



25 YEARS

*of keeping the land and people together*

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

# Land Stewardship Project's Current Staff & Board



•1982•



LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

•2007•

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*Printing and design of this publication made possible through  
a generous donation from an anonymous donor.*

*Publication design: Jen Clough*

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# 25 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

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Photo by Melissa Driscoll



# Why I Belong to LSP



**Stewardship.** That one word brought me to membership in the Land Stewardship Project.

My passion is an ecological trifecta of sorts: wildlife conservation, clean water and increased biodiversity on the landscape. One belief is that the way to bring about a healthier environment is to focus on the “gated community” strategy: set aside wildlife refuges and conservation areas where development and economic activity in general is banned or at least severely restricted. Indeed, our nation has benefited greatly from our wilderness areas, national parks, wildlife refuges and land retirement programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program.



photo by Jen Clough

However, focusing exclusively on such natural treasures means sacrificing a major hunk of real estate: all the private land where economic activities such as food production take place. Nearly 70 percent of the United States, exclusive of Alaska, is held in private ownership by millions of individuals. Half of this country is cropland, pastureland and rangeland owned and managed by farmers and ranchers and their families, according to the USDA. Nearly 88 percent of the water that falls on our country’s landscape hits private land before it reaches our waterways and underground aquifers. How farmers steward their land has wide-ranging environmental impacts.

With the realization a few years ago that the stewardship of privately owned, working lands holds the key to my environmental goals, I actively sought out a group that promotes my values. That’s what brought me to membership in the Land Stewardship Project. My member interest has turned into board membership.

Through my association with LSP, I’ve come to realize the critical connection between how food is produced, the ecological health of our land and the economic viability of our rural communities. What I have learned is that locally grown food, marketed regionally, can be the basis of vibrant local economies and communities. The freshness of the food, the smaller energy input, the support for rural communities and the chance to keep profits in the communities appeal to me as a conservation-minded citizen.

But making such ideas a part of our food and farming system will not come about by accident. Over the past 25 years, LSP members have acted on the belief that by working from core democratic principles of open discussion and education, we can promote sustainable ways of keeping more people and animals on the land. This can be done with the three-legged stool concept of environment, economy and society in balance. In the future we may be talking about three fields on a farm: one a rotationally-grazed section for livestock,

another field of mixed prairie grasses to be harvested for biofuel, and a third area devoted to a CRP buffer zone where bobolinks nest.

The discussions of what the rural landscape and rural economy will look like in the future need a full, robust democratic process that includes the producers and the consumers. I can’t think of any better organization for nurturing such a process, for providing people from all walks of life—farmers and nonfarmers—a chance to have a connection with the land bonded by a stewardship ethic.

— Charlotte Brooker, Chair, Land Stewardship Project Board of Directors

# Stewardship

The **Mission** of the Land Stewardship Project is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture and to develop sustainable communities.

## LSP's Vision for a Sustainable Society

A stewardship ethic will be the foundation of our society. Rural and urban people will value their interdependence with each other and, whether they live on farms, in rural towns or in urban centers, will value their interdependence with healthy land, water, plants and animals, our rich natural heritage and our tradition of family farms. Individuals will be valued for their differing contributions to society and will feel empowered to contribute.

Revitalized and culturally diverse (racial, gender, age, profession, faith, orientation and heritage) communities will form the basis of rural areas. There will be access for all to goods and services and to opportunities for work, recreation, education, health care, cultural events, worship and civic engagement.

Policy decisions at all levels will be informed by shared visions and will encourage individual responsibility, build community, continuously improve environmental conditions, generate and circulate solar wealth through meaningful work, and fully utilize all talents and abilities within the community. Citizens will participate in democratic institutions and communities will have the right to create sustainable economic development in their communities.

*“Stewardship is a responsibility to nurture a gift of land entrusted to your care for future generations.”*

—LSP Board Member  
Florence Minar

The countryside will have more diverse farms with an increasing number of people on the land. Livestock will be raised on the land by farm families distributed throughout the countryside. Healthy, revitalized rural communities will be set in environments of clean water, clear air and healthy soil as well as community-based food and energy businesses. Urban areas will be contained and fringed with permanently protected farms that provide safe and nutritious food and fiber to the city. A greater

variety of crops and livestock will be produced in ways that support maximum environmental benefits, including biological diversity and wildlife.

Energy will be provided from renewable resources produced in ways that can be sustained for future generations. Conservation, energy efficiency and public transportation will be keystones of community life. There will be more understanding and cooperation between farmers and rural community members and between people in rural and urban areas. Youth will stay or return to rural areas and learn how to farm because they see farming as an opportunity to make a living while caring for the land.

*“Civic engagement means that individuals are afforded opportunities to shape the life and direction of their community. It also means that members of Land Stewardship Project are able to shape the organization through their involvement.”*

—LSP Board Member  
Sister Kathleen Mary Kiemen

*“All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts...The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.”*

—Aldo Leopold, *Round River*

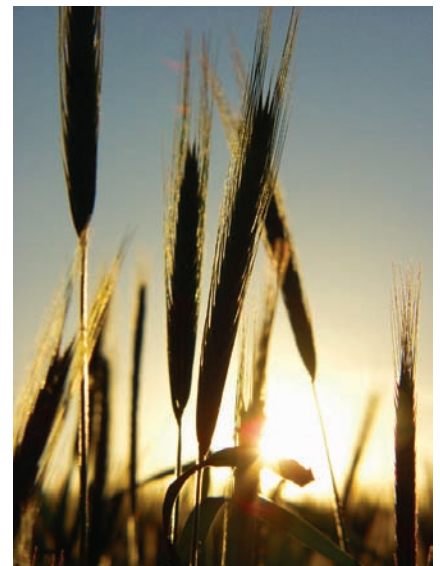


photo by Pat Deninger

# 25 YEARS

*of keeping the land and people together*



Twenty-five years ago a young family farm activist named Ron Kroese teamed up with Victor Ray, a former National Farmers Union vice president, to create a new kind of organization. They called it the “Land Stewardship Project” and envisioned it as a grassroots mechanism for promoting and supporting a land ethic on farms. LSP was created out of a sense of urgency: at the time, the National Agriculture Land Study was showing that severe soil erosion was plaguing many areas. But it became clear early on that the Land Stewardship Project was the kind of group that would not be a short-term crisis-oriented organization—we were in it for the long haul, much like the generations of farm families we work with.

