and elsewhere utilizing ecologically-based methods to produce food in a way that benefited wildlife habitat, water quality and other natural resources.

While in graduate school, Bryan took the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course (see page 25). He enrolled in the class with Ryan Heinen, a friend of his since seventh grade who had a similar academic/professional background in natural

resources. (The friends later took Journeyperson, LSP's follow-up course to Farm Beginnings.)

### Finding the Perfect Farm

Simon and Heinen share a passion for the prairie, and thus went into the Farm Beginnings class knowing what kind of farming they were going to do: grass-based livestock production. Innovations in managed rotational grazing systems, portable fencing and pasture improvement in recent decades have made it possible to graze cattle and other livestock on grasslands in ways that not only improve forage quality and extend the grazing season, but benefit habitat for wildlife like grassland songbirds and pollinators. In recent years, managers of nature preserves and wildlife refuges have recognized the benefits of utilizing rotational grazing as a way to control invasive species in prairie systems and maintain healthy grassland habitat.

It's become clear that grassland habitats that aren't regularly disturbed—much like the prairies were when bison roamed the landscape—are doomed to being taken over by invasive species. Graziers, for their part, like that the native warm-season grasses and forbs in prairie systems can help them get through the traditional "summer slump," when the cool-season grasses found in domesticated pastures tend to go dormant.

One result of taking the Farm Beginnings course was it forced Simon and Heinen to develop a business plan, which turned out to be a critical tool for getting access to the 195-acre farm in Grant County. At the annual conference of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota five years ago, the group's livestock and grazing specialist, Kent Solberg, introduced the young farmers to Joe and Sylvia Luetmer, Alexandria, Minn., residents who were looking to buy a farm and get some beginners started on it. The Luetmers liked the young farmers' plans for utilizing rotational grazing and other methods to support a healthy farm landscape. Soon after, the Grant County farm came up for sale. The owner had been renting out the tillable acres for corn, soybean and wheat production, and utilizing the small house as a hunting cabin. There are approximately 25 acres of wetlands and a remnant of oak savanna dominates one end of the property. In other words, it was perfect for what Simon and Heinen had in mind: start a farm that blended the wild and the tame. In 2012, the Luetmers bought the farm and began renting it to the beginning farmers. The Simons moved into the former

Ecological Agrarians, see page 23...



hunting cabin, and Bryan and Ryan started putting in place their eco-based farming operation by clearing out invasives, converting cropland to prairie and erecting fencing for rotational grazing of livestock. In 2016, Ryan and his wife Barbara decided to pursue their own dream of grass-based dairy farming, and they are now doing a Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship internship on a farm near Osakis in central Minnesota.

The Luetmers have agreed to eventually sell the property to Bryan and Jessie at the same price they originally bought it for. In addition, the Simons are utilizing a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program that puts the farm's grassland acres in a permanent easement. The easement allows grazing of the acres, as long as they are kept in perennial grasses. The ultimate effect of the arrangement is that it reduces the "economic value" of the farm, since it can't be cropped or otherwise developed. That, along with wetland bank credits they hope to get from the government, will make the land much more affordable to Bryan and Jessie.

"That's the best thing we've got going for us right now, as far as the economic side of farming," Bryan says, only half-joking, adding that the perpetual nature of the grassland easement is both good and bad.

"The good is all of our work here restoring the prairie and putting in all this high diversity mix will be preserved. It will be prairie, hopefully, forever," he says. "But from a farming point of view, who knows what the future holds? It does tie the hands of the future generation a little."

## The Wild & the Tame

On this particular summer day, the future generation is enjoying the open landscape of the here and now. Bryan, Jessie, Charlie and Annella walk up the farm's long driveway to check on a 20-acre piece of land that in 2015 was converted from row crops to an 80-species prairie planting. Perimeter fencing has been erected so the prairie can be grazed; a recent seven-acre planting of rye and oats across the fence is preparing the soil in another former crop field for a grassland seeding. The restored prairie is doing well: the yellow of brown-eyed Susans add a bright pop to a hillside shrouded in a July mist. Prairie phlox and prairie smoke are also established, as well as, to the Simons' chagrin, plenty of Canada thistle. Bryan isn't happy about the fact that they had to use herbicides to control the thistle in order to get the prairie established, or that in actuality a prairie like this should have 300 different species represented. But such compromises are the

bargains one has to strike when undertaking ecological restoration in farm country.

An eastern kingbird and a dickcissel call out from pastureland across the driveway. The Simons have identified 99 different species of birds on their farm. "Well, now, we've only *identified* 99 different species," says Bryan sheepishly. "There's more here that I haven't put a name to yet."

In the hilly pasture, 29 head of beef cattle, representing various breeds—British White, Angus, Devon and Hereford—graze. Closer to the house, two sows serve as the foundation of the Simons' new pastured pork enterprise. Beyond the pig pasture, there are glimpses of Cormorant Lake through the understory of a stand of 150 to 200-year-old burr and white oaks. This view of the lake is a result of a labor-intensive buckthorn removal effort that's ongoing; over 17 acres of buckthorn have been cut so far, some of which is being burned in the Simons' wood stove as a kind of red-hot revenge against invasives.

The long-term goal is to reclaim this 40-acre stand of timber as oak savanna: that transition zone between prairie and

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***"Once you gain that knowledge that it's not either one or the other, you're cursed; you can't go back to being ignorant."***

— Bryan Simon

• • •

trees characterized by sprawling oaks interspersed amongst grasslands. Bryan and Jessie are hoping a combination of mechanical invasive species removal and utilizing livestock grazing to keep the understory open will bring back the savanna habitat on this farm. Sedges, jack-in-the-pulpit, Dutchman's breeches and snow trillium are already responding to the opening up of this habitat—as is, unfortunately, the invasive weed burdock.

They are also using livestock grazing to thin out the reed canary grass and cattails that are choking out the shallow marsh and wet meadow regions of the farm's wetland habitat. This runs counter to a common misconception that wetlands and livestock should never mix, but just as native grassland restoration can benefit from animal disturbance, so too can semi-aquatic habitat.

