The Land Stewardship Letter

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Keeping the Land & People Together

Volume 29 www.landstewardshipproject.org Number 4, 2011

Can farm to school deliver? *(See pages 22-23.)*

Illustration by Anna King

—You Have to See it to Believe it—

—Beginning Farmer Bill—

—Denying the Science of Polluted Water—

—The U of M's New Ag Generation—

—A City Garden Provides Hope—

—The Perennial Mob—

—Gathering, Conversations with the Land—

The Land Stewardship Letter
Keeping the Land & People Together
Vol. 29—Number 4, 2011

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

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Kim Bartmann, Bonnie Haugen, Tex Hawkins, Alan Hoffman, Dennis Johnson, Sr. Kathleen Mary Kiemen, Lou Anne Kling, Sandy Olson-Loy, Florence Minar, Heidi Morlock, Dan Specht, Rhys Williams

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

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

Twin Cities/Policy
821 East 35th St., Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55407;
phone: 612-722-6377; fax: 6474;
e-mail: info@landstewardshipproject.org
George Boody—Executive Director
Mark Schultz—Associate Director/Director of Programs/Policy & Organizing Director
Megan Buckingham, Amber Butcher, Anna Cioffi, Brian DeVore, Steve Ewest, Dana Jackson, Bobby King, Abigail Liesch, Mike McMahon, Ron Rengel, Joe Riemann, Megan Smith, Paul Sobocinski, Adam Warthesen

This newsletter printed by Roscoe Printers, Wanamingo, Minn.

Contents

Commentary !?!?!

LSP proves seeing is believing

By Terry Van Der Pol

The first Minnesota Governor's Pheasant Opener on Oct. 15 was a picture-perfect day in the western part of the state—warm and sunny with a light northwesterly breeze. Governor Mark Dayton, Speaker of the House Kurt Zellers, U.S. Congressman Collin Peterson, as well as hunters and press from across the region were fanning out on public grasslands and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land hunting pheasant in the morning.

Meanwhile, Watson Hunting Camp in the Lac qui Parle watershed was buzzing with activity. Land Stewardship Project staffers Tom Taylor, Rebecca Terk, Johanna Rupprecht, myself and Brian DeVore, along with members Audrey Arner, Richard Handeen and their farm intern Alex Keilty, were making preparations to feed lunch to the hungry hunters. Good food from the region graced the tables: apples, melons, tomatoes, onions and lettuce, as well as beans baked with apple cider and smoked ham hocks. To top it off, grass-fed burgers from Moonstone Farm sizzled on the grills. We worked the chow line and the crowd with the message that good habitat is found not only on public land or parcels enrolled in CRP. Good habitat is also provided by innovative farming practices with deep crop rotations that include perennials and cover.

As if on cue, huge combines rolled across the field to the north and east of the hunting camp, followed closely by stalk choppers flailing the corn stover into small pieces of litter with the rakes, balers and plows not far behind. In the blink of an eye, the 150-acre cornfield could not have provided cover for a single pheasant.

But there was more of this story to tell. After lunch about 20 of us, including local and Twin Cities media, headed a few miles south for a tour of Moonstone Farm, owned and operated by Handeen and Arner. Moonstone is rich with biodiversity and perennial plants that provide profit for the farm's stewards as well as wildlife habitat. The farm was a verdant green island in a sea of gray-black plowed fields. As we walked along a neighboring plowed-up soybean field, Arner kicked a chunk of corn stalk from the previous year over to me.

"What's wrong with this picture?" Arner asked. Answer: there wasn't much biological activity breaking that stalk down and thus feeding organic material to the soil.

LSP served food produced on local, sustainable farms to show hunters that working farmland can help produce good food *and* wildlife habitat. (*LSP photo*)

Arner and Handeen talked to the group about transitioning the family farm from a corn-soybean rotation to a diverse system dominated by perennials. They have made this transition using a combination of innovative government conservation programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program, and market-based strategies (they direct market their beef to eaters in western Minnesota and the Twin Cities).

Harvesting maximum energy from the sun is their principle strategy, and perennial grasses are an effective way to do that. Cattle harvest the grass in a carefully managed rotation. Their dung, urine and saliva replenish the land, while their hooves break material up to feed the livestock living in the soil. Field edges, grass growing in resting paddocks, windbreaks and buffer strips provide rich habitat for all manner of wildlife.

The narrative leading up to the Governor's Pheasant Opener was that two difficult winters took a heavy toll and knocked the pheasant population down 71 percent below its 10-year average.

LSP was there to tell a more nuanced story. With the rush to plant corn and soybeans on every square foot of land brought on by high commodity prices and government policy, Minnesota has lost about 120,000 acres of CRP since 2007. If we want wildlife habitat (as well as healthy soil and clean water), we need more farmers figuring out profitable ways to incorporate perennials and cover into their crop rotation. With better habitat on working farmland, more pheasants would have survived our recent tough winters.

Profitable farming and good wildlife habitat can go hand-in-hand. This is an important message, one that is counter intuitive to many outdoor writers, policy makers and other members of the public.

And that's a key role LSP plays in helping create a new food and farming system: we can present a different narrative than what people are used to hearing and walk the talk that stewardship farming works thanks to members like Arner and Handeen, who so generously open their lives up to the public and journalists on a regular basis.

Saying we need a more diverse agriculture is one thing, showing it in action is another. On this particular October day, we were able to show that for people who enjoy hunting pheasants on a crisp fall morning or just enjoy walking across a grassland watching wildlife, food and policy choices we make really can help create the world we say we want. If places like western Minnesota are to host Pheasant Openers long into the future, we need to support a transition of U.S. agriculture towards farms like Moonstone, both with sound policy and our food dollars. ❒

Terry Van Der Pol directs LSP's Community Based Food Systems program and raises pasture-based beef in western Minnesota. For more on Moonstone Farm, see page 13. To read and listen to news stories covering LSP's efforts to promote working lands conservation during the Minnesota Pheasant Opener, see the ***LSP in the News*** *page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-itn.html.*

Commentary !?!?!

Raising Elijah is everyone's work

By Kamyar Enshayan

At my university, the College of Education has more than 100 years of experience in early childhood education. Key words here are child development, early childhood, infants, toddlers and preschoolers. It is universally understood that the early years are critical in child development, and all of us can enrich these early years to give our kids a strong start.

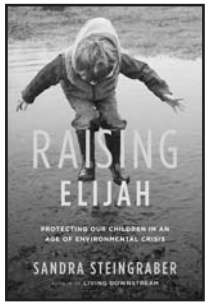
On April 21, the scientific journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* published three studies related to early childhood exposure to common pesticides. Blood and urine samples from 1,000 pregnant women and their babies were analyzed over 10 years. Conclusion: babies exposed to pesticides in the womb have lower IQ scores than unexposed peers by the time they reach school age. Early childhood was compromised, resulting in life-long lower functions and immense costs to society.

Referring to these studies, the *New York Times* quoted pediatrician Philip Landrigan: "When we took lead out of gasoline, we reduced lead poisoning by 90 percent, and we raised the IQ of a whole generation of children by four or five points." He advised that we sharply reduce children's exposure to pesticides through public policy.

Renowned biologist Sandra Steingraber's new book, *Raising Elijah: Protecting Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis*, explores the environmental lives of children through daily family routines such as doing homework, eating pizza and going to the playground. Steingraber thoroughly documents how child development is directly intertwined with our national energy, transportation and agriculture policies. Family stories and environmental health literature are woven together into a highly readable and compelling logic.

One of the recurring themes is the failure of an individualized approach to public health, which is: "surround the kids with brain poisons and enlist mothers and fathers to serve as security detail." In the chapter titled "Homework (and Frontiers of Neurotoxicology)," referring to the studies mentioned above, Steingraber writes, "If organophosphate pesticides are damaging children's brains at background levels of exposure and above, they should be abolished. After decades of dithering, abolition was the decision we ultimately took with lead paint. It worked. Educating parents to prevent the problem on their own did not work."

In the chapter called "The Big Talk," Steingraber discusses the difficulties of talking to our children about climate disruptions caused by burning of coal, oil and natural gas. She recounts her family's close encounter with rabies and discusses a highly effective proactive national system in place to prevent the spread of this disease: "I began to wonder why we don't bring a rabies approach—with its urgent, multi-tiered, take-no-chances, can-do lines of attack—to climate change."