There were government agencies and other nonprofits that focused on preventing and mitigating the damage caused by erosion, but it was felt there was a niche for an organization that focused on the practical, ethical considerations that farmers faced. LSP’s founders were inspired by the writings of Aldo Leopold and Wendell Berry and by religious statements on care for the land. Just as importantly, they were inspired by farmers themselves. Both Kroese and Ray had worked extensively with farm families through the National Farmers Union’s American Farm Project. This initiative consisted of taking 20 to 25 farm couples from around the country, exposing them to the “culture” of agriculture and teaching them how to communicate. It was these families’ emotional attachment to the land, the desire to be good stewards, that most impressed Ray and Kroese. These families not only served as the inspiration for the Land Stewardship Project, but their stewardship ethic helped conjure up the organization’s name.

Eventually, LSP’s staff, board and membership came to realize that if we were to promote a stewardship ethic, we needed to find ways of supporting such an ethic through the marketplace, via policy changes and by utilizing grassroots democracy. We now have offices in the Minnesota communities of Lewiston, Montevideo, White Bear Lake and South Minneapolis. LSP’s work has gained national prominence, and we are having impacts in the halls of Congress and the Minnesota legislature, on college campuses, in the business community and, most importantly, on the land.

But through all the years, LSP has remained committed to the idea that the key to true, long-term land stewardship is people. Hence our mantra: “Keeping the land and people together.” LSP feels that there is a symbiotic relationship tying people to the land and when that relationship is healthy, both the land and the people benefit. That’s why soon after LSP was founded Ron Kroese hired community organizers to put on meetings in southeast Minnesota counties that had extremely high erosion levels. These meetings, which included a blend of literature, music, hard facts and open discussion, helped set the tone for how LSP brings people together to talk about stewardship issues today. It became evident that local communities possess the capacity to generate their own innovative solutions.

This kind of thinking went into the creation of LSP’s Stewardship Farming Program in 1987. Modeled after a similar initiative developed in Nebraska by the Center for Rural Affairs, this three-year program involved 25 farm families who were looking for information on sustainable alternatives. The success of the Stewardship Farming Program at utilizing farmer-to-farmer networking to support and promote environmentally sound, profitable methods of food production helped launch the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota. One evening in 1988 farmers had come to an LSP meeting to hear an official from the Minnesota Extension Service give a talk. Afterwards, it became clear that at the time Extension had little to offer farmers who were looking for alternatives, and that the Stewardship Farming Program was a good model for supporting and fostering sustainable production systems. That very night, the SFA was born. During the past two decades it has grown to a statewide organization and is recognized as one of the leading farmer-to-farmer education groups in the nation.

In the case of SFA, LSP helped plant the seed of an initiative that eventually became a separate, independent organization. We have also done this in other cases—Clean Up the River Environment (CURE) and 1000 Friends of Minnesota, for example. CURE, based in western Minnesota, is working to organize citizens around environmental issues on the watershed level—the Minnesota River, in this case. LSP’s work in preventing farmland from being lost

## **Culture & Agriculture**

*At various times throughout our history, LSP has worked to help promote a dialogue about the land ethic through cultural programs. The play “Planting in the Dust” and the film “Voices of Minnesota Farm Women” are two powerful bookends to our cultural work. LSP’s Dana Jackson shared some of her thoughts on these two programs in the July–Sept. 2005 “Land Stewardship Letter” ([www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-lsL.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-lsL.html)).*



to rampant sprawling development was the impetus behind 1000 Friends, which is now promoting land protection policies at the local and state level.

Walk into any Farm Beginnings class today and you will see LSP's commitment to "keeping the land and people together" in action. Farm Beginnings also has its roots in the Stewardship Farming Program. It was started 10 years ago when a group of farmers in Minnesota's Wabasha County got together and decided to do something about the lack of young producers in their community. LSP initially worked with a staff person from the Minnesota Extension Service to help these farmers create an innovative education/mentoring program. Since that time under LSP's direction it has graduated some 300 people, 60 percent of whom are farming. Farm Beginnings is based on LSP's belief that good things happen when prospective farm families get together with community support. It also helps us further our goal of promoting farming practices that are environmentally and economically sustainable.

LSP's deep roots in community action and land stewardship have also driven our policy and organizing work over the years. We have helped communities fight factory farms and assisted them in developing planning that creates a positive future for the land and its people. Our members have gone to the state capital and Washington, D.C., to advocate for policies that are good for family farmers and rural communities. Sometimes this work has put us at odds with corporate and governmental promoters of a system of agriculture that is based on unlimited commodity production and fewer people on the land. But it has forged stronger connections with farmers and others who are concerned about those impacts on their own operations and the future of farming.

LSP has taken its commitment to bringing grassroots power to reforming government policy to the national level. In 1988 we joined with other groups to create the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (MSAWG). This was the first "Sustainable Agriculture Working Group" in the country, and over the years MSAWG and the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC) have been extremely effective at helping interject grassroots-led changes in conservation programs, among other things.

To be honest, recent trends in agriculture have made it clear we need to work even harder at getting more people connected to the land. Studies show that rural counties with the highest number of acres in corn and soybeans are losing population the fastest. It's become clear to LSP's members in recent years that it's not enough to promote a stewardship ethic—we must also find a way to get farmers rewarded for environmentally sound practices. That means bringing nonfarmers—consumers—into the equation. Keeping the land and people together doesn't just mean keeping farmers on the land. It also means helping all of us—whether we live in Milan, Eagan or Chicago—maintain a connection to the land. You don't have to own 300 acres to be rooted in the land. Forging such a link may mean belonging to a Community Supported Agriculture operation, buying direct from a meat producer, going to the farmers' market, or purchasing a product at the grocery store that carries the Food Alliance seal. The recent trends in community-based food systems are exciting, and have brought us full circle and helped expand the definition of what "keeping the land and people together" really means.