The Simons are aware the livestock aren't just here to maintain natural habitat—they, and these acres, must earn their way. Lakeside Prairie Farm started out also raising vegetables, chickens, eggs, oats and wheat, but now focuses only on grass-fed

beef and pastured pork. Bryan and Jessie direct market about 11-head of cattle and approximately the same number of hogs each year, which isn't enough to make the farm self-sustaining financially. Their goal is to double the number of beef animals they sell, and market as many as 100 pigs annually.

But access to grazing land is a limiting factor. It takes time to re-invent row-cropped acres as productive grassland, especially when one's goal is to have native species be a major part of the mix. On one part of the farm, Bryan points out 70 acres of land that's been idled for several years under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Invasive red cedar was actually planted on the CRP ground, all but ruining it as a grassland. The contract expires this year, and it's clear the Simons can't wait to use chain saws and cattle to bring back the grassland habitat on this piece of ground—it will provide much needed feed while allowing them to test yet again the theory that farming and natural habitat restoration can dovetail nicely.

The young farmers know that in order to attain their dream of balancing ecological health with financially viable farming, they will need help via public policy as well as the marketplace. Bryan says it's frustrating that federal farm policy doesn't see diverse, ecologically healthy operations like theirs as a public good, and that it instead promotes monocultural crop production. However, they have received cost-share funding through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to do everything from set up rotational grazing systems and seed native species to take on invasives removal.

Marketing a product that is good for the environment can also be frustrating at a time when consumers seem to favor convenience and price over sustainability, no matter what the long-term costs to the landscape and communities might be. Bryan is hopeful people can change their views. After all, he himself was able to go against the conventional wisdom that a healthy environment and farming are mutually exclusive.

"Once you gain that knowledge that it's not either one or the other, you're cursed; you can't go back to being ignorant," he says. "And with that knowledge, you seek to bridge those worlds."

Bridging those worlds means inoculating consumers with the idea that what they eat influences not only their own health, but the health of the land. It's not such a crazy idea—recently a man from the Twin Cities found the Lakeside Prairie Farm website and ordered beef from the Simons as a result.

"I asked him why he was buying from us," says Bryan. "He said, 'I like what you guys are doing ecologically.'" □

## Join a CSA Farm in 2017

### LSP Community Supported Farm Directory Now Available

The 2017 edition of the Land Stewardship Project's *CSA Farm Directory* is now available at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/findingjustfood/csa](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/findingjustfood/csa). The *Directory* lists farms that provide eaters in the Twin Cities, Minnesota and western Wisconsin region an opportunity to buy a share, and in return receive produce, meat and other food throughout the growing season.

### What is CSA?

At their most fundamental level, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms provide a weekly delivery of sustainably produced food to consumers during the growing season (approximately June to October). Those consumers, in turn, pay a subscription fee. But CSA consumers don't so much "buy" food from particular farms as become "members" of those farms. CSA operations provide more than just food; they offer ways for eaters to become involved in the ecological and human community that supports the farm.

The farms listed in LSP's directory have paid a fee to be included. The Land Stewardship Project is not a certification agency for CSA farms and does not guarantee customer satisfaction.

Please keep in mind that while membership in a CSA farm means sharing in the bounty of the season, it also means sharing in the risks. At times, raising food in the Upper Midwest can be made quite challenging by inclement weather, pest infestations and other factors beyond the farmers' control. We encourage you to contact the farms directly and ask questions to determine what best fits with your needs, lifestyle and schedule. We recommend reading the "Selecting a CSA Farm" and "Questions to Ask a CSA Farmer" guides below before beginning your search for a CSA operation that fits you best.

### Selecting a CSA

While membership in a CSA farm includes a weekly share of fresh produce (and increasingly, meat and other products), other

factors may vary from farm-to-farm. You may want to refer to this list when choosing a farm (ideas and wording used for this list taken from FairShare Community Supported Agriculture: [www.csacoalition.org](http://www.csacoalition.org)):

→ **Location:** The CSA farms listed in this directory are located throughout Minnesota and western Wisconsin. You should keep in mind the driving distance to the pick-up site or the farm when considering your level of involvement and the involvement expectations of the farm.

→ **Pick-up site/Delivery Day:** The CSA farms listed have various delivery or pick-up dates. Most farms deliver shares to a common pick-up site, but a few will deliver shares to your door, while others require you to pick up your share at the farm or help with deliveries.

→ **Length of Season/Number of Deliveries:** The length of season and number of deliveries varies among the farms. Most begin in May or June and run through September or October. Some farms have an optional winter delivery for an additional cost.

→ **Types of Produce and Other Food Items:** Most of the CSA farms offer a wide variety of seasonal vegetables. Some farms offer unusual varieties while others may add extras to their standard shares. Some farms may give members the option to buy honey, fruit, eggs, meat or other specialties at an additional cost.

→ **Opportunities for Involvement:** Community building is an important part of the CSA approach; most farms encourage you to become involved. Some farms plan seasonal festivals or special events while others encourage their members to just "drop by."

### Questions to Ask a CSA Farmer

As the number of CSA farms has grown in the region over the years, eaters interested

in knowing the faces behind their food have been offered more choices than ever. However, increased choice can bring with it some challenges. How do you choose the farm that best fits your needs and is most likely to provide a satisfying experience?

Below are a few questions that can be asked of any farmer you are considering entering into a CSA relationship with. Potential CSA members should not be shy about asking such questions — and a good CSA farmer should be forthcoming with answers. After all, this is about creating a trusting relationship built on food, stewardship and friendships.

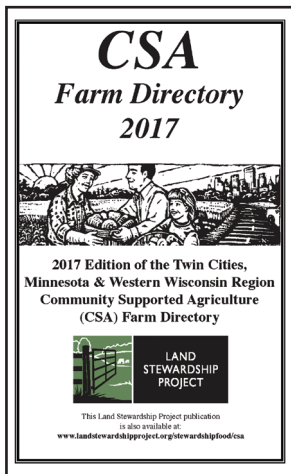
- ✓ How many years have you been farming?
- ✓ How many seasons have you been doing a CSA?
- ✓ Have you ever worked or trained on another CSA farm?
- ✓ What vegetables or other food items do you plan to provide to shareholders?
- ✓ What is the size of a share? Do you offer half shares?
- ✓ What is your system for storing and transporting the share once it is harvested?
- ✓ At the drop-off locations, is the share left in a sheltered area?
- ✓ How do you view the CSA notion of shared risk/shared bounty?
- ✓ Are farm members welcome on the farm? What community events are held?
- ✓ Is there a farm work requirement?