In the face of looming climate disruptions (which are a huge health threat to children), do we stay silent? Steingraber suggests that we could stop acting like Good Germans and start demonstrating to our kids that we are part of the French Resistance. She argues that we can do this at home in ways that are visible to our children (clotheslines, garden, compost pile), as well as by working on public policies that will move us towards massive conservation and renewable energy.

Writes Steingraber:

> "Hanging laundry cannot stop global warming. The process that clotheslines—and reel mowers and compost piles—begin, however, is denormalizing of fossil fuel ways of living. They are daily reminders that we urgently need new choices within new systems. They are harbingers. They signal our eagerness to embrace much bigger changes. They bear witness to our children that we are willing to exert agency, that we are not cynical, that we respect their right to inherit a habitable planet."

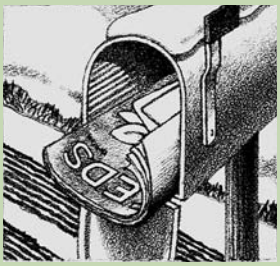
Steingraber refers to the environmental crisis as two crises with a common cause. Disruption of the Earth's atmosphere through accumulation of heat trapping gases, and the accumulation of toxic chemical pollutants in our bodies—both crises are rooted in our economic dependency on fossil energy. "Ultimately the environmental crisis is a parenting crisis. It undermines my ability to carry out my two fundamental duties: to protect my children from harm and to plan for their future," she writes.

Steingraber reminds us that another world is possible, a better one, and that we need to organize, plan and mobilize, possibly on the scale of the Civil Rights movement, and create broad cultural and policy changes that will safeguard the biosphere on which children's lives depend.

When I first read the essay about the land ethic in Aldo Leopold's 1948 *A Sand County Almanac* in college, it put in motion for me a life-long work towards environmental protection and restoration. And now, Sandra Steingraber's *Raising Elijah* offers all of us a new logic, strong evidence and a framework for action as compelling as Aldo Leopold's. ❐

Land Stewardship Project member Kamyar Enshayan is director of the University of Northern Iowa's Center for Energy and Environmental Education in Cedar Falls. He can be reached at kamyar.enshayan@uni.edu. For more on the book Raising Elijah, *see http://steingraber.com/books/raising-elijah.*

What's on your mind?



Got an opinion? Comments? Criticisms?

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

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

Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

➔ *Myth:* Artificial drainage of ag land is a boon to the environment.

➔ *Fact:*

Without artificial, subsurface drainage, millions of acres of farmland would simply be too wet to produce crops. Over the years, farmland drainage has evolved from simply digging open ditches in low spots to a highly sophisticated and effective process for removing water as quickly as possible off the surface of the soil. Today, satellite and laser-guided technology, combined with yield monitors and soil tests, allow farmers to place plastic drainage "tile lines" beneath the soil surface in exactly the spots where they will do the most good.

As a result, yields of row crops such as soybeans and corn have climbed in low-lying areas that previously were considered too soggy to farm. So there's little dispute that subsurface tile drainage has been a huge benefit to crop farming. But in recent years, some within the agricultural community have tried to justify farmland drainage on environmental grounds as well, arguing that it provides a significant overall benefit to the hydrological health of a watershed. The argument is that drainage actually reduces soil erosion, helps remove chemical contaminants and overall improves water quality.

This claim has become particularly contentious in Minnesota, where the Minnesota River dumps huge amounts of sediment into the Mississippi, which has in turn resulted in Lake Pepin—a wide spot in the Mississippi below the Twin Cities—shrinking by several feet a year. Core samples show that Minnesota River sedimentation has doubled since the 1940s, which dovetails with the period of time when row crop agriculture (and tile drainage) rapidly increased in the basin. It also parallels increased stream flow in the river—the amount of water flowing past a Minnesota River monitoring station in Jordan, Minn., has doubled during the past several decades.

In 2010, a University of Minnesota study funded by the Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council and the Minnesota Corn Research and Promotion Council concluded that the role of such agricultural practices such as tile drainage in sending more sediment to the Mississippi River was overblown, and much of the sedimentation was caused by "natural" stream bank erosion that humans had little control over.

It is true tile drainage can cut surface erosion on farm fields by preventing them from becoming saturated with moisture. Saturated fields tend to be more prone to overland runoff, which can carry soil away.

But overall, the ability of farmland drainage to shortcut the natural hydrological cycle is considered a major threat to water quality in the Midwest and beyond. This fall, researchers at the University of Minnesota and the Science Museum of Minnesota released 70 years of data on 21 tributaries in the Lake Pepin basin showing how tile drainage has disrupted the water cycle of the region to a major extent.

It turns out that all that water leaving the field produces a fire hose effect when it gets dumped into a creek or river, tearing away vegetation and the sides of stream banks and creating deep gullies. The study found a correlation between increased water flow in the basin and the amount of tile drainage (as well as soybean plantings). The water flow was particularly strong in May and June, when crops are being planted and winter/spring runoff is being rushed off the land.

Research also shows that tile drainage is a major contributor of nitrate-nitrogen pollution to the Mississippi River watershed. Tile drainage can rush water so quickly off the land that soil and vegetation don't have the opportunity to take up pollutants such as nitrate-nitrogen before they reach rivers and streams.

A U.S. Geological Survey study released in August shows nitrogen flowing into the Mississippi from Minnesota and Wisconsin has increased 76 percent since 1980.

In October, the Natural Resources Conservation Service named loss of nitrogen from cultivated cropland through subsurface flow as the single biggest water quality concern in the U.S. portion of the Great Lakes agricultural drainage.

Is the answer to ban farmland drainage? Obviously not—it would mean giving up some of the most productive cropland in the world. But there are options. Farmers have had success experimenting with controlled drainage—a system that slows water runoff enough to return a little of the naturalness to the hydrological cycle, not only allowing the land to keep more sediment and other contaminants out of waterways, but reducing the fire hose effect at the end of the pipe.

In Iowa, preliminary research shows that using "saturated buffers" to redirect tile lines long enough to allow nitrate-nitrogen to be removed by natural vegetation can be quite effective. In one study, the system removed 100 percent of the nitrate-nitrogen from 60 percent of the field tile flow. "Bioreactors"—buried trenches filled with wood chips that are installed along crop fields—can capture 15 to 60 percent of nitrate in tile-drained water annually.

Finally, as has been reported in the *Land Stewardship Letter* (*No. 2, 2011*), establishing perennial plant systems like prairies and wetlands in key areas on just a small percentage of agricultural watersheds can produce significant water quality benefits without sacrificing large expanses of fertile farmland.

➔ *More information*:

• An abstract of the study examining 70 years of sediment erosion data in the Minnesota River basin is at http://gsa.confex.com/gsa/2011AM/finalprogram/abstract_197265.htm.

• The U.S. Geological Survey study on nitrate-nitrogen pollution in the Mississippi River watershed is at www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2874.

• See page pages 10-13 for more on water quality problems in the Mississippi River basin, and pages 24-27 for details on how cover crops and perennials can improve soil and water quality.

More *Myth Busters*

See the No. 3, 2011 edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for a full listing of previous installments in the *Myth Busters* series. To download copies, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-myth.htm. For paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377.

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

LSP News

LSP featured in *Dream of a Nation* book

The Land Stewardship Project's work with beginning farmers and community building is featured in a new book that was released nationwide this fall. *Dream of a Nation: Inspiring Ideas for a Better America* features writers representing 60 organizations nationwide discussing ways of addressing some of the most pressing economic, social and environmental issues of our time.

The book features stories of groups from across the country working to develop practical, bold solutions. Twelve areas of work are covered:

- Good Government
- A Stable and Equitable Economy
- Citizen Stewardship
- Constructive Media
- Education Innovation
- Re-Powering America
- Improving Health
- Ending Poverty
- Re-Imaging Business
- Strengthening Communities
- Waging Peace
- Realizing Our Full Potential

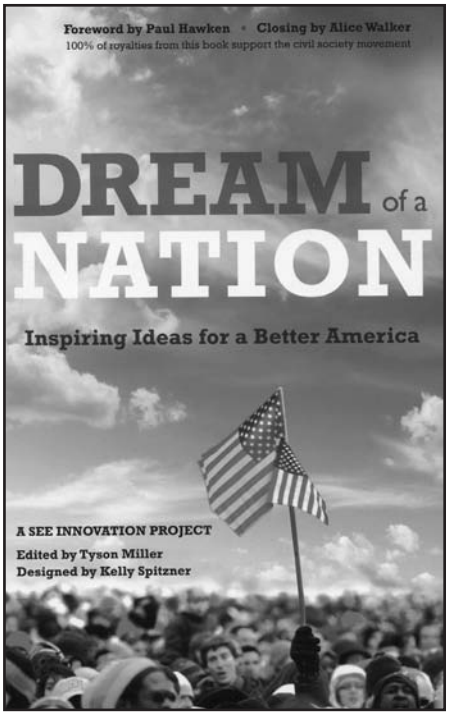
Contributing writers include Francis Moore Lappé, Paul Hawken, Winona LaDuke, Alice Walker, Erika Allen, Amy Goodman and Geoffrey Canada, among others.