On page five we have presented LSP's mission statement and vision of what our members would like to see our land and communities look like in the future. Later in this publication, we present our long range goals and how we plan on attaining them. Talk (and writing) is cheap, and such statements are only as good as the ideas and actions that back them up. As you look through this publication and learn about our history, our accomplishments, our current work and the land ethic-based philosophy that goes into everything we do, we think you will agree that LSP's future visions and goals are no paper promises or baseless fantasies. They are based on the practical good that can come when people get together and share ideas, wisdom and action.

## A New Generation of Farmers



Two decades ago the Land Stewardship Project launched the Stewardship Farming Program as a way to promote on-farm research and farmer-to-farmer education. This three-year program involved 25 farm families who were looking for information on sustainable alternatives. The farmers learned a lot from that initiative. But LSP took away a valuable lesson as well: truly innovative production systems develop and evolve when farmers learn from other farmers.

That idea served as a seed for one of the most successful beginning farmer education programs in operation today: Farm Beginnings®. Farm Beginnings started in the late 1990s when a group of southeast Minnesota farmers approached LSP with concerns about where the next generation of farmers would come from. These farmers saw a need for a program that would combine classroom instruction and on-farm mentoring. What resulted was an initiative that has its roots in the philosophy that farmers learn new techniques and management systems best by networking with other farmers. The program was initiated with the University of Minnesota Extension Service and the first Farm Beginnings classes began meeting in southeast Minnesota. LSP eventually expanded the program to western Minnesota.

Studies show that one major barrier to adopting “sustainable” farming methods is a lack of information and first-hand knowledge related to such systems. A Northwest Area Foundation study found that farmers adopting alternative production methods were more likely to be successful if they were part of some sort of formal or informal network of like-minded farmers. Another potential barrier to getting started in farming is lack of access to capital. A 2003 survey of farmers, lenders and agricultural educators in Minnesota and Wisconsin found that not having a good business plan was a major impediment to getting financing for alternative enterprises.

That’s where Farm Beginnings comes in. It provides an opportunity for participants to network with established farmers through the classroom and out on the farm. It also provides a solid foundation in basic business planning, goal setting and innovative marketing. In short, Farm Beginnings provides the decision-making tools for beginning and transitioning farmers to get established in enterprises that are environmentally and economically sustainable.

Farm Beginnings classes begin in the fall of each year and meet throughout the winter. Class participants learn goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and low-cost sustainable farming techniques. Participants are encouraged to develop a sustainable business plan that enhances their quality of life/goals, a plan that factors in sound environmental practices while being economically viable. Established farmers and other professionals such as lenders and agricultural business instructors present at the seminars, providing a strong foundation of community resources, networks and contacts for those interested in farming. The highlight of the winter classes is a set of presentations given by beginning farmers outlining their goals and how they plan on achieving them.

At the conclusion of classes, Farm Beginnings moves onto the land itself, where participants take part in a series of on-farm field days during the spring and summer. At these field days, innovative farmers demonstrate firsthand how they raise food and fiber using methods that are economically and environmentally sound. Participants find themselves touring a variety of farms in addition to having a one-on-one experience with a specific farmer. Throughout the 10-month course, participants are encouraged to utilize established farmers as mentors.

“You get these farm magazines all the time that have all this advice for you, and they’re all about doing the same thing,” says Lyle Kruse, a Farm Beginnings graduate who raises crops and livestock in western Minnesota. “Farm Beginnings really gets you to step out of the box and look at things differently.”

In a further effort to help people get launched in their farming careers, Farm Beginnings has partnered with Heifer International to provide a zero interest revolving livestock loan for qualified beginning farmers. The Livestock Loan Program helps farmers build equity while supporting them with a continuing education component that connects them with an adviser. In numerous cases beginning farmers have been able to use their livestock loan to “prime the pump” and show lenders they are worth taking a risk on.



### **Launching a Farming Enterprise**

*When Lisa and Eric Klein showed an interest in farming, they got one piece of advice: take LSP's Farm Beginnings class. In 1998, they took the course and used what they learned to eventually take over Lisa's family operation. Today, the Kleins raise hogs, cattle and chickens using grass-based and natural systems. They direct market to health-conscious consumers and their products are certified as sustainably-raised by Food Alliance Midwest. The Kleins have served on the Farm Beginnings steering committee and they regularly give presentations to the program's classes. They've also served as mentors on three separate occasions to people who have graduated from the course. More on the Kleins is at [www.landstewardship-project.org/fb/profiles/klein.html](http://www.landstewardship-project.org/fb/profiles/klein.html)*





“That was the only way we would have gotten the bank loan,” says Reagan Hulbert, a Farm Beginnings graduate who dairy farms with her husband Kevin. “Once we told the bank about the [revolving livestock] loan, they opened their eyes and said, ‘Aha.’ ”

As Farm Beginnings has gained attention nationally, communities in other states have been expressing the desire for a similar program. That’s why LSP has helped launch Farm Beginnings programs in Illinois, Nebraska and North Dakota. These programs are being adapted to meet the specific needs of those regions. However, the expanded Farm Beginnings courses have at their core the philosophy that has made the program so successful in Minnesota: farmers learn best from each other in a community-based system.

In addition, LSP has been offering special follow-up workshops on the nuts and bolts of taxes, bookkeeping and business planning. Both Farm Beginnings graduates and other farmers have taken advantage of these programs, which help promote the idea that a successful farming operation requires continuing education and networking.

Farm Beginnings has always been about offering farming opportunities to people who may have been shut out in the past. That’s why in 2007 the program began reaching out to new communities such as people of color with a series of on-farm workshops offered in Spanish. We are excited to work with these communities as we keep adding to our diverse mix of future farmers.