### Vegetable Farm Survey

The University of Wisconsin and the Madison-based FairShare CSA Coalition have launched an online survey to develop financial benchmarks for fresh market vegetable farms. The goal is to get several hundred vegetable farms to complete the survey.

The primary outcome will be key financial indicators that growers can use to compare their own situation with industry averages and make more informed decisions about crops, markets, pricing, capital investments and labor. Respondents will be paid \$50 for every year they provide data (2014-2016). All responses will be held in confidentiality; only aggregate data will be made public over time.

To take the survey, see <http://tinyurl.com/veggiebenchmarksurvey>. For more information, contact Brad Barham at [barham@mailplus.wisc.edu](mailto:barham@mailplus.wisc.edu) or John Hendrickson at [jhendric@wisc.edu](mailto:jhendric@wisc.edu) (608-265-3704).





# It's Not too Early to Apply for 2017-2018 LSP Farm Beginnings Course

## Minnesota-Wisconsin Region Class to Begin in Fall 2017

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program is accepting applications for its 2017-2018 class session. The class will be held in Pine City in east-central Minnesota.

LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its second decade of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is 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 and enterprise planning, marketing and innovative production techniques.

This 12-month 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

### Farm Beginnings in Other Regions

For information on Farm Beginnings courses in other parts of the country, see the Farm Beginnings Collaborative website at [www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org](http://www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org), or contact LSP's Amy Bacigalupo at 320-269-2105, [amyb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:amyb@landstewardshipproject.org).

the region. The classes, which meet approximately twice-a-month beginning in the fall, run until March 2018, followed by an

on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 750 people have graduated from the Minnesota-Wisconsin region Farm Beginnings course. 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 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](http://www.farmbeginnings.org), or contact LSP's Karen Benson at [karenb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:karenb@landstewardshipproject.org), 507-523-3366. □

## LSP's Farm Dreams: Is Farming in Your Future? Find Out April 2

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 farming is the next step for them. This is a great workshop to attend if you are considering farming as a career and are not sure where to start. Farm

Dreams is a good prerequisite for LSP's Farm Beginnings course (*see above*).

LSP holds Farm Dreams workshops at locations throughout the Minnesota-Wisconsin region during the year. The cost is \$20 for LSP members and \$40 for non-members.

The next two classes are scheduled for April 2 and July 23. Both classes will run

from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and will be held in Minneapolis. A third class may be scheduled for August or September.

For more information, see the **Farm Dreams** page at [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org). Details are also available by contacting LSP's Dori Eder at 612-578-4497 or [dori@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:dori@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Next LSP Journeyman Course Starting This Fall

The Land Stewardship Project's year-long Journeyman Course is designed to support people who have several years of managing their own farm under their belt, and are working to take their business to the next level. This course

offers advanced farm business planning and a mentorship, as well as guidance on balancing farm, family and personal needs, along with a matched savings account.

The next Journeyman session will begin this fall—final details are still being

worked out.

For more information, contact LSP's Dori Eder at [dori@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:dori@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-578-4497. More information is also on the **Journeyman** page at [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org). □

## Passing On the Farm? Check out the *Farm Transitions Toolkit*

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

economies and sustainable land stewardship.

The *Toolkit* contains resources, links to services and practical calculation tables to help landowners establish a commonsense plan. It also features user-friendly resources on the economic, legal, governmental, agronomic, ecological and even social issues that must be considered in order to ensure a successful farm transition. It is rounded out

with profiles of farmers who are in various stages of transitioning their enterprises to the next generation. An online version of the *Toolkit* is at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmtransitiontools/farmtransitiontoolkit](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmtransitiontools/farmtransitiontoolkit); paper versions can be purchased by calling 800-909-6472. □

# 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](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) and look under the **More Farmers on the Land** section. You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Dori Eder at [dori@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:dori@landstewardshipproject.org), or by calling her at 612-578-4497. Below are excerpts of recent listings. For the full listings, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse).

## Farmland Available

◆ Lynn Knapp has for sale 22 acres of farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin's Richland County*. The land has not been sprayed for 35 years and it includes pasture and a house. The asking price starts at \$79,000. Contact: Lynn Knapp, 608-986-2207, [dellkoprime@yahoo.com](mailto:dellkoprime@yahoo.com).

◆ Rick Bateson has for sale 21-250 acres of farmland in *central Minnesota's Meeker County*. No chemicals have been used on the land in eight years. The property has been operated as a spa retreat. There are restored prairies, CRP acres, trails, timber and 1,400-foot of lakeshore. There is a six-stall shop/heated garage, carriage house, luxury chicken coop, 3,500-square-foot multipurpose building, eight-unit barn (6,000-square-foot) and house. The asking price is \$1,900,000, with additional options. Contact: Rick Bateson, 612-850-1916, [rickbateson@kw.com](mailto:rickbateson@kw.com).

◆ Andy Marcum has for sale 43 acres of farmland in *west-central Minnesota's Pope County (near Glenwood)*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and consists of pasture with four-strand, high-tensile perimeter fencing and two-strand high-tensile interior cross-fencing. There are also above-ground and deep-buried water lines with three hydrants. The property also includes a house and an 8 x 10 chicken coop. There is an opportunity to rent an additional 80 acres of pasture adjacent to the property. The asking price is \$225,000. Contact: Andy Marcum, 541-263-1053.

◆ Anthony Demma has for rent 5-35 acres of farmland in *northern Illinois*. The property is a former nursery and landscape company owner's home. The land includes pasture and it has not been sprayed for at least five years. There are three hoop houses, a 2,400-square-foot pole barn, a three-car-garage, stables and a 2,000-square-foot house. There are a number of bee hives on-site, as well as some small projects for hops, mushrooms and vegetables. No hunting or animals raised solely for slaughter permitted. Contact: Anthony Demma, [iriefarms2014@gmail.com](mailto:iriefarms2014@gmail.com).