Dream of a Nation's "Strengthening Communities" section describes how LSP's Farm Beginnings program (*see pages 14-17*) has over the past 15 years trained hundreds of people interested in sustainable farming methods. It also describes how Farm Beginnings graduates are becoming leaders in their communities on the local, state and national level.

Publishers Weekly calls *Dream of a Nation*: "The perfect blend of text and graphics to spell out what can and should be done to move the country forward. A must read for anyone that wants to be a part of the solution." ❐

Order the book & support LSP

All profits from sales of *Dream of a Nation* go to the contributing organizations, including the Land Stewardship Project. For more information on the book, including details on purchasing a copy, see http://dreamofanation.org.



• • •

An excerpt from LSP's chapter:

"This movement is not just about creating the next generation of livestock producers, CSA farmers and specialty crop growers. It's also about revitalizing rural communities and creating active members of society. With the network in place and a business focused on community, it's not a far leap for these farmers to take on bigger roles in their communities by serving on boards, volunteering and getting involved with local decision-making institutions like townships."

• • •

A sweet sight

Land Stewardship Project member-farmer Randy Anderson (*left*) helped Greg Judy conduct a Brix test to determine the sugar content of grass during a pasture walk in September.

The pasture walk, held near Alexandria, Minn., was part of two days of workshops led by Judy, a Missouri grazier, teacher and author. Over 100 farmers, college students, extension educators and natural resource professionals participated in the workshops.

LSP helped put on the workshops as part of its "profits from perennials" initiative. See pages 24-27 for more on Judy and farming systems based on perennial plant systems. (*LSP photo*)

Buckingham joins LSP staff

Megan Buckingham has joined the Land Stewardship Project staff as an organizer in the Policy and Organizing program.

She has a bachelor's degree in philosophy with a minor in Spanish from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn. Buckingham has worked as the education and events coordinator for Seed Savers Exchange, a program associate for Californians for Pesticide Reform and a program assistant for Pesticide Action Network. She has also been an apprentice on Easy Bean Farm in Milan, Minn.

Megan Buckingham

Buckingham is based in LSP's Twin Cities office and is working on state and federal policy. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or meganb@landstewardshipproject.org. ❒

Butcher & Ewest serve LSP internships

Amber Butcher and **Steve Ewest** are serving internships with the Land Stewardship Project this winter.

Butcher has a bachelor's degree in applied economics with an emphasis in nutrition and marketing management from the University of Minnesota. She has worked as a team leader for the General Store of Minnetonka, a sales representative for Aroma Air Creations and a sales associate for Rottlund Homes. Butcher has also volunteered for Renewing the Countryside and Second Harvest Heartland.

Amber Butcher

During her internship, Butcher is organizing LSP's 7th Annual Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol, which will be held in Saint Paul, Minn., in mid-March.

Ewest has a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Bethel University and a master's degree in geographic information science (GIS) from the University of Denver. He has worked as a GIS technician for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, a stream technician for the Anchorage Parks Foundation and a wildlife technician for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Steve Ewest

During his internship, Ewest is doing GIS work for the Chippewa 10% Project (*see page 27*). ❒

Voices of the land

The Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast showcases the voices of the farmers, eaters, scientists and activists who are working to create a more sustainable food and farming system. We now have over 100 episodes online and have organized our podcasts by category.

To listen in, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org, and click on the **Podcast** link under the **LSP on the Web** heading. ❒

March of the melons

Members of the Ridgeway Community School Garden Club in southeast Minnesota harvested a bumper crop of melons (*top photo*) and squash, among other items, this fall in preparation for a load of compost being delivered by a neighboring dairy farmer.

School neighbor Lea Karlssen (*bottom photo*) showed some of the students her homemade solar food drier recently. Karlssen has been the school's lead gardener since the club was initiated in 2009 as part of the Land Stewardship Project's work to bring locally grown food into the school kitchen. School families took turns throughout the summer caring for the school garden; club leadership now includes several of those families working in collaboration with LSP.

See pages 22-23 for more on the farm to school issue. (*photos by Caroline van Schaik*)

Policy & Organizing

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Opportunity Act introduced in Congress

Key LSP policy objectives are advanced in legislative effort to support smart investments & job creation in rural areas

Legislation that will help the next generation of farmers and ranchers create jobs and other economic activity in rural communities was introduced in the U.S. House and Senate this fall. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act (BFROA) of 2011 is authored by Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN) and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) in the House, and Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) in the Senate.

This legislation is a comprehensive policy approach to helping the next generation of farmers and ranchers take advantage of growing opportunities in agriculture. It includes support for beginning farmer and rancher training programs, beginning farmer lending and savings provisions and conservation incentives for new farmers and ranchers.

Numerous BFROA provisions related to beginning farmer education, access to credit and support of conservation farming methods are major policy objectives of the Land Stewardship Project, says LSP organizer Adam Warthesen (*see sidebar below*).

A central component of the bill is continued backing for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), which supports community-based organizations that offer beginning farmer training.

Bill summary

Minnesota Senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken co-sponsored the Senate bill. In the House, Minnesota Representatives Tim Walz and Betty McCollum are the lead sponsor and a co-sponsor, respectively. This makes Minnesota tops in the nation in terms of the number of members of Congress who are initial supporters of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act.

A full summary of the bill and background information is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_bfroa.html.

Since it was launched in 2009, demand for BFRDP has far outstripped resources available, with hundreds of organizations applying each year. To date 105 organizations and institutions have received support through the BFRDP to work with new farmers. In the past three years the program has provided $54 million to groups in 48 states.

Beginning farmer Katie Felland and her family operate O-Wata-Farm, which produces eggs, apples, pumpkins, berries and popcorn near Owatonna, Minn. In 2008, Felland graduated from Farm Beginnings, an LSP program that trains new farmers in innovative marketing, business planning and management techniques (*see pages 14-17*).

"Networking and connecting to farmers and others through community based programs like Farm Beginnings was invaluable to helping us get started in farming," says Felland, who is 39. "We hope to grow our farm in the future, and getting support and assistance from community groups we know can be effective. That's partly why this legislation makes sense—it provides community-based groups resources to work on local issues new farmers face."

Tyler Benson, who raises crops and cattle near Rushford, Minn., said that a Farm Service Agency beginning farmer loan he received has been key in getting his operation started. Demand for beginning farmer loans has been high. In 2010, nearly 14,000 loans were made or guaranteed by USDA for beginning farmers, representing $1.5 billion in credit.

"Access to capital is a must for beginning farmers," says Benson, who is 26. "These programs are good investments—new farmers are new jobs. They buy products and supplies for their businesses and create economic activity. We need more of that in rural America." ❒

Key provisions in new beginning farmer bill

LSP believes several provisions of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act of 2011 can support beginning farmer education, conservation and access to credit:

1. Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. This program is the flagship initiative in the Act and provides grants to organizations and institutions assisting, mentoring and supporting new farmers and ranchers. The program has been in high demand with community groups across the nation that are using it to assist new farmers. The BFROA increases mandatory funding from $75 million to $125 million over the next five years to help meet the growing demand, and includes a new priority on agricultural rehabilitation and vocational training programs for military veterans.

2. Access to conservation programs for new farmers. Specifically under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Act does two things for conservation. First, it provides a cost-share rate of up to 90 percent for beginning farmers who are putting in conservation practices and structures on their farm or ranch. Secondly, within EQIP and the Conservation Stewardship Program, the new Act would ensure that 10 percent of yearly funds or acres enrolled are reserved for beginning farmers and ranchers. Socially disadvantaged farmers would receive the same preference.