As the statistics cited to the right indicate, Farm Beginnings has put up some impressive numbers during its short lifespan. Farm Beginnings is also gaining respect in farm towns. For example, local business leaders such as bankers are presenting at some of the classes—an indication that they see these beginning farmers as valuable assets to the community. And Farm Beginnings graduates are finding that the class has provided them a competitive edge when it comes to seeking credit from lenders or negotiating with landowners. But perhaps the ultimate sign of Farm Beginnings’ success is this: some of its original graduates are now returning to the class to teach the next generation of farmers.



## The Farm Beginnings Story

- During the first 10 years, 304 people (representing 197 families) have completed the Farm Beginnings course in southeast and western Minnesota.
- Over 60 percent of those graduates are farming.
- Farm Beginnings graduates are engaged in a broad spectrum of farming enterprises: beef, dairy, hogs, meat goats, poultry, wholesale vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture, organic grains and specialty products such as flowers.
- Sixty-six percent of the course graduates who are farming say their net farm income has increased since taking Farm Beginnings. The average net farm income increase is \$12,500.
- As of early 2007, 18 livestock loans totaling over \$200,000 had been awarded to Farm Beginnings graduates. Seven loan recipients have paid back the loan money in full, making it possible for other beginning farmers to use the money for the purchase of animals.

**Of the 138 families (from the class of 1998 through the class of 2005) who received the post Farm Beginnings survey, 50 percent responded. It is from these surveys the following information has been tabulated:**

- Ninety-one percent use conservation practices; 57 percent say their use of conservation practices has increased since taking Farm Beginnings.
- Eighty-nine percent use alternative marketing strategies.
- Eighty-six percent market their product locally.
- Ninety-eight percent do financial planning.



# Community Based Food Systems & Economic Development

## Neighbor-to-Neighbor Food

*On the western prairies of Minnesota, the village of Milan (pop. 326) boasts a popular small town grocery store, Bergen's Prairie Market. At a suggestion from a local farmer, proprietor Bergen Standahl began carrying as much locally grown product as possible. One day recently, Bev Struxness, an LSP member and a local cattle producer who supplies the grocery store, stopped in at Bergen's to check the beef inventory. "Even though it's not a huge inventory, it's easy for me to maintain because it's local," explains Bev, who is involved with the Pride of the Prairie local foods initiative. "The partnership between the market and area farmers means more dollars stay in the community." More information on Pride of the Prairie is at [www.prideoftheprairie.org](http://www.prideoftheprairie.org).*



Our industrialized food system has created a gap between farmers and eaters, and that gap has produced negative consequences. Cheap food prices and overflowing store shelves are hiding the true environmental and social costs of our food and agriculture system—rapid erosion and degradation of soil, the chemical contamination and depletion of our water, the loss of genetic diversity, the destruction of wildlife habitat, the loss of family farmers and impoverishment of rural communities.

The good news is that we now have an alternative. A growing number of farmers are choosing to work with nature, and are adopting farming practices that build up the soil, reduce runoff, create habitat for wildlife, treat livestock humanely and best of all, produce safe, wholesome food.

LSP learned early on that being a good stewardship farmer meant little if the operation was not financially viable. Sustainable production methods must be rewarded financially. Farmers using sustainable methods cannot prosper without the help of urban and rural consumers. As these farmers explore creative new ways to market their carefully grown products, consumers can support their choice to farm sustainably by purchasing those products.

"When people make a buying choice they are casting a ballot for the type of food system they want," says Land Stewardship Project member Tom Frantzen, who farms in northeast Iowa. "That sends a tremendously powerful message back to rural America about what sort of farming is valued."

That's why during much of its history, LSP has been working hard to connect farmers and consumers. These connections are helping forge relationships that reward good land stewardship while providing healthy food that keeps economic wealth close to home.

## The Dish on Community Based Food Systems

• Since 1992, LSP has helped support and promote the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model of agriculture, which allows consumers to actually buy

shares in a farm. This model is seen as one of the most effective means for connecting consumers and farmers and putting a face on food. LSP publishes an annual directory for consumers that lists and describes CSA operations serving the Twin Cities region. Although the CSA model is most often associated with metropolitan regions, LSP has helped support the growth of CSA farms in rural areas of the Upper Midwest, providing a chance for consumers from diverse demographic backgrounds to put a face on their food.

• Since the late 1990s, we have published the Stewardship Food Network, a directory that consists of over 100 LSP members who produce sustainably raised food for sale to consumers. It also lists LSP members who retail and process sustainable, locally produced food.

• In 2000, LSP joined forces with Cooperative Development Services to create a sustainable food label. Now known as Food Alliance Midwest (an affiliate of the national Food Alliance) its farms and ranches are third-party certified for using environmentally friendly and socially responsible agricultural practices. During the past five years, Food Alliance Midwest has certified more than 80 producers across Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and the Dakotas. Fifty-five retail stores, 13 college and high school campuses, and 20 corporate campuses in the Upper Midwest offer Food Alliance certified products.

• Pride of the Prairie is a collaborative effort of the Land Stewardship Project, Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, University of Minnesota-Morris, West Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, West Central Research and Outreach Center, Morris Prairie Renaissance, Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance, Pomme de Terre Food Coop, area farmers and the Upper Minnesota River Valley community. It started as a *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Campaign to promote the production and use of locally grown food in the Upper Minnesota River Valley. Pride of the Prairie is developing a regional food system that provides nutritious food, nurtures a healthy environment and provides economic opportunity for area entrepreneurs. The initiative publishes an annual *Locally Grown Foods Guide* that lists not only growers, but also



grocers that carry local food products as well as restaurants and caterers that feature local foods on their menus. The University of Minnesota-Morris and its food vendor Sodexo are Pride of the Prairie collaborators that are striving to use more locally and sustainably grown food for campus meals.