◆ Eric Pierson has for sale farmland in *western Wisconsin's Dunn County (near Colfax)*. Pierson is selling his unit in the sev-

en-family Cherrystone Association, founded in 1974. Owners' homes are widely scattered across 311 mostly-wooded acres on a dead end road. The land includes 18 tillable acres, 11 acres pasture, and one-third of a share of a 2005 Kubota tractor with bucket, blade and mower. There is a house, two-car garage, guest cabin, 400-bale capacity hay barn and a tractor storage shed. The asking price is \$125,000, depending on details. Contact: Eric Pierson, [piersoneric222@gmail.com](mailto:piersoneric222@gmail.com).

◆ Bill Brandt has for sale 14.68 acres of farmland in *southwestern Minnesota's Jackson County (near Lakefield)*. There is a hog barn with the capacity to farrow/finish or finish 1,000+ head, a cattle barn, hay storage/calving pens, three greenhouses (all heated and ventilated), a new wash/refrigeration/storage vegetable building, machine shed, four grain bins with 4,000+ grain storage/dryer, two large feedlots with 100+ cattle capacity, cattle sorting tub, lambing barn, two wells and a newer house, with additional acres available to rent. Brandt is looking at a succession plan. Contact: Bill Brandt, [brandtgardens@gmail.com](mailto:brandtgardens@gmail.com).

◆ Ken Raspotnik has for rent 5 to 160 acres of farmland in *northwestern Wisconsin's Bayfield County*. The land includes pasture, 100 apple trees, loafing sheds, a greenhouse and a 24 x 32 log cabin. It has been fenced for rotational grazing and has pipeline watering, as well as an automatic winter waterer. The land has not been sprayed for several years. Contact: Ken Raspotnik, 715-682-9240, [ken@raspotnikfarm.com](mailto:ken@raspotnikfarm.com).

◆ Dean Dickel has for sale 7.8 acres of tillable certified organic farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin's Lafayette County*. The land includes poultry buildings and equipment for 9,500 layers and 3,000 pullets. There is a cooler as well as grain bins. A house is available. The buyer will assume a contract with a regional organic egg brand; owner will provide feed. The asking price is \$325,000 for land and equipment. Contact: Dean Dickel, [dickel@centurylink.net](mailto:dickel@centurylink.net).

◆ Sylvester Wetle has for rent 80 acres of farmland in *south-central Wisconsin's Adams County*. It consists of 40 acres of pasture that has been laying fallow for more than 40 years. It could be used for grazing or hay production.

Electricity and water is available. No house or outbuildings are available. Contact: Sylvester Wetle, [showperg@aol.com](mailto:showperg@aol.com).

◆ Andy has for rent 18 tillable acres in *southeastern Minnesota's Rice County (near Webster)*. The land is suitable for growing vegetables; it's a 35-minute drive to Minneapolis-St. Paul, and a 20-minute drive to southern Twin Cities Metro area farmers' markets. There is no house. The asking price is \$100 per acre. Contact: Andy, [farmland.rice@gmail.com](mailto:farmland.rice@gmail.com).

## Seeking Farmland

◆ Ryan Heinen is seeking to purchase 160-240 acres of farmland in *central or west-central Minnesota (Pope, Stevens, Douglas, Grant, Ottertail, Stearns, Swift or Kandiyohi County)* for an organic grazing-based dairy operation. Land with pastures, tillable land, outbuildings and a house is preferred. Land that has not been sprayed for three years is preferred, but would also consider conventionally-farmed land. He is willing to build milking facilities or renovate existing buildings, as well as plant pasture and build fences. Heinen is also interested in land with native or restored prairie and wetlands. Contact: Ryan Heinen, 605-380-2697, [ryanheinen@hotmail.com](mailto:ryanheinen@hotmail.com).

◆ Henry Brown is seeking to purchase farmland in *southeastern Minnesota and southwestern Wisconsin*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has buildings such as a dairy barn, as well as a house, is preferred. Brown would like to find a retiring farmer that is willing to transition the farm to a young couple. Contact: Henry Brown, 608-487-4420, [thenorthernpike@gmail.com](mailto:thenorthernpike@gmail.com).

◆ Miranda Maloney is seeking to purchase 1 acre or more of farmland in *Wisconsin*. Land with pasture and that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Miranda Maloney, 608-286-4437.

◆ Athena Salzer is seeking to purchase .25-4 acres of farmland in *south-central Wisconsin's Dane County (near Madison)*.

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Land with well/water access and a level place for a greenhouse is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Athena Salzer, athena.salzer@gmail.com.

◆ Josh Horvat is seeking to purchase 30+ acres of farmland in *western Wisconsin*, within a half-hour of the town of Cadott. Land with pasture and a water source preferred. Fencing would be good, but can be negotiated. No house or outbuildings are required. Contact: Josh Horvat, 715-828-4577, uplandnut@gmail.com.

◆ Ellen Ferwerda is seeking to purchase 5-50 acres of farmland in *Wisconsin*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred; no house or outbuildings are required. Contact: Ellen Ferwerda, 262-748-7928, Emferwerda@gmail.com.

◆ Ian Baker is seeking to rent 2+ acres of tillable farmland in *northeastern Illinois's Kane County*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a small barn is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Ian Baker, 630-397-9465.

◆ Paul is seeking to purchase 60-180 acres of tillable farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin*. He would prefer land with no foreseeable development potential. No house or outbuildings are required; one building site would be good, but is not required. He can pay cash. Contact: Paul, 608-588-6365, cropground@att.net.

◆ Kia is seeking to purchase 5 acres of farmland in *Wisconsin*. Land with pasture and a water pipeline is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Kia, 715-225-1334.

◆ Daniel Englert is seeking to rent 1 acre of tillable farmland in *Hennepin County in Minnesota's Twin Cities area*. A water connection for a hose would be ideal; no house is required. Contact: Daniel Englert, 952-393-5706, danielenglert@outlook.com

◆ Raymond Moses is seeking to rent 40 or more acres of farmland in *Michigan*. Land with pasture and water is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Raymond Moses, 248-894-2012.