3. Favorable credit options through USDA for beginning farmers and ranchers. These provisions provide low interest operating and ownership loans for beginning farmers. Additionally, a significantly portion of the total credit available to farmers in general is reserved for beginning farmers and ranchers for a select period of time. The Act also creates a new simplified loan category to provide flexible capital through micro-loans, not to exceed $35,000, for beginning farmers and ranchers from 19 to 35 years of age.

4. Incentives for beginning farmers to save. The Act includes a matched savings program that beginning farmers can use to establish a pattern of savings for purchases that enhance or expand their farm or ranch. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Accounts Pilot Program, with $5 million per year or $25 million over five years, would operate in 15 states with partners that could offer these savings accounts to new farmers. New farmers would develop a savings plan; as that plan is being completed they would receive matching funds, typically of a few thousand dollars, that could be used to purchase farm items or leverage additional capital.

Federal budget crisis a major threat to conservation

By Adam Warthesen

As this edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press, U. S. House and Senate Agriculture Committee members were in the process of providing recommendations to the "Super Committee." This is a select joint committee made up of six Republicans and six Democrats from both chambers, and is tasked with cutting $1.2 trillion from the federal budget over the next 10 years.

Agriculture is expected to contribute $23 billion in savings to this deficit reduction effort. Indications are that substantial cuts will be made to commodity, conservation and nutrition programs, among others, and there will be major rewrites in some Farm Bill areas. Many are characterizing this as essentially a truncated Farm Bill reauthorization.

The Land Stewardship Project's Policy and Organizing program has little confidence that this particular process of lawmaking will provide a bill that directs agriculture into a more sustainable and socially just direction.

LSP has consistently maintained that setting agricultural funding levels and policy is best achieved in the framework of the Farm Bill, which provides appropriate consideration as well as public input during deliberations. The Super Committee's attempt to create policy behind closed doors fundamentally undermines a democratic and open process of governance and lawmaking.

The failure of the Super Committee to reach consensus, which would trigger arbitrary across-the-board budget cuts, would leave agriculture generally better off than the alternative. The fact is, the financial security issue our nation faces is as much a revenue crisis as a spending problem. As big banks, huge corporations and Wall Street speculators are given massive bailouts and tailor-made tax shelters, they also are not paying their fair share of taxes. That is the problem that needs to be addressed.

We consider any agriculture policy framework a failure unless it includes:

1. A vigorous and thriving Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). CSP has been a real help for American farmers and our nation's farmlands. It is a blueprint for how farm policy should be fashioned in the future, with a greater emphasis on outcomes and a way to provide farmers the flexibility to produce both food and fiber, along with protection and enhancement of our natural resources. Minnesota garnered more CSP resources than any other state in 2011 ($16.3 million) to maintain and enable good conservation on the land. Over 33,000 farmers across the nation are currently using CSP.

CSP should not be hampered in any way that jeopardizes existing contracts or new enrollments at a level equivalent or greater than we have seen in each of the past three years.

2. Inclusion and codification of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act. Introduced in the U.S. House and Senate (*see page 8*), this bill is the basis for growing the next generation of farmers and ranchers. This is an investment in the people that produce our food and fiber, protect and enhance our natural resources and contribute to the revitalization of our rural as well as urban communities.

3. Curtailment of wasteful and detrimental spending in the commodity and crop insurance titles. Farmland prices and rental rates are shockingly high. There are underlying federal farm policies that either directly or indirectly contribute to this troubling trend. In farm country, we're seeing some of the biggest operators making land grabs, further exacerbating concentration and consolidation in agriculture. Additionally, the past few years we've seen devastating wind and water erosion on our nation's farmland, much of which can be traced to government policies that reward intensive production of row crops.

While many support cutting the commodity title direct payments program in order to contribute significant savings to deficit reduction, it's clear that putting a greater emphasis on using the crop insurance program as a farm subsidy without meaningful changes is unhelpful and unacceptable. Reasonable limits on federally subsidized crop insurance should be explored, as should strengthening and creating more effective conservation compliance. We must not let our land blow or wash away, or be subject to the control of just a few very large operators.

• • •

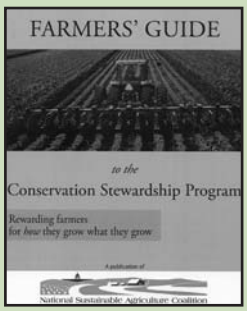
In addition to the three priorities above, LSP supports rural development initiatives that can advance and embolden a local and regional food systems. And lastly, LSP believes any attempt to sever resources for food support and nutrition programs should be opposed vehemently. In this time of economic crisis, individuals with basic food needs must be provided for and we cannot let people go hungry. It is a moral imperative to ensure that those seeking assistance receive nutritious and sustaining food. ❒

Adam Warthesen is an LSP organizer who specializes in federal policy issues. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.

Updated CSP Guide available

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) has released an updated version of its popular *Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program*.

The *Guide* is intended to help family farmers, ranchers and foresters understand the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) enrollment process. In addition, it provides clear information on conservation activities eligible for CSP payments to improve conservation performance and environmental benefits. CSP is a continuous sign-up program, meaning producers can apply to enroll at any time of the year.



The updated *Guide* features real-life examples of farmers who are utilizing CSP, including Land Stewardship Project members Nolan and Vanessa Lenzen.

The *Guide* is available at www.sustainableagriculture.net/publications. Printed copies of the *Guide* can also be purchased. To inquire about ordering printed copies, e-mail NSAC at intern@sustainableagriculture.net or call 202-547-5754.

For a copy of the Land Stewardship Project's latest CSP fact sheet, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/CSPFactSheet1.pdf or call 612-722-6377. To read a profile of a southern Minnesota farm that is using the program, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/Jovaag-CSP-Snapshot.pdf.

Troubled waters remain troubled

A year after the U of M tried to censor a film on farmland pollution, the bad news about the Mississippi watershed isn't going away

EDITOR'S NOTE: A year ago, it was revealed that University of Minnesota officials attempted to stop the release of *Troubled Waters*, a film about agricultural pollution in the Mississippi River watershed and how sustainable farming methods could help solve the problem. The Land Stewardship Project, working with other organizations and the local media, learned that U officials attempted to censor the film because of concerns it would offend industrial agriculture interests in the state. This film was eventually released and the main official responsible for trying to squelch it, Karen Himle, resigned her position as vice-president of University Relations. In the wake of the controversy, Al Levine, the dean of the U's College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, pledged to work with groups like LSP to support research and education related to sustainable and organic agriculture. As far as the subject of the movie—the Mississippi River—is concerned, 2011 has not been a good year in terms of water quality. As the article and Q and A on the following pages show, we have a long ways to go before *Troubled Waters* becomes an historical artifact.

A three-hour drive separates the rolling hills of Minnesota's Douglas County from the front steps of the University of Minnesota's Bell Museum of Natural History. But a year after the controversy over *Troubled Waters*—the Bell's Emmy award-winning film on farmland pollution in the Mississippi River basin—brought words like "dead zone," "hypoxia" and "nitrogen fertilizer" to the attention of the general public, what's happening in places like west-central Minnesota provides an insight into what the future holds for the health of the entire watershed all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

"Douglas County is at the headwaters of the Chippewa," says local Soil and Water Conservation District staffer Jerry Haggenmiller. "So the water here flows all down hill."

Haggenmiller is saying this while leading a summer tour of innovative conservation measures being used on farmland in the region. Several miles south of here the Chippewa flows into the Minnesota River, which then meanders across the state before dumping its load into the Mississippi at Fort Snelling. One of the stops on the tour is a hilly cornfield near the town of Brandon, where a handful of cattail-growing patches—each about the size of a two-car garage—are located in low spots. Buried beneath each spot of rank vegetation is an innovative drainage system that uses pea gravel to filter eroded sediment out of the water before it begins its long journey to the Gulf, a couple thousand miles away.

Later in the day, Haggenmiller and other conservation experts show off numerous other innovations for keeping sediment, nitrogen fertilizer and other contaminants out of the Chippewa, and eventually the Minnesota and Mississippi. Besides alternative drainage systems, on display are sediment basins, grassy waterways, rotational grazing systems and shoreline restoration.

Nutrients flow off a lake into the Chippewa River watershed, which feeds into the Minnesota and eventually the Mississippi. (*LSP photo*)

"We've seen a lot of good examples of taking care of the land," says Jennifer Hoffman of the Chippewa River Watershed Project at the end of the tour. "These are good conservation measures that go above and beyond." (*See page 27 for details on LSP's work in the Chippewa watershed.*)

But a drive around the Chippewa watershed, followed by a trip to the Twin Cities, makes one thing clear: more corn than ever is being grown in Minnesota, mostly at the cost of pasture, hay and other perennial plant systems that can hold soil and contaminants in place.