- LSP is organizing a second *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Campaign in the St. Croix River Valley of Minnesota and Wisconsin in collaboration with several other sustainable agriculture and conservation organizations. The goals of this campaign are to expand local markets for growers, increase the consumption of local, healthy food, diversify the economic base, and promote the protection of ecological and scenic resources by reconnecting food systems with ecosystems. Educational, promotional events are designed to broaden public understanding and appreciation for the region's natural resources and motivate people to support environmentally sound land use through their purchases of sustainably-produced local food.



- Over the years, numerous LSP-sponsored local food dinners have highlighted what is grown here in the Upper Midwest and introduced eaters to these delicious foods. These meals are also an opportunity for farmers and consumers to meet face-to-face so they can appreciate each other's role in creating a local, sustainable food system. LSP has developed resources for other community groups that are interested in putting on such meals.

- Since 2000, LSP has organized the Community Food and Farm Festival at the Minnesota Living Green Expo held the first weekend in May. This event has evolved into one of the region's most popular venues for meeting farmers who are direct marketing various kinds of food. During the Festival, farmers are on hand to answer questions about the sustainable

methods they use to produce foods that are safe and delicious.

- Part of our community based food systems work involves getting local institutions such as hospitals to carry fresh, healthy, local food. LSP has recently started working with Health Care Without Harm to connect farmers with healthcare facilities in southeastern and western Minnesota.

- The 2007 Farm Bill, which is currently being debated by Congress and will set U.S. food and farm policy for the next five or six years, is a key opportunity to enact policies that advance community based food systems, among other things. Through the New Farm Initiative, LSP and its allies are working to implement public policies that support community based food systems. LSP believes even a modest public investment will help fuel an economic renaissance in our rural areas by creating opportunities for local entrepreneurs, and by retaining more of the wealth generated by our rich soils, skilled farmers and ranchers, as well as local businesspeople.

- An important focus of LSP's work is to monitor and bring farmers' voices to the table as the USDA's Ag Marketing Service attempts to develop rules for food labels, including grass-fed, no antibiotics or hormones, and free-range. LSP member-farmers and others throughout the nation have worked hard to develop and maintain high standards for the food they produce, and USDA labeling standards must respect the integrity of the relationship between these farmers and their customers. For example, in 2006 the USDA released proposed rules for how grass-fed meat can be labeled. The proposed rules were good for farmers, consumers, livestock and the land, thanks in large part to the input provided by LSP and various other groups.

- LSP sees community based food systems as a potentially critical economic engine in rural communities. As a sign of the credibility the local-foods-as-economic-development idea has attained, in 2006 and 2007 LSP worked with the Winona County Economic Development Authority to put on a "Local Food Forum and Expo" in southeast Minnesota. Also in 2007, U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson, the powerful Chair of the House Agriculture Committee, sponsored a conference on local food systems and rural economic development in western Minnesota. LSP helped plan that conference as well.

# Policy & Organizing



## ***A Stand for Democracy***

*In October 2002, rural residents in Minnesota's Dodge County asked LSP for help after a mega-dairy—at the time it would have been the largest in the state—was proposed for their community. An LSP organizer met with the local residents and provided information on their rights as a township. In the ensuing years, the committed group of citizens conducted research, wrote letters to local newspapers, talked on the telephone, mounted petition drives, took part in court cases and attended lots of meetings. In the end, the citizens defeated the mega-dairy proposal, and their involvement in developing a positive future for their community has led them to take a wider view of food and farming systems as well. Check out the LSP publication, "When a Factory Farm Comes to Town: Protecting Your Township From Unwanted Development", at [www.landstewardship-project.org/pr/06/newsr\\_060921.html](http://www.landstewardship-project.org/pr/06/newsr_060921.html)*

From its inception, the Land Stewardship Project has believed in the power of people to bring about positive changes on the land and in their communities. That's why people-powered democracy has been interlaced with almost every aspect of our work. In the early years, we organized around soil erosion issues using community meetings and cultural events such as the Planting in the Dust play. More recently, LSP members have worked on the local, state and national level to advocate for policies that are good for the land, family farmers, communities and consumers.

As with LSP itself, our citizen organizing started with the soil. One of the earliest examples of how people's passion for the land could translate into positive policy began in the early 1980s. A group of southeast Minnesota residents approached LSP about a situation taking shape in their neighborhood: on a Wabasha County farm 27 years of award-winning conservation measures had been ripped out following the operation's foreclosure by John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company. Soil conservation experts estimated that the farm's erosion rates could increase as much as 40 tons per acre as a result of what John Hancock had allowed to take place.

This wasn't just a localized event—as the economic crisis in agriculture deepened, insurance companies across the country were coming into possession of farms and allowing conservation measures to go by the wayside or to be removed completely. But it was difficult for the public to grasp the extent of this crisis. In 1985, LSP staffer Chuck Thesing helped put a "face" on the problem when he took an aerial photo of the Wabasha County farm owned by John Hancock. When compared to an aerial photo taken just one year before, the contrasts were startling. LSP eventually distributed the "Before" and "After" photos nationally, and the management of farms by insurance companies became a major media story that received coverage in the *Washington Post* and on the CBS *Sunday Morning News* program. This launched LSP's Farmland Investor Accountability Program (FIAP), which focused on the issue of absentee land ownership and conservation.

The bad publicity created by the photos and the news stories forced John Hancock officials to finally meet with the southeast Minnesota farmers who had raised the original concerns. They traveled to the company's towering corporate headquarters in Boston, and talked about what soil

meant to them and their community. At one point during the meeting, dairy farmer Bill McMillin took a handful of topsoil and showed it to the insurance executives. "You know this is what we're talking about," the farmer said.

This meeting, and subsequent organizing on LSP's part, eventually led to changes in the way John Hancock and other insurance companies treated farmland. LSP's insurance campaign stopped a foreclosure of a farm by John Hancock in Iowa, and helped the farm family get their land back. LSP organized throughout the region on this issue, particularly in areas like northwest Missouri where we exposed and changed Mutual Benefit Life's farm management policies and practices. The Land Stewardship Project organized citizens to take direct, effective actions at corporate offices, on courthouse steps and in rural communities throughout the Midwest.