◆ Cory McDonald is seeking to rent 1 acre of tillable farmland in the *Upper Peninsula of Michigan (Marquette County)*. Land with water preferred; no house is required. Contact: Cory McDonald, 906-281-1542, mcdonald.cory.p@gmail.com.

◆ Melissa Drenchen is seeking to rent 20+ acres of farmland in *Michigan*. Land with pasture, a barn and a house is preferred. Contact: Melissa Drenchen, 616-427-4152.

◆ Brett Ziegler is seeking to purchase 15-40 acres of farmland in *southwestern Michigan*. Land that has not been sprayed

for several years and that has forest and a house is preferred. Contact: Brett Ziegler, 847-302-9673, brettziegler@yahoo.com.

◆ Roberta Mihai is seeking to rent 1-2 acres of tillable farmland in *northern Illinois's Winnebago County*. Contact: Roberta Mihai, 779-221-9997, robertzica@gmail.com.

◆ Caitlin Barnhart is seeking to purchase 1-5 acres of farmland in *Hennepin or Washington County in Minnesota's Twin Cities region*. Land with pasture and that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred. A chicken coop, greenhouse or high tunnel, as well as a pack house, would be nice, but not essential; no house required. Contact: Caitlin Barnhart, Barnh034@umn.edu.

◆ Dennis Wimmer is seeking to rent 50-200 acres of tillable farmland in *southwestern Iowa's Union County*. He would like to transition it to organic if it is not already certified organic. Contact: Dennis Wimmer, 641-278-0735, denny@wimmerfarms.com.

◆ Koby Hagen is seeking to purchase 1+ acres of tillable farmland in *southeastern Minnesota, western Wisconsin or northeastern Iowa*. Hagen is looking to grow seed this year. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a shed, fencing and a house is preferred. If it is a rental, Hagen would be willing to turn it into a long-term commitment. Contact: Koby Hagen, kobyjh@gmail.com, 612-791-7687.

### Seeking Farmer

◆ The Land Stewardship Project is seeking a farmer to rent a 57-acre field in *west-central Minnesota (near Chokio)*, beginning in the 2018 growing season. The field has been in corn and soybean production and LSP is seeking a beginning/family farmer who will transition it to organic and/or livestock production with a continuous living cover system that provides wildlife habitat and builds the soil. There is potential for access to contiguous acres. Contact: George Boody, LSP, 612-722-6377.

◆ Terry Randolph Schramm is seeking a farmer for an operation in *Michigan*. The 140-year-old farm consists of 90 acres and approximately 15 acres is tillable, with more available. The land has seen limited farming during the past 40 years. The farm would be available at no cost if the farmer can improve the land. A small house may be available, as well as use of old, but usable, machinery. Contact: Terry Randolph Schramm, riverboy88@gmail.com.

◆ 10<sup>th</sup> Street Farm and Market is seeking two individuals, or a couple, interested in getting involved with all aspects of a diversified organic vegetable farm. 10<sup>th</sup> Street Farm and Market is located *east of Minnesota's Twin Cities near Afton*. It is

an extended season vegetable micro-farm using organic intensive cropping practices. Markets include a three-season CSA, wholesale and a small farm stand. The farm is seeking people who are self-motivated, have great attention to detail and an interest in sustainable agriculture and local food. Previous farm experience a benefit, but not required. The pay is \$600 per month, plus housing. A full job description is available via e-mail. Contact: Hallie Talbott, tenthst-farmmarket@yahoo.com.

◆ Clara Davis is seeking a farm partner who wishes to start a market farm on 10 acres near *Taylor's Falls in the Twin Cities, Minn., region*. No housing available. Contact: Clara Davis, cwdavis99@gmail.com.

◆ Fresh Starts Farm in *east-central Minnesota's Kanabec County* is seeking a farmer to assist in growing vegetables, farm upkeep and livestock management from April to September. Fresh Starts Farm has a vegetable and egg CSA, and raises heritage hogs. It also has the beginnings of an orchard and nut grove. The farm is 160 acres and no chemical pesticides or artificial fertilizers are used. The pay is \$500 to \$1,000 per month, depending on skill level; housing is available. Contact: Rye Carlson, 320-455-2658, ryetracker@gmail.com.

◆ Shodo Spring is seeking a farmer to join a 17-acre farm in *southeastern Minnesota's Rice County*. The farm is a beginning permaculture enterprise, with a 2-year-old orchard, productive berry patch and wild foods. There is considerable space for vegetables, plans for more perennial crops and much flexibility. The land is ready for organic certification. Spring is open to working with animals that the farmer would bring. Shared housing is available. Full- or part-time is possible; pay could possibly come from profit of production sold. Contact: Shodo Spring, shodo.spring@gmail.com, 507-384-8541.

◆ Cherry Tree House Mushrooms is seeking an assistant farm manager. Cherry Tree House Mushrooms is a certified organic farm in *northwestern Wisconsin's Polk County (90 minutes from the Twin Cities)* that specializes in log-grown shiitake and other mushrooms. The farm consists of 38 acres and 5,000 mushroom logs. The assistant farm manager helps with mushroom production and farm upkeep, as well as a Sunday farmers' market booth. The pay is \$8-\$12 per hour, depending on skill and experience; housing is included. More information is at <https://cherrytreehouse-mushrooms.com/farm-manager-wanted>. Contact: Jeremy McAdams, 612-205-8599, cherrytreehousemushrooms@gmail.com.



## The Hidden Half of Nature The Microbial Roots of Life & Health

By David R. Montgomery  
& Anne Biklé  
2016; 309 pages  
W.W. Norton  
www.dig2grow.com

Reviewed by Brian DeVore

A few years ago, I had a conversation with a USDA soil microbiologist about how farmers in south-central North Dakota were building up the organic matter in their fields with a combination of cover-cropping, no-tilling and mob grazing. The Burleigh County Soil Health Team, as the group these farmers belonged to was called, showed how paying attention to soil biology could make fields incredibly productive and resilient, even under the kind of weather conditions that would send most producers scurrying for the crop insurance adjuster. Something special was going on, and it was rooted in a way of farming that nurtured the mysterious biological world beneath our feet. I was hoping the scientist, Kristine Nichols, could help me digest all the new information I'd been exposed to while touring these farms.