Indeed, a few days after the Douglas County conservation tour, the USDA announced that Minnesota farmers planted over 8.10 million acres of corn this year, a 5 percent increase from 2010 and the second largest planting behind 2007's 8.40 million acres. Some 90 percent of that corn received applications of nitrogen fertilizer at an average rate of 125 pounds per acre. That's an important statistic, since nitrogen fertilizer making its way to the Gulf of Mexico is a leading cause of the hypoxic "dead zone."

A few weeks after the USDA crops report was released, scientists in the Gulf reported that this summer the dead zone covered an area larger than the state of Connecticut. At 6,765 square miles, this year's dead zone is larger than the five-year average of 6,688 square miles.

In a sense, 2011 has been a microcosm of the struggle to clean up the Mississippi River. A few steps forward: use of innovative farm conservation measures. A few steps back: more acres than ever covered in nitrogen-hungry corn. A few steps forward: point pollution sources such as factories and municipal sewage systems are being identified and controlled. A few steps back: nonpoint sources such as farmland runoff are far outstripping point sources as a problem.

The backward steps are threatening to outpace the forward ones, according to a study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. As corn acreage climbs to record levels in response to demand for ethanol, the overall amount

Troubled Waters, *see page 11…*

Troubled Waters background

In September, *Troubled Waters: A Mississippi River Story* won an Upper Midwest Emmy Award for best documentary. To read more about the film and the controversy, see the Autumn 2010 *Land Stewardship Letter* at www.landstewardshipproject.org/lsl/lspv28n4.pdf.

…Troubled Waters, *from page 10*

of nitrogen fertilizer present in the watershed is bound to go up, according to the *Proceedings* study. Scientists have estimated that nitrogen levels in the Mississippi River basin will need to decrease by 30 percent to 50 percent to shrink the dead zone. But the increase in corn cultivation required to produce 15 billion gallons of ethanol by 2022—one federal goal that's being discussed—would increase the amount of nitrogen in the Gulf by at least 10 percent, concludes the *Proceedings* study.

And an increasing amount of that nitrogen is coming from Minnesota and Wisconsin, says a U.S. Geological Survey study released in August. Nitrogen flowing into the Mississippi from those two states has increased 76 percent since 1980, a major factor in why nitrogen levels in the Gulf have jumped 10 percent during the same period.

The good news is that farmers have reduced their use of nitrogen dramatically over the years, thanks to more precise cropping techniques, among other things. In 2005 the average Minnesota farmer was using as much as 139 pounds of nitrogen per acre, at least 10 pounds more than they use today. But even in years when nitrogen fertilizer use has leveled off or dropped, the hypoxic zone in the Gulf keeps growing.

It turns out Midwestern fields are so saturated with nitrogen, and so much more water is running off them thanks to artificial drainage, that it could take several years to see positive effects downstream. But there's no doubt that replacing annual row crops like corn with perennials like pasture and hay could help reduce nitrogen contamination significantly.

For one thing, such perennial systems aren't reliant on nitrogen fertilizer to thrive. For another, they reduce water runoff significantly, which keeps rivers downstream cleaner. In a multi-year study of southwest Minnesota tile drainage systems, recently retired U of M soil scientist Gyles Randall found that nitrate-nitrogen losses from continuous corn and corn-soybean systems were about 37 times and 35 times higher, respectively, than from land planted to perennial hay crops or grass systems. The study period took place when precipitation levels ranged from 36 percent below normal to 66 percent above normal.

But no matter what the precipitation levels, subsurface tile drainage is sending more water than ever into the Mississippi—the amount of flow past a Minnesota River monitoring station in Jordan, Minn., has doubled during the past several decades.

And that has consequences. This fall, researchers at the University of Minnesota and the Science Museum of Minnesota released 70 years of data on 21 tributaries in the Lake Pepin basin showing how tile drainage has disrupted the hydrological cycle of the region to a major extent. All that water leaving the field via tile lines produces a fire hose effect when it gets dumped into a creek or river, tearing away vegetation and the sides of stream banks and thus creating deep gullies. As a result, Minnesota River sedimentation has doubled since the 1940s.

At loggerheads

Unfortunately, despite all the recent scientific data on the relationship between agriculture and water quality in the Mississippi watershed, little of it is being put to work solving the problem. In a letter this fall announcing his resignation as the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Mississippi River Basin coordinator, Norman Senjem (*see Q and A below*) made it clear that the unwillingness of big ag interests—commodity groups such as the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association in particular—to acknowledge the accepted science and use it to take proactive steps has created a stalling pattern. The result, he wrote, is that not much actual cleaning up of water has been accomplished.

"…we are faced with the same dreary zero-sum-game as ever, pitting the environment against agriculture," wrote Senjem. "If we believe that, we are unlikely to find common ground." ❐

Q & A: Denying the science, derailing the solutions

A water quality expert talks about why solutions to the Mississippi's pollution problems are stalled.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In September, Norman Senjem announced that he was leaving the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), where he had been employed since 1993. During the past seven years, Senjem had been the MPCA's Mississippi River Basin coordinator. In that position, he oversaw research into the source of water quality problems in the watershed, and sought input from farmers, scientists and others on possible solutions. In recent years, Senjem, a former agricultural journalist who has a master's degree in agricultural economics, has been forthright about the role agriculture plays in affecting hydrology and water quality in the Minnesota River, which empties into the Mississippi in the Twin Cities. In particular, he is concerned that sedimentation caused by eroded stream channels is filling Lake Pepin, a wide spot in the Mississippi River, at an accelerated rate. In announcing his resignation from the MPCA, Senjem sent out a letter expressing frustration with how little had been accomplished in cleaning up the basin, and how agricultural commodity groups were unwilling to accept the conclusions of even basic science showing that intensive row crop farming has changed the hydrology of the landscape in a negative way. Senjem recently talked to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about the relationship between water quality and agriculture, and some of the barriers to cleaning up the basin.

LSL: *Tell us a little about the research you coordinated in the upper Mississippi River basin.*

Senjem: As part of this seven-year study, the state of Minnesota invested in three major projects looking at sediment sources. We did everything from study stream banks and ravines on the Minnesota to take core samples to calculate the amount of sediment that was accumulating in Lake Pepin. It was that research that showed 75 percent to 85 percent of the sediment that flows into the Mississippi in the state comes from the Minnesota River. And sedimentation produced by the Minnesota River has doubled since the 1940s. Before 1945, two-thirds of that sediment came from field erosion, and one-third from the Minnesota River's channel itself. From 1945 to the present it has shifted so that those proportions are reversed, where one-third is now from field erosion and two-thirds is from the channel. Research is continuing on how that flip occurred, but it's clear that land-use changes brought about primarily by agriculture in the Minnesota River basin are responsible for more than half of the sediment that's now making its way to Lake Pepin.

LSL: *Any ideas what is causing this flip? One study funded by the Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council and the Minnesota Corn Research and Promotion Council concluded that higher rainfall amounts, natural erosion and dredging, not farming practices, are the major causes of Lake Pepin's increased sedimentation.*

Senjem Q & A, *see page 12…*

Policy & Organizing

…Senjem Q & A, *from page 11*

Senjem: Increased rainfall could not account for all that extra sedimentation we are seeing. Geological scientists seem to think it's a changed hydrology that caused this change and that it was caused by human changes to the landscape, primarily drainage of wetlands and substitution of row crops for perennial vegetation such as prairie, pasture and hay crops. Back in 1945 there were large portions of the Minnesota River that were isolated from the tributaries, and water was allowed to evaporate or soak in. But after the war, ditch draining and the mechanization of agriculture ramped up.

All of those things combined caused a change in the hydrology of the land, and now nearly 100 percent of the land drains into a receiving ditch or tributary today. You have more runoff through the ditch system and the tile system and we've doubled the flow at the monitoring station in Jordan [Minn.]. As a result, we're seeing a lot of stress on the stream system, the river system. All of a sudden you pour more water through the system and there will be impacts, such as more sedimentation.