In effect, a campaign that started with a handful of people sitting around a dining room table in southeast Minnesota talking about the fate of one family farm took off into a national campaign that brought about real change. This early example of LSP organizing laid the foundation for all our policy and organizing work today. LSP members are organizing for governmental, societal and corporate change on the local, state and national level. They are fighting factory farms, creating good planning and zoning on the township level, supporting the development of publicly-funded research on sustainable/organic farming systems, working against the corporate control of agriculture, stumping for changes in our food system, and advocating for reforms in federal farm policy that are just and sustainable.

Much has changed since a group of Wabasha County farmers carried prime Minnesota topsoil to a big city skyscraper. But even when LSP's members are walking the halls of Congress, their passion and ideas are still rooted in all those meetings that take place around supper tables, at township halls and during farm field days—wherever citizens who believe in the land and its people gather.

## **25 Years of Policy & Organizing**

- The FIAP campaign pushed insurance companies to reform their policies when it came to management of farms they owned. It also highlighted the problems associated with absentee ownership of farmland.



- In the early 1990s, LSP's Factory Farm Awareness Campaign worked successfully to maintain a strong Minnesota law that prevents corporate ownership of farms.

- LSP was a founding member of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, a coalition of farm and rural organizations from several states that fights for independent livestock farmers and against the spread of corporate factory farms. Through local organizing, LSP and the other member organizations of the Campaign caused a nationwide referendum to be conducted by USDA in the fall of 2000, in which America's hog farmers voted to terminate the mandatory pork checkoff because of that fee's failure to help, or be accountable to, independent hog producers.

The anti-checkoff campaign generated favorable newspaper editorials in everything from *Agri-News* to the *New York Times*. It also produced a tidal wave of grassroots support in rural areas. Incredibly, the hog farmers' vote was thrown out as part of a backroom deal cut between the USDA and the National Pork Producers Council. Today, the pork checkoff remains in operation, despite numerous court decisions supporting the referendum vote. The Supreme Court applied a decision from another case to the hog farmers' case, and kept the checkoff in place. Nonetheless, the checkoff campaign was successful in shining a public spotlight on the failed mandatory pork checkoff. The campaign also effectively questioned the purpose, results and fairness of mandatory commodity checkoffs in general, as well as the commodity organizations that benefit from them. Many hog farmers who joined LSP during that campaign remain as active members today, strengthening LSP's work in various areas.

- In the early 1990s, LSP worked with rural citizens in places like Renville County, Minn., where huge confinement hog operations were being built. LSP-led organizing, research and advocacy eventually led to the nation's first hydrogen sulfide standards related to large-scale livestock operations. That work also helped bring about the establishment of a nationally recognized alternative swine research facility at the West Central Research and Outreach Center.

- LSP has been a major player in promoting and protecting township and community rights. Townships throughout rural Minnesota have instituted planning and zoning ordinances that protect the environment and the future of these communities. Soon after it was published in 1997, the LSP booklet, *When a Factory Farm Comes to Town: Protecting Your Township From Unwanted Development*, was being used in communities throughout the state. An updated second edition that was published in 2006 has been equally as popular.

- LSP's members have long advocated that sustainable family farming is a public good, and therefore research into alternatives that support such a system should be supported with public dollars. In Minnesota, our members have worked to increase funding for the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) as well as the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Environmental and Sustainable Agriculture Program (ESAP).

- In 1988, LSP was a founding member of the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (MSAWG), a network of organizations working for a system of agriculture that is economically profitable, environmentally sound, family-farm based and socially just. MSAWG and the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition interject grassroots sustainable agriculture perspectives into crafting sustainable agriculture initiatives within the USDA. They are also major players in the debate over the periodically renewed federal Farm Bill, annual rural and agricultural budget and appropriations decisions, and broad federal policy and program reform.

- LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee, which is made up of LSP members, has made major strides in reforming national agricultural commodity policy. In 2002, the Conservation Security Program (CSP) was made into law by Congress. This precedent-setting initiative rewards farmers for producing environmental benefits on the land. It had its genesis, among other places, in discussions among members of the Federal Farm Policy Committee in late 1998 and early 1999. Committee members such as the late Dave Serfling developed the outline for how such a program would work, testified before Congress about the need for such a program, and, in the case of Serfling and Greg Koether, actually utilized CSP on their own farms. "Please don't tell the farmers how to farm," Serfling told the Senate Agriculture Committee in 2001. "Just tell us what results you want to see on working land, give us meaningful financial incentives, and we American farmers will not let you down."

- In 2006, over 6,000 people in Minnesota signed a petition calling for reforms in the 2007 Farm Bill. The petition, which was circulated by LSP as part of a national petition drive coordinated by the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, called for full scale implementation of the Conservation Security Program nationwide, commodity policy reform that stops rewarding large-scale grain and livestock operations with cheap grain, and enactment of proactive policies that help develop local food systems and that support beginning farmers. As the debate on the 2007 Farm Bill heats up, LSP members from Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin are making regular trips to Washington, D.C., to advocate for such reforms.



## The Next 25

The Land Stewardship Project is a forward-looking grassroots organization focused on an ethic of stewardship for the land and keeping the land and people together. Aldo Leopold helped us understand that achieving a high level of stewardship does not come out of a narrow utilitarian view or an attitude of restraint in the face of a push for all-out production. The concept of stewardship is much richer. It requires curiosity. It is the implementation of values such as care for future generations and human community. It is the skillful application of sensible business practices in the context of the land. It is embodied in culturally diverse and healthful food made with care from high quality ingredients.