"I'm less concerned about what soil organisms are, and more about what they do," said Nichols, who is now the chief scientist at the Rodale Institute and who recently keynoted a Land Stewardship Project soil health meeting.

I thought about that conversation while reading *The Hidden Half of Nature: The Microbial Roots of Life and Health*, a comprehensive look at the life of our "inner and outer" soil—the countless microbes and other bits of hidden life that we know so little about, but which impact everything from how our food is grown to our ability to live healthy lives. The authors, David R. Montgomery and Anne Biklé, are married and live in Seattle, Wash. They aren't microbiologists but because of their scientific backgrounds—he is a geologist and she a biologist—they know the value of attacking a topic with empirical evidence.

The result is a book that's a personal memoir-scientific textbook hybrid: they

intermingle their own personal experiences with chapters that take the reader deep inside the science of microbiology, germ theory and agronomy. Their central argument is that by ignoring, and worse, attacking, microbial life in the soil and within our bodies, we've left the land poorer and ourselves sicker. If we change the way we farm, eat and even treat disease, we can take advantage of a hidden world that every day scientists, healthcare professionals, farmers and gardeners are gaining a new appreciation for. But we have a long way to go.

"...our relationship with the hidden half of nature remains modeled on killing it, rather than understanding and fostering its beneficial aspects," write Montgomery and Biklé.

They take the reader through a history of chemical agriculture, providing a summary of how Justus von Liebig's reductionist view of fertility set farming on a path of obsessively focusing on how much fertilizer could be "fed" to a plant, rather than supporting the soil's entire biome.

Montgomery and Biklé give germ theory a similar historical treatment: describing how the development of antibiotics was a blessing and a curse. "Antibiotic" literally means "against life," and that's exactly what these drugs do: kill good as well as bad bacteria. The side effects of such carpet bombing of our biome, along with the problem of overuse, is making these wonder drugs increasingly less effective.

The problem is, it takes time to build up a healthy soil or a resilient digestive tract. As the authors put it: "Who could argue with the use of chemicals that immediately delivered desirable results?"

Some have, and still do, question this quick-fix approach, pointing out that it's not sustainable in the long-term. While slogging through a few of the denser, scientifically-based chapters of this book, I thought of Kristine Nichols' comments on how it was less important to know the minute details of microbiology than it was to figure out what benefits this world can offer. But Montgomery and Biklé provide a good argument for being so detail-oriented. They cite examples of scientific pioneers who were derided by their colleagues when, early in the agrichemical revolution, they expressed concerns about ignoring the soil biome. In the 1930s, Sir Albert Howard was doing dramatic trials that showed microbial life boosted soil fertility. But he couldn't explain the mechanisms that caused this to happen, so he was

dismissed by the scientific and agribusiness community. It wasn't until technologies such as gene sequencing were developed later that the nuanced soil health ideas of people like Howard and the University of Missouri's William Albrecht were confirmed. So it's understandable why Montgomery and Biklé cite study-after-study, old and new. That said, as one who muddled through chemistry and soil science classes in college, I welcomed the book's glossary of terms.

Perhaps the most engaging sections of *The Hidden Half of Nature* are the chapters describing the authors' personal stake in this issue. Biklé and Montgomery present in detail how they used composting, mulching and other methods of building the biotic community to bring their yard's "fixer-upper dirt" to life as a full-fledged garden. Despite their backgrounds in the natural sciences, the power of subterranean biology was a revelation to them. Things take a darker turn in the chapter describing Biklé's cancer diagnosis. After her surgery, she began examining her own diet, which inspired the book's discussion of the biome within our bodies, and how what we eat can impact it, for better or worse.

No surprises here: their research (and personal experience) shows that a diet that's more plant-centered and diverse can produce a healthier "inner soil" which boosts immune systems and wards off chronic disease. There's also evidence that food raised in healthy soil packs a bigger nutritional punch.

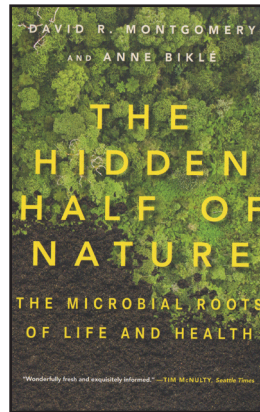
In the end, the authors promote an approach that's pretty straight-forward: whether it be agriculture of healthcare, let's nurture the good organisms so that they can help us fight the bad. That means getting off the chemical treadmill, eating a healthy diet, and dramatically reducing antibiotic use.

And this book makes a much-needed case for the value of "symbiosis": creating an environment where life forms can work as a team, swapping resources and protecting each other from a threat, such as a disease. I've seen this all-for-one, one-for-all mentality in action in places like Burleigh County.

"Over the long run, microbial communities with mutually beneficial checks and balances provide a more stable environment than individual microbes can find on their own," write Montgomery and Biklé.

Or, as they say in the grassroots organizing world: we can do together what we can't do alone. □

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.





### beneath

the horizon,  
10 to the 6<sup>th</sup>  
fungal organisms

in a gram  
of soil, and who  
knows

how many  
of their co-workers —  
protozoa, bacteria,

nematodes —  
next to them  
speckling that

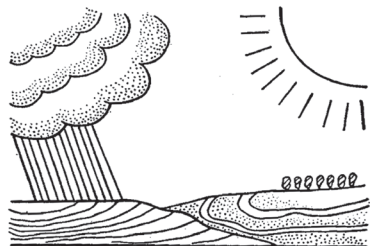
dark  
universe.  
just now

bow to them,  
every one,  
stars in the sequence

of soil, seed,  
simple  
sustenance.

of course,  
in these microbes,  
god.

— Suzanne Swanson



### About the Poet

Land Stewardship Project member Suzanne Swanson grew up in Pipestone, Minn.; both her parents are from families who farmed in northwestern Minnesota. She is the author of *House of Music* and *What Other Worlds: Postpartum Poems*. Swanson is at work on a chapbook about soil, climate, farming and family.