LSL: *Commodity groups such as the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association argue that tile drainage actually reduces soil erosion by sending water underneath the fields rather than over the surface where it can do damage (*see page 5*).*

Senjem: There's some truth to the argument that tiling reduces erosion in the fields themselves, since more water will be going down through the soil profile, instead of overland. But then on the other side you have more volume of water going into the river where the tile line empties its load. In addition, oftentimes when you get high flows coming out of tile lines you get increased erosion through steep ravines. As I mentioned before, this has become a major source of sedimentation. We also have to consider that even if field erosion is dropping in some places, nitrogen concentration in the Mississippi is one thing that tends to be going up and up and up, which is a major water quality problem.

LSL: *What response was there from commodity groups when these studies came out?*

Senjem: The Minnesota Soybean Association especially, as well as the Minnesota Corn Growers Association, are very reluctant to admit that agriculture has a major role in diminished water quality. The science has made it clear that agriculture actually is the main source. They're trying to find cracks in the science and challenge us on things, which is good. But when you're in the position like I am of solving the problem, and people won't even acknowledge the basic science behind the issue, then it starts to look like stalling tactics.

This aerial photo shows the point at Fort Snelling where the Minnesota River dumps its sediment load into the Mississippi. (*photo courtesy of the Friends of the Mississippi River*)

It wasn't like experts in the field were disagreeing. It was leaders in agriculture who were funding their own studies and then saying the science wasn't settled. We studied this more than any lake or river has been studied in Minnesota. There's a limit to how much the state can afford to study something. Not all of the papers have been published yet, but it's pretty clear that agriculture has modified the hydrology and is the main source of this increased sedimentation.

LSL: *This sounds similar to the debate over global climate change, where industry claims more research is needed, thus delaying any implementation of solutions.*

Senjem: I think there are similarities. Who are you, Joe Citizen, to deny what 97 percent of the scientists says is fact? I'll admit it does sound like an imposing challenge to reduce sediment by 50 percent, for example. But the state has put a priority on this, and we have money through the Clean Water Fund to put in place some solutions. But we never got that far because every time we'd have a meeting, the leaders of the commodity groups would say, "The science isn't settled, we need more research."

I'd like to make a differentiation between the leaders of these commodity groups, and the rank and file farmers they say they are representing. When I took this position, I felt we could energize 10 to 20 percent of the farmers to adopt innovations and bring about some real improvements in water quality. I learned from agricultural journalism that there's a very strong component of farmers out there who are interested in innovation. When I worked for farm magazines like *Farm Industry News* and *The Farmer*, I interviewed a lot of farmers out there who were adjusting their tillage equipment, doing innovative things to keep more residue on the ground, tinkering in their shops. Where there's a will, there's a way.

I grew up on a Dodge County [Minn.] farm and back in the 60s we were adjusting our tillage equipment to help us farm with more residue in the crop fields. We also had a tiling operation, and I recognize that without tiling a good portion of the state wouldn't be suitable for farming. But like anything, it's a question of balance. What if we allowed meanders in some of these tributaries to help slow down water and runoff? What if we increased the diversity of our crop rotations? But [commodity group leaders] are too busy arguing against the science. When people don't budge an inch and you've been working as hard as you can to come up with solutions, and these leaders are the ones the politicians listen to, it gets very frustrating.

LSL: *So there are some solutions out there?*

Senjem: We don't have good crop rotations anymore in places like western Minnesota. Some modest diversification of the landscape would help balance the hydrology. Farming practices that build up more organic matter could help increase the water storage capacity of the land and recycle nutrients, thus helping with the nitrogen and phosphorus runoff problem. But the soil science professionals have focused on looking at applying inputs, and not the soil as a living system.

And there are solutions to this problem of tile line outlets causing major ravine erosion. The Natural Resources Conservation Service can design engineered solutions to this problem.

LSL: *You were outspoken in recent years about the need for agriculture to own up to*

Senjem Q & A, *see page 13…*

…Senjem Q & A, *from page 12*

its role in this problem. Was there pressure on the MPCA to remove you?

Senjem: No. Of course, whenever I was quoted in the media saying agriculture is a major part of the problem there was some cautionary speaking to me, but nothing close to pushing me out. I left voluntarily. The MPCA has a dedicated staff and good leadership, but we all work under the rules that are mandated on the state and federal level. Agencies are limited by policies that are set by politicians who are being influenced by people such as the leaders of commodity groups.

• • •

There is a great reluctance to admit that agriculture has any role in diminished water quality.

• • •

LSL: *So how do we bring about change?*

Senjem: To make it a movement, or an overall trend, you need a bit of a stick. You can see how the 1985 Farm Bill's conservation cross-compliance provisions were a real driver in changes toward conservation tillage systems. The Farm Bill required farming highly eroded lands according to a conservation plan, and it so happened that often conservation tillage was the most practical way to achieve the erosion targets in the plan. All of a sudden there was a real spurt of innovation because of these rules that pushed farmers to utilize conservation tillage systems in order to qualify for commodity payments. And industry got involved as well. I was working for the Case IH implement company's magazine at the time, and I was asked to do a special section on conservation tillage. Other farm equipment manufacturers like John Deere were doing the same thing. It probably wouldn't have happened without the stick of cross compliance.

LSL: *Are you seeing any positive trends as far as water quality?*

Senjem: As I mentioned before, there is less field erosion in the Minnesota River basin. On the local level, concentration in sediment is down two-thirds at one monitoring station in southeast Minnesota. When I was growing up on the farm in the 60s nobody was doing mulch tillage, but now it's quite common, so that's a positive trend. But implement dealers have verified that moldboard plow sales are up in southeast Minnesota. With high commodity prices these days, that slight yield boost you get from moldboard plowing is even more attractive. We've got to hope we don't backslide on some of these positive trends.

LSL: *Speaking of local watersheds, you're recently taken a part-time position with the Zumbro Watershed Partnership in southeast Minnesota.*

Senjem: Over the years, having that MPCA nametag probably didn't help in dealing with farmers, because people associate that right away with regulation. So I'm hoping by working on the watershed level through a non-government organization, I can deal more normally with farmers. One of the farmers on our board is a no-tiller who uses cover crops—a terrific innovator. When we come up with some recommendations for reducing [total maximum daily loads] in the watershed, I'm hoping we can get some farmers on board and get to some reasonable answers, instead of spending all our time arguing about whether there's a problem in the first place. ❒

Working lands & wildlife in western Minnesota

As part of the Minnesota Governor's Pheasant Opener Oct. 15 (*see page 3*), Land Stewardship Project members Audrey Arner and Richard Handeen hosted a public tour of their farm in western Minnesota to showcase how working lands conservation can help game birds and other aspects of the environment.

Arner and Handeen's Moonstone farm is within a mile of the upper Minnesota River, and during the tour they described how they have used managed rotational livestock grazing, plantings of perennials and diversification to make their farm a source of profitable food production and prime wildlife habitat, as well as a source of clean water.

"This is what our farm used to look like," Arner said, pointing to a neighbor's plowed soybean stubble, which was a stark contrast to Moonstone's diverse mix of grass and woody vegetation. "If you were a pheasant, where would you like to be?"

Arner and Handeen make stewardship farming pay by direct marketing beef and other products, allowing consumers to support their environmentally-friendly production systems. The farmers have also taken advantage of government programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program (*see page 9*) to help them establish and maintain environmentally friendly farming systems.

At one point during the tour, Arner and Handeen talked about wildlife habitat they've established on Conservation Reserve Program acres. Pictured here in the vase at Arner's feet are cuttings of some of the species represented in the wildlife planting: hazelnut, high bush cranberry, sea berry and bittersweet planted. They received cost share for the plantings and planting assistance from the Chippewa County Soil and Water Conservation District.

"What you see is a farm that provides economic benefit for us, as well as a positive habitat for wildlife," Handeen said to the tour participants. "We now have a farm that's about as secure in its stability as it can be."

To read a recent *Star Tribune* newspaper article about Moonstone and working lands conservation, see the **LSP in the News** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-itn.html. (*LSP photo*)

Farm Beginnings

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

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

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

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

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

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

For application materials or for more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org, or contact Karen Benson at 507-523-3366; lspse@landstewardshipproject.org. ❐

Greg Rasmussen took the Farm Beginnings course in 2002-2003. He and his wife Nancy now raise sheep, cattle and chickens in southwest Missouri. See page 16 for more on the Rasmussens' operation. (*LSP photo*)

Is farming in your future? Find out at 'Farm Dreams' Jan. 8

Are you trying to figure out if a farming career is right for you? The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program is offering a "Farm Dreams" workshop Jan. 8, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., in the western Minnesota community of Clinton.