When thinking of the future for the Land Stewardship Project, and of that deep understanding of stewardship and human community, I think of farmers like Brad and Leslea Hodgson. The Hodgsons are Farm Beginnings® graduates who raise grass-based beef near the Root River in southeast Minnesota. They direct market their beef to local, health-conscious consumers. Brad and Leslea are also involved in innovative agricultural policy. For example, because of the environmentally-friendly nature of their operation, they recently qualified for the Conservation Security Program (CSP), meaning they are getting rewarded for farming practices that are punished by traditional commodity programs. Those CSP payments will help the Hodgsons further establish their fledgling grass-based livestock operation on a farm that was frankly pretty worn out when they bought it. And Brad and Leslea have traveled to Washington, D.C., on an LSP-sponsored trip to advocate for a fully funded CSP, as well as initiatives that support beginning farmers such as themselves. They have even hosted a member of Congress on their farm during an LSP tour.

The Hodgsons represent the future for LSP because they are at the nexus of so much of our work: beginning farmer education and support, community based food systems, policy and organizing and leadership development. The Hodgsons are symbolic of how LSP's programs work in tandem to create a truly sustainable food and farming system. People like them inspire us to work more intentionally in the next several years to create synergies in our program activities.

Continuing to underlie LSP's work in the future will be a land ethic and a philosophy that people can work together to make better communities. Such thinking will be critical in coming years as nations, local communities and individuals struggle with difficult decisions concerning the competing requirements of agricultural production, ecosystems, economics and social justice. How we deal with these issues will become even more complicated as societies push for yet another commodity from agriculture: energy. Corn in the United States is being used increasingly for ethanol. Will agriculture provide energy in the future from monoscapes of corn, soybeans, sugarcane and switchgrass, or from diverse landscapes of prairie grasses, forbs, other perennials and annuals using low inputs of chemicals and energy? How will societies balance using their agricultural crops for food and fuel?

Responding to such demands in a sustainable way requires us to create holistic, multifunctional farming and food systems based on the needs, limitations and resources of communities—human and ecological. An agriculture based on a series of isolated components—crops separate from livestock, farmers distanced from consumers, farming separated from culture, and production systems disrupting ecological processes—won't sustain us into the future. The future of food, the land and society requires us to make agriculture and food whole.

In early 2007, LSP chose a new logo. Our old one, which had been designed by former LSP organizer Patrick Moore, had served us well for 25 years. But it was time to update our look. The new logo features a fence and gate, and that's no accident. The presence or absence of a fence can tell a lot about a farm. When fencing is being torn out, it's a sign that operation is probably being switched over to monocropping, or livestock is being separated from the land. When fences are being built on a farm, it usually means diversity is returning to that operation. And an open gate sends an important message about what kind of organization LSP is. We like to think we are opening up a new world of farming—a world that keeps the land and people together.

As we look toward the future, LSP's staff and board, with member input, have developed a long-range plan for the next five years. The first part of that plan, which we've included in this publication, includes goals developed in

### *The Farm as Natural Habitat*

*Over the years, LSP member-farmers Martin and Loretta Jaus have blended agricultural productivity and wildlife habitat restoration by establishing trees, grasses and other perennial plant species on their dairy operation. "If the place is good for wildlife, then we know it's good for us," says Loretta. For more on this kind of farming, check out "The Farm as Natural Habitat", a book edited by LSP's Dana Jackson and featuring several LSP members and staffers, at [www.landstewardship-project.org/programs\\_agroecobook.html#contents](http://www.landstewardship-project.org/programs_agroecobook.html#contents).*



# LSP's Long Range Goals

1992 and updated recently. The plan embodies an integrated and expanded approach to get program results across three broad areas rooted in the foundation of a stewardship ethic. We have identified ways to strengthen and develop enhanced organizational capacity needed to achieve the program results. LSP will rededicate itself to achieving a stewardship ethic and working on economic and social justice issues. The human landscape of our rural areas will change greatly in the next 25 years and LSP will pursue opportunities to develop collaborative efforts with minorities that build community, oppose discrimination, and advance shared values of stewardship, democracy and justice. We enthusiastically look forward to working with you, our members, to make significant progress towards these goals.

— **George Boody, Executive Director, Land Stewardship Project**



## 1 Prosperous, diversified family-sized farms managing for high levels of stewardship **This will require:**

- Integrating quality-of-life issues, profitability, the long-term health of the ecosystem and a healthy food system into farming decisions.
- Developing improved farming approaches that increasingly replace reliance on purchased inputs with management and on-farm biological resources.
- Changing public and corporate policies that currently encourage farms to grow very large and that promote vertical integration and ecologically damaging production systems.
- Farmers joining together to make available food and fiber products through businesses that return value to farmers and rural communities.

## 2 Land Reform in the Upper-Midwest **This will require:**

- More people farming on smaller diverse farms.
- Increasing public understanding of the need for more people on the land to produce safe, nutritious food, renewable energy and environmental benefits.
- Equitable distribution of farmland.
- Transitioning land from retiring and absentee owners to viable family farm businesses.
- Providing access to farmland and education in the principles and practices of sustainable agriculture that will encourage people to stay or return to rural communities.
- Preserving healthy working farmland in metropolitan and rural areas.

## 3 Healthy Communities **This will require:**

- Bringing people together to develop visions, goals and action plans for change to increase the number of people and animals on the land.
- Organizing public support for policies that will help sustainable family farms to thrive and promote regional-scale infrastructures and social networks to capture and increase economic value.
- Supporting the growth of meaningful, well-paying employment opportunities in rural areas, including those based on farming.
- Encouraging understanding, interaction and respect for cultural diversity in terms of race, gender, age, professions, heritage, orientation and faiths.
- Food and energy security based on a higher percentage of locally available and sustainably raised healthful food products and renewable energy and fiber products.

# Program Results to be Achieved in 5 Years

## Land Stewardship Ethic

- Re-connecting culture, land and farming
- Landscape diversification and enhancement

### We will have

inspired a broad public discussion of the values of personal and community responsibility for care of the land. We will also have significantly increased the amount of farmland in watersheds in the Mississippi and Great Lakes basins protected by crop and livestock systems that maintain perennial plants, resource-conserving crop rotations and continuous cover throughout the year.