### home, two

where the Minnesota encounters  
the Mississippi their flows remain

separate for a time. even more so  
with the Ohio, blue water trying for miles

to demand its own space against brown, then  
braiding until confluence is complete.

does one river belong  
to you? whose damage do you

claim? tradition says: toss a coin  
into that spot the two currents first

meet, your wish will come true. your  
wish: cover crops, buffer strips, bubble-

curtains, windmills pawing the sky, no pipes  
spitting manure into the river. your wish: none  
of it

left to chance/one coin finding the perfect  
co-ordinates/instead a cross of laws, love,  
money.

— Suzanne Swanson

### Plowing

It might just as well be religion, this repetition:

the Deere throttled to just above an idle, its pistons  
rumbling your hind-end and all the way up through

arms stretched close to full-length on the wheel. Then

hand over hand to the left, straighten her, hand over hand  
left, straighten. You are revved up and settled in

at the same time. And you're plowing a rectangle

that folds into itself. Curve those angles a bit,  
you've got a labyrinth fit for any bull or penitent.  
The rhythm of a litany, a rosary, humble prayer

beads fingered in the everyday conversation between  
the one who works the land and the one who might give:

sun and rain in good-enough proportions.

— Suzanne Swanson



LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

## Membership Update

### Check Your Mailbox for the 2017 Member Survey

By Abby Liesch

While creating the Land Stewardship Project's Long Range Plan for 2014-2019, it became clear to us that we need to grow our membership base to win the changes we seek across the food and farming system. We have a goal of reaching 5,000 household memberships by 2019. Currently, LSP is made up of over 4,000 household memberships. Knowing more about who makes up LSP is important to understanding how we can exercise our power.

Over the course of this year, LSP will be sending all of our members a brief survey along with their membership renewal letter. Please look for it in the mail, or by e-mail, and send it back as soon as you can.

#### Why a Membership Survey?

The work before us is urgent, and the voices of people (and the land) need to be heard. Communicating fast and effectively is critical. Having the most current and complete contact information for our members is necessary for clear communications and swift action. There are new tools that allow us to send messages quickly and electronically to public officials and lawmakers. But the long-held and trusted methods of telephoning, mail, gathering together or meeting

one-on-one with legislators or other decision makers is also critical to our grassroots organizing—now more than ever. This survey will help us learn more about your communications preferences, too.

• • •

*Knowing more about who makes up LSP is important to understanding how we can exercise our power.*

• • •

LSP seeks to help more young farmers get started farming on the land while developing young leaders in our communities and within our campaigns. We also know that it is imperative to nurture the long-term health of the Land Stewardship Project by building our planned giving program. That's why we seek information on our members' ages as well as input from any members who may consider supporting LSP in this deeply committed and generous way.

Over the past few years, LSP has been participating in an increasing number of alliances across the food system and in the broader movement for social, racial and economic justice. LSP members are farmers, nurses, teachers, truck drivers, community bankers, entrepreneurs, doctors, scientists, artists, musicians, parents and so many others who come together to create trans-

formational change. Knowing what you do for work and where you do it will help LSP better identify how to build our power collaboratively.

Again, I hope you will take a few minutes to tell us a little bit about yourself in this survey—it helps a great deal, and informs the work we do together. As a growing organization, our members continue to be the Land Stewardship Project's source of creativity and power.

If you don't want to wait for your renewal letter to fill out the survey, e-mail me at [aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org) and I'll be glad to send it to you early. □

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

### Membership Questions?

If you have questions about the status of your Land Stewardship Project membership, give our Individual Giving and Membership Program a call at 612-722-6377, or send an e-mail to [megans@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:megans@landstewardshipproject.org). □

### The Gift of Stewardship

Gift memberships are a great way to introduce friends and family to the Land Stewardship Project while supporting the organization. When you purchase a gift membership, LSP will send the recipient a special card along with an introductory membership packet.

For more information, contact LSP's Megan Smith at 612-722-6377 or [megans@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:megans@landstewardshipproject.org). You can also purchase gift memberships online at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate). □

## LSP Launches Future Impact Fund

In order to carry out strategic, high-impact initiatives that are important to our membership but not fully funded by grants from foundations or public programs, the Land Stewardship Project has established the **Future Impact Fund**.

The fund will support LSP's work to have a profound impact on the greatest issues we face today—like the health of our very soil, climate change, the protection of our water, the healthcare crisis, access to good food for everyone, and racial and economic justice.

It will help LSP strengthen a progressive populism that advances the voice and will of the people over the agenda of major corporations. Advancing a new narrative, a new story about the love of the land and our belief in each other—that we can make a difference for our children and our children's children—is one of the most powerful actions we can take together. Because by doing so, we will invite more and more people to join us, and take effective action for positive change.

If you have not made a contribution to the Future Impact Fund yet, please consider making a contribution today. We have much to do, and your contribution of \$50, \$250, \$500, \$1,000 or another amount that works for you will go right to work for stewardship and justice on the land.

To make your contribution, you can use the envelope in the center of this *Land Stewardship Letter* to mail in your gift. You may also use LSP's secure website ([www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate)) to make a contribution. When making your gift, please include a note that it is for the **Future Impact Fund**. As always, your gift is fully tax deductible. For more information, contact LSP's Mike McMahon at [mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-722-6377.