This class is the first step toward planning a farming educational path, and is designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether agriculture is for them. This is an opportunity to learn what it takes to start and manage a farm-based business, and to learn about the various resources available for potential farmers.

After participating in this class and getting on-farm training over the growing season, prospective farmers may be ready to enroll in LSP's Farm Beginnings course (*see the article above*).

For more information and to register, contact Nick Olson at nicko@landstewardshipproject.org or 320-269-2105; 320-269-1057. ❐

LSP's 2011-2012 winter workshop schedule set

The Land Stewardship Project has finalized its schedule for this winter's set of farm skills and farm planning workshops. There is a fee for these sessions. Here is the complete schedule:

➔ Dec. 8—**Diversifying Your Operation by Growing 1-5 Acres of Vegetables for Wholesale,** La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: Parker Forsell, 507-523-3366; parker@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ Dec. 13-14—**Planning for Success: An Introduction to Holistic Mgt.,** Twin Cities, Minn.; Contact: Richard Ness, 320-269-2105; rness@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ Feb. 4—**Quality of Life Workshop: Communications Systems for Farming Partners,** Twin Cities, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, 507-523-3366; parker@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ Feb. 7-8—**Planning for Success: An Introduction to Holistic Mgt.,** Twin Cities, Minn.; Contact: Richard Ness, 320-269-2105; rness@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ Feb. 11—**Making $45,000 with Grass-Fed Beef,** St. Charles, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, 507-523-3366; parker@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ March 17—**Making $45,000 with Niche Pork,** St. Charles, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, 507-523-3366; parker@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ March 23—**Making $45,000 with Grass-Based Dairy,** St. Charles, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, 507-523-3366; parker@landstewardshipproject.org.

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

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

Seeking land: Twin Cities area

• Christina and David Bellert are seeking to rent 1 to 10 acres of land in the Twin Cities area as a first step toward starting a farming operation. They would prefer land with a large garden space and some fruit trees or berries. They need a house and would like the land to have outbuildings. Contact: Christina Bellert, 952-938-1924; bell0300@d.umn.edu.

• Adam and Megan Greeson are seeking to rent 2-5 acres of tillable farmland for vegetable production within 60 miles east or northeast of the Twin Cities. They would prefer land that has not been sprayed but will consider all options. Housing and a small outbuilding are desired, but not necessary. Contact: Adam and Megan Greeson, 507-923-6251; megan.greeson@gmail.com.

• Dan Kapernick is seeking to buy 10 to 40 acres of farmland in or near Rice County, near Minnesota's Twin Cities. He would like tillable and forested acres, and does not require a house. Contact: Dan Kapernick, 4133 27th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55406; 651-214-3670; dkapernick@gmail.com.

Organic farm for sale: Twin Cities area

• Marc Cutter has for sale a 37-acre organic vegetable and meat operation near Turtle Lake, Wis., an hour and 15 minute drive from the Twin Cities. The property consists of 22 acres tillable land and has no house. It has a market store building with a walk-in cooler and freezer. There is a greenhouse, high tensile fencing, a pole shed and ponds. The pastures are fenced to permit rotational grazing. The land is not certified organic, but has been in the past, and has not been sprayed in over 20 years. The price is $115,000. Contact: Marc Cutter, 715-491-9381; marccutter@edinarealty.com.

Organic Farmland & Vineyard Available: East Central MN

Jeanne Larson is looking for a partner and/or winemaker for a small organic vineyard on a 200+ acre farm in east central Minnesota's Chisago County. The vineyard is one acre with four varieties of cold-hardy grapes, with 2011 being the first year of production. Approximately 100 acres of the farm are in hay in the third-year transition to organic, and the other 100 acres are woods and former pasture. Use of some portion of the land and outbuildings for farming is available, ideally in exchange for vineyard help. Contact: 612-419-1978; Jeannelarsonglobal@gmail.com.

Farm for sale: SE MN

• Tracie Fogelson has for sale a 14-acre farm in southeast Minnesota's Dodge County, near the town of Hayfield. The property is pastured land with a house (newer furnace and remodeled kitchen), barn and detached garage. It has city water and sewer. The asking price is $119,900. Contact: Tracie Fogelson, 507-254-0920; ezdeals@traciefogelson.com.

Seeking land: Central Minn.

• Joshua Marshall is seeking 100-plus acres of farmland to rent or buy in central Minnesota. He would like tillable, forested and pastured land, and requires a house as well as outbuildings. He will consider a variety of land history situations, including certified organic and conventionally farmed. He is open to a variety of ownership/rental arrangements. Contact: Joshua Marshall, 309-645-1807; josh41276@hotmail.com.

Farms for rent: Western WI

• Daniel and Carol Jean Smith have available for rent 10 acres of certified organic farmland near the western Wisconsin community of Amery. The property has not been sprayed in 23 years and includes 2 to 7 tillable acres, as well as pasture and forest. It has numerous hoop house and greenhouse facilities, as well as sheds. There is also a farmhouse. Amery's Farmers' Market is a short drive away. The price range is $700 to $900, plus security deposit. Contact: Carol Jean Smith, 715-220-2314; godsgarden2@gmail.com.

• Marc Cutter has for rent 20 acres of tillable farmland in western Wisconsin's Polk County. The land has not been sprayed or conventionally farmed in over 25 years and is surrounded by forest; for the past six or seven years grass on the property has been baled. The land is available to rent on shares or $1,000 cash rent per year. Contact: Marc Cutter, 715-491-9381; marccutter@edinarealty.

Seeking land: Northern MO

• Adam Casner is seeking to buy or rent tillable farmland in northern Missouri's Carroll, Ray, Saline, Chariton or Lafayette counties. He does not require a house. Contact: Adam Casner, 816-863-2597.

Seeking land: Southern MN

• Kelsey Fitzgerald is seeking to buy or rent 30 to 40 acres of land in Minnesota's Le Sueur or Blue Earth counties. Fitzgerald would like tillable and forested land that is certified organic or has not been sprayed for at least two years. No house is required. Contact: Kelsey Fitzgerald, 507-304-5371.

• Leonard and Peggy Jacobs are seeking to rent or purchase 30 to 100 acres of land in Minnesota's Scott, Le Sueur, Dakota, Carver or Rice counties. They want to raise grass-based beef and chickens, so would prefer pasture. Perimeter fencing and outbuildings are preferred; they do not require a house. They would prefer land that has not been sprayed for 10 years. Contact: Leonard Jacobs, 612-282-2193; ljacobs@tds.net.

Seeking land: NW WI; UP MI

• Evan Dvorsak and Sarah Costa are seeking to rent or buy 10 acres of tillable farmland in northwest Wisconsin's Ashland or Bayfield county, or in the Marquette area of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. They would like to develop a small market garden/fruit farm and are seeking a long-term rental arrangement, contract for deed or traditional sale. They do not require a house. Contact: Sarah Costa at 715-209-7558; dogsongfarm@gmail.com.

Seeking Land: Wisconsin

Sam Werlein and Kelsey Reimann are seeking to rent or purchase 40 to 120 acres of farmland in Wisconsin's Trempealeau, Buffalo, Jackson, Marathon, La Crosse, Portage or Waupaca counties. They are looking for tillable, forested and pastured acres, and would prefer that the land be certified organic or to have not been sprayed for at least one year. They would like a house, a barn and outbuildings. Contact: Sam Werlein (715-577-3579; swerl226@uwsp.edu) or Kelsey Reimann (715-573-7684; kreim554@uwsp.edu).

Farm Beginnings

Greg & Nancy Rasmussen

The best laid plans...

When it comes to farming, oftentimes things don't work out as planned—and sometimes that's a good thing.

Take for example Greg and Nancy Rasmussen, who on a recent October afternoon are checking on some newly arrived chicks gathered under heat lamps in their barn. When the Rasmussens enrolled in the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course in 2002, they didn't picture this as being part of their chore routine.

"That wasn't what we wanted to do," says Nancy.

What the Rasmussens had planned was to develop a brood cow operation and ease into it so that it could be a going venture by the time their four sons had left home and Greg retired — they are both 62 and he's been a telephone installer for over four decades. They wanted to eventually market calves through conventional channels such as sale barns. And they wanted those cattle to be Herefords, because, after all, "There's nothing prettier than Herefords on grass," says Nancy.

But then they decided that it would take a couple of years to get a beef operation going, so in the meantime, why not raise a few chickens?