## Successful Farmers

- Profitable diversified crop/livestock systems that incorporate perennials
- Healthful foods and stewardship of earth

### We will have

assisted new and transitioning farmers and their employees to succeed financially while managing for high levels of stewardship. We will also have increased the availability of community resources to support human and biological diversity, and strengthened the economic and social foundations of rural communities.

## Empowered Citizens

- Public policy for the common good
- Community engagement

### We will have

organized and educated citizens to strengthen their communities, protect their environment and foster rural community development through democratic participation and social action. We will also have led in advancing the design, implementation and protection of public policies that result in multiple environmental and social benefits for society.

## Sustainable Economic Development

- Community-based food systems
- Renewable energy from resource conserving crop rotations

### We will have

developed an abundant supply of sustainably-raised local and ecolabeled products and assisted producers in aggregating supply through businesses that return benefits to farmers and rural communities from processing, marketing and distribution. We will also have educated a critical mass of consumers and institutions to purchase healthful food, renewable energy and fiber products from diversified farms that care for the land.





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## Working for a Land Stewardship Ethic

> Re-Connecting Culture, the Land & Farming  
> Healthy Landscapes

### Successful Farmers

- Profitable Crop/Livestock Farms
  - Healthful Foods & Stewardship of the Land

### Empowered Citizens

- Public Policy for the Common Good
  - Community Engagement

### Sustainable Economic Development

- Community-Based Food Systems
- Renewable Energy from Resource Conserving Crop Rotations & Mixed Perennials

### Who are LSP's members?

*In 1994, the Land Stewardship Project became a membership organization. That meant that for the first time since we were founded in 1982, people could show their support by paying annual membership dues. But this membership-based model is more than a way to generate financial resources for LSP's work. It also provides citizens concerned about family farming, sustainable agriculture, local food and our rural communities an opportunity to get involved with and influence all aspects of our work.*

*As of 2007, LSP has over 2,500 members, and we're growing. But those numbers only tell a fraction of the LSP membership story. Almost since we became a membership organization, LSP has been made up of a relatively balanced mix of farmers, urbanites, suburbanites and rural, non-farm residents. Consistent with our history, farmers and rural residents continue to make up the core of LSP's membership.*

*Our farm members represent a diversity of enterprises: commodity crops, livestock, vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture and specialty products. Our non-farm members also represent a vast range of backgrounds: teachers, mechanics, civil servants, students, professors, scientists, truck drivers, engineers, small business owners, factory workers—you name it.*

*The way our members show their support varies as well. All support us with their annual membership dues and many through additional special donations, monthly or quarterly pledges and generous major gifts. In addition, many also serve on steering committees, volunteer their time, and participate in special events at the local, state and national level.*

*This diverse cross-section of membership and membership involvement has made us tremendously effective as we work to create a food and farming system that benefits all aspects of our society.*

*For more on LSP's membership program, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-joinus.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-joinus.html) or call 651-653-0618.*



# Organizational Capacity Building to be Achieved in Five Years



photos by Jen Clough

## Vision

### We will have

been guided by and grounded in our vision and mission.

## Membership

### We will have

increased our capacity to recruit and retain members and involve them in advancing LSP's vision and engaged new people in the mission of Land Stewardship Project.

## Fundraising

### We will have

raised funds from major donors and other individual giving so that 30 percent of our budget comes from these sources; raised another 20 percent of the budget from fees for services and other non-grant sources; offered planned giving opportunities; and increased our success at seeking grants from national funders.

## Staff and Board

### We will have

increased our rural presence and activities; further developed employment conditions and administrative systems that support and nurture staff while keeping high standards for efficiency and credibility of the organization; and increased the capacity of the board to serve the organization and advance its mission.

## Communications

### We will have

refined our internal communications system so that staff and board are well informed and connected; and expanded an external communications program that presents a compelling picture of LSP's work through public meetings and programs, electronic and paper/publications and frequent coverage by public and commercial media.

# Finances



As the Land Stewardship Project turns 25, we have a solid financial base from which to grow. We plan to raise our unrestricted individual contributions from 23 percent to 30 percent of revenue. We also intend to cover the costs for the service aspects (Farm Beginnings® courses, for example) of our work through fees. Together with other non-grant revenues, contributions and fees will total 50 percent of our revenue per year after five years (see projection below). This past year LSP was honored to accept a generous donation of a farm from the estate of a member who had been deeply involved with our policy and organizing work. LSP's Land Legacy Program is designed to help donors continue their legacy of sustainability by donating land in support of LSP and beginning farmers. The Stewardship Legacy Program accepts other types of planned gifts.

Operating Revenue	FY 05–06	FY 10–11
	Actual	Projected
	<b>\$1,314,748</b>	<b>\$1,650,000</b>
Religious grants	6.8%	5%
Foundations & corporations	52.0%	35%
Government grants	14.0%	10%
Membership/Contributions	23.0%	30%
Fees	1.7%	15%
Other	2.5%	5%

## Expenses by Operational Area Fiscal Year 2006-07

Organizing/Policy	20%
Food Systems	18%
Farm Beginnings®	16%
Multiple Benefits of Agr.	8%
Communication	6%
Membership/Outreach	11%
Fundraising	7%
General Administration	11%
Other	3%

## Statement of Financial Position as of June 30, 2006

<b>Assets</b>	
Cash & Investments	\$189,343
Donated Farm	\$366,400
Grants Receivable	\$414,218
Other	\$85,066
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$1,055,027</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>	<b>\$140,552</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	
Unrestricted	\$79,701
Temporarily Restricted Grants	\$468,374
Temporarily Restricted Farm	\$366,400
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$1,055,027</b>

# Thank You!

As we celebrate 25 years of keeping the land and people together, the Land Stewardship Project would like to take this opportunity to thank our members and donors for their generous support over the years.



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STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

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25  
YEARS  
*of keeping the land and people together*  
1982-2007