# In Memory & in Honor...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gifts made to honor and remember loved ones and friends:

*In Memory of Bill Wilcke*

◆ Helene Murray

*In Memory of Christopher McDonnell*

◆ Carolyn Schultz McDonnell

*In Memory of Harvey Ratzlaff*

◆ Lara Ratzlaff

*In Memory of Herman Bunge*

◆ Diane Fields

*In Memory of Noreen Hampel*

◆ Jenny Winkelman

*In Memory of Dewey Ringham*

◆ Kristen Ringham

*In Memory of Dan Specht*

◆ Mary Damm

*In Memory of Tom Ferson*

◆ Desiree Mueller

*In Memory of Jim & Anne Sims*

◆ Anonymous

*In Memory of Cathy McNeil*

◆ John & Michelle Hedin

*In Memory of Bill & Marion Friedrich*

◆ Amy Frye

*In Honor of George Boody*

◆ Jen Cantine

◆ Steve Anthony

◆ Michael Troutman & Amy Blumenshine

*In Honor of Mark Schultz*

◆ Amy Bartucci

*In Honor of Kate Kluegel*

◆ Mary Menk

*In Honor of Jacalyn Fleming*

◆ Jackie Collier

*In Honor of Sherry Smith*

◆ Francis & Kathleen Schweigert

*In Honor of Hillary Clinton*

◆ Colleen McLean

*In Honor of Jean Silberman & Tom van der Linden*

◆ Joellen Silberman

*In Honor of Madeline Kepner*

◆ Kelley Stange

*In Honor of Miriam Meyers*

◆ Helen Sullinger

*In Honor of Eric Nelson*

◆ Crystal Hegge

*In Honor of Roberta Jortner & Karl Lee*

◆ Janice Mirra

For details on donating to LSP in the name of someone, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or [mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org). Donations can be made online at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate](http://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 to give through the Minnesota Environmental Fund, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For details, contact LSP's Mike McMahon ([mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org)) or Abby Liesch ([aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org)) at 612-722-6377. □



**MINNESOTA**  
*Environmental Fund*

## Volunteer for LSP

A big thank you goes out to the volunteers that help the Land Stewardship Project in all aspects of our work. LSP literally could not fulfill its mission without the hard work of our volunteers. Volunteers help us do everything from stuff envelopes and make telephone calls to enter data and set up logistics for meetings. If you'd like to volunteer in one of our offices, contact:

• **Montevideo, Minnesota:**

Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105,  
[tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org).

• **Lewiston, Minnesota:**

Karen Benson, 507-523-3366,  
[karenb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:karenb@landstewardshipproject.org).

• **Minneapolis, Minnesota:**

Amelia Shoptaugh, 612-722-6377,  
[amelia@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:amelia@landstewardshipproject.org).



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## STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **MARCH 20—LSP ‘Giving Monday’ at Lowbrow Restaurant**, 5:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m., 4244 Nicollet Ave, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: <http://thelowbrowmpls.com>, 612-208-0720

→ **MARCH 20—Nourish Film Series**, West Minnehaha Recreation Center, 685 W. Minnehaha Ave., St. Paul, Minn. Contact: Maryan Abdinur, LSP, 612-806-9845, [mabdinur@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mabdinur@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **MARCH 25—LSP Networking Meeting Connecting Beginning & Retiring Farmers**, southeastern Minn. Contact: Karen Stettler, LSP, 507-523-3366, [stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **MARCH 27—Nourish Film Series**, St. Olaf, 901 Emerson Ave. N., Minneapolis. Contact: Maryan Abdinur, LSP, 612-806-9845, [mabdinur@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mabdinur@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **APRIL 2—LSP Farm Dreams Class, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., Minneapolis.** (see page 25)

→ **APRIL 21—LSP Earth Day Benefit Breakfast**, 7 a.m.-10 a.m., Red Stag Supperclub, Minneapolis. Contact: [www.redstagsupperclub.com](http://www.redstagsupperclub.com), 612-767-7766

→ **APRIL 22—Seward Co-op CSA Fair**, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., 2823 E. Franklin Ave., Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: [www.seward.coop](http://www.seward.coop), 612-338-2465 (see page 24 for information on LSP’s 2017 CSA Farm Directory)

→ **SPRING-SUMMER—2017 LSP Farm Beginnings On-Farm Workshops/Tours** (see page 25 for more on Farm Beginnings)

→ **APRIL 22—Deborah Foutch Earth Day Art Show**, 5 p.m.-9 p.m., Caskets Arts Carriage House, Northeast Minneapolis. Contact: [www.deborahfoutch.com](http://www.deborahfoutch.com)

→ **APRIL 28-29—National Pesticide Forum: Healthy Hives, Healthy Lives, Healthy Land**, Minneapolis. Contact: [www.beyondpesticides.org](http://www.beyondpesticides.org), 202-543-5450

→ **APRIL 29—Minnesota Department of Ag Specialty Crops Grant Deadline.** Contact: Julianne LaClair, MDA, 651-201-6135, [julianne.laclair@state.mn.us](mailto:julianne.laclair@state.mn.us); [www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx)

→ **JUNE 13-14—2017 Midwest Farm Energy Conference**, WCROC, Morris, Minn. Contact: <https://wcroc.cfans.umn.edu>, 320-589-1711

→ **JUNE 24—Glacial Lakes BioBlitz, Glacial Lakes State Park**, Starbuck, Minn. Contact: Robin Moore, LSP, 320-321-5244, [rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **JULY 23—LSP Farm Dreams Class, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., Minneapolis, Minn.** (see page 25)

→ **JULY—LSP Twin Cities Summer Potluck Cookout**, LSP Minneapolis office

Check **Upcoming Events** at [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) for the latest workshops, classes, field days and deadlines.

(details to be announced). Contact: Megan Smith, LSP, 612-722-6377, [megans@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:megans@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **AUG. or SEPT.—LSP Farm Dreams Class** (details to be determined; see page 25)  
 → **AUG. 1—Early Bird Application Deadline for 2017-2018 LSP Farm Beginnings Course** (see page 25)

→ **SEPT. 1—Application Deadline for 2017-2018 LSP Farm Beginnings Course** (see page 25)

→ **FALL—LSP’s Journeyperson Course convenes** (see page 25 for more on Journeyperson)

## Make a Stewardship (Fashion) Statement

Just in time for our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, the Land Stewardship Project has a new t-shirt available. LSP staff member Josh Journey-Heinz has designed a light, comfortable shirt that shows off the wearer’s support of “keeping the land and people together.”

The shirts are “avocado” green, and come in various sizes, with women’s and men’s cuts available. They are ring-spun 100 percent organic cotton and made in the U.S.

The price is \$20, and the shirts are available from our offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377), as well as at LSP events and meetings. Shirts can also be ordered from our online store at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/store](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/store).