"The first year we raised 500 chickens and we sold every one of them," says Nancy. "We were going to stop raising chickens but it was 750 the next year, and on and on until now it's 2,400."

Not that the dream of raising beef cattle on their 65-acre southwest Missouri farm has been dropped. Since they launched their enterprise in 2004, the Rasmussens' Sunny Lane Farm has built up a 20-head cow-calf herd of Polled Herefords, as well as a herd they grass finish. They also have a sheep flock. The animals are raised on rotationally grazed pastures, which *was* part of the plan, by the way.

But when it comes to marketing these animals, well, that hasn't followed a predetermined route either. Sunny Lane direct markets everything these days.

Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

"You should have heard us the first year—we thought, 'We can't do all this,' " says Nancy.

Blame their flexibility on some of the farmers they met while taking Farm Beginnings (*see page 14*). During the winter of 2002-2003, the Rasmussens drove from western Wisconsin where they were living at the time to Rochester, Minn., for twice-a-month classes. The classes were taught by established farmers and other ag professionals from the community, many of whom had taken various circuitous routes to launching successful agricultural enterprises.

The Rasmussens had always wanted to raise beef cattle, but weren't planning on taking on direct marketing or other enterprises. (*LSP photo*)

The Rasmussens say their ability to roll with the punches and take advantage of opportunities is a result of the course's emphasis on business planning and financial goal setting. Neither Greg nor Nancy grew up on farms, but both had worked on the farms of grandparents during summers when they were young.

"We had experience putting up hay, moving cattle and different chore type work, but as far as the planning and business end of it, we didn't have a lot of farm experience that way," says Greg.

What they learned from developing business plans and from being mentored by established farmers was that there was a good market for pasture-raised livestock if they were willing to do the marketing themselves. The Rasmussens worked directly with Eric and Lisa Klein, 1999 Farm Beginnings grads who have built up a thriving direct-to-consumer pork and chicken business over the past decade or so. They enjoyed the work they did with the Kleins on their farm, and wanted to begin an operation of their own.

But once they graduated from the course and started looking around for land in southeast Minnesota, they found it difficult to find anything affordable. They finally found a farm in southwest Missouri for around half the per-acre price of land in Minnesota. Greg got a job with a local telephone company in Missouri, helping seal the deal.

It turns out they landed in a good spot: two regional centers—Springfield (pop. 159,000) and Joplin (pop. 50,000)—are each 45 minutes away. To top it off, they have two meat processors within a 15-minute drive. Conversations with owners of local health food stores made it clear there was a pent-up demand for meat produced using grass and other natural methods.

Along with the chickens, each year the Rasmussens market 20 cattle (individual cuts and quarters and halves) and 30 lambs. They are at farmers' markets three days a week and make deliveries to two health food stores and a restaurant.

"The demand for naturally raised products has been the biggest surprise to me," says Greg, adding that the market is so good they are now looking at renting additional land to graze more animals on. "Down in this area the demand is so high for naturally raised meat that we could probably easily double what we're producing and still sell it."

Right now the farm is covering the expenses of running it, and the ultimate goal is make it a venture

Fresh Faces, *see page 17…*

…Fresh Faces, *from page 16*

that can support the couple long after Greg leaves the telephone business.

"But the problem with raising more livestock now is finding the time," says Greg, adding with a smile, "Maybe that's another incentive to retire."

Adjusting to the region

That kind of confidence is rooted in the knowledge that he and Nancy have dealt with curve balls since starting their farming operation, and pretty much fielded them. The latest challenge has been producing good pasture in this part of Missouri, which is on the Ozark Plateau, west of the Ozark Mountains. It's characterized by poor soils, mild winters and hot summers. Just west of their farm the land is flat, providing ample areas for corn, soybeans and winter wheat. To the hillier east, crop fields give way to pastures dominated by fescue grass, which can be hard to manage.

"We were not used to the Ozarks weather and grasses at all," says Nancy as she and Greg check on their herd of Hereford cows, their red and white coats brilliant in the slanting rays of a late autumn sun. "We were really surprised at how different it is here."

But as the Rasmussens did with their farming career in general, they have dealt with local twists in climate and soil by taking a go slow approach. Soon after moving to the farm they tested the soil and found it was short on nitrogen, prompting them to use seedings of lespedeza (Japanese clover) and red clover to build up the fertility of the pastures. They also received cost-share funds through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program to put in water lines for their rotationally grazed paddocks, thus reducing the amount of walking cattle have to do and cutting soil compaction.

The Rasmussens did not jump right into owning cattle. When they purchased their farm in 2004, it consisted of perimeter fencing, a house and a small barn. Although Greg and Nancy had seen how farmers like the Kleins rotationally grazed in southeast Minnesota, they weren't sure how to execute it in this part of the country.

So, the Rasmussens "started in reverse" as they put it. In 2005 they began custom grazing a neighbor's cattle to get the hang of setting up a grass-based system in this part of Missouri.

"While grazing our neighbor's cattle, we experimented with different paddock designs we would like to use when we got our own cattle," says Nancy. "That was a nice way to do it."

As Farm Beginnings graduates, they qualified to receive a no-interest livestock loan through Heifer International. In 2006 they used the loan to launch their own herd with 15 heifers.

Give it a listen

To listen to a Land Stewardship Project podcast featuring Greg Rasmussen talking about his and Nancy's farming operation, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=2. It's episode 110.

What they learned from their "practice" grazing was that in this part of Missouri, when the spring flush of grass comes, it comes on strong enough that it can be hard to keep up with. That's why the Rasmussens utilize a form of "mob grazing"—putting lots of animals in a small area for a short amount of time (*see pages 24-25 for more on mob grazing*). The farmers also learned how to deal with fescue, which, if managed properly, they've found to be a good forage that's quite drought tolerant.

Learning the ropes of Ozark pastures has paid off. This year the region experienced a severe drought. Greg shows a photo of their pastures taken in August—the grasses were yellow with dormancy, offering a stark contrast to the green trees in the background. But by October, rain had helped the pastures come back to life. The Rasmussens had to start supplementing the pasture grasses with hay earlier than normal this year, but felt their paddocks weathered the drought well.

A neighbor of the Rasmussens, Keygan Brunner, helps them with livestock chores a few days a week. (*LSP photo*)

In fact, grass-based livestock production in this part of the country held a pleasant surprise for the couple: they can graze from April to January, providing roughly three extra months of pasturing compared to places like Minnesota.

But as a dried out pond next to the barn indicates, farming can still be a challenge in this region. The Rasmussens recently received a USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant to catch rainwater off a barn overhang and pipe it to the pond a couple hundred feet away. They plan to eventually use a solar pump to deliver water to the cattle on a side of the pond where rocky ground prevented putting in water lines.

While the Rasmussens check on their market cattle that are being grazed in paddocks laid out in narrow, neat strips, Keygan Brunner, a quiet high school sophomore, walks over from his family's homestead, which shares a fence with Sunny Lane Farm. During the week, Brunner helps with livestock chores to earn a little extra pocket change and because, as he puts it, "I like working with livestock." As the teenager tends to the cattle and chickens, the Rasmussens talk about how Farm Beginnings prepared them for participating in a farming community in another surprising way: they've seen the importance of reaching out to other new farmers.

Greg and Nancy have spoken to beginning farmer classes put on by the University of Missouri, and Nancy talked one area farmers' market into being a year-round venue with the argument, "If they can do it in Rochester, Minnesota, why not here?" In September, Nancy was named Ag Woman of the Year at the Missouri Women in Ag conference, and in July the Rasmussens were on the cover of *Missouri Farmer Today*.

When telling their story to other beginning and wannabe farmers, the Rasmussens are giving back a little of what they gained from hearing farmers speak at the Farm Beginnings classes in Minnesota.

"They told you the good things and the bad things," says Greg of the class presentations. "Because things don't always go smoothly."

Or, as he and Nancy have discovered, "as planned." ❐

More *Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming* profiles

To read more Farm Beginnings profiles, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html.

Hope for a healthy food system

LSP teams up with a community garden in Minneapolis

By Anna Cioffi

The Land Stewardship Project and Hope Community in Minneapolis have come together to create a project called "Growing Neighborhood Access to Healthy Food." Why has an organization known for its rural organizing teamed up with an urban community group? Because a truly sustainable food and farming system requires that everyone have access to healthy, affordable food.

LSP's relationship with Hope Community started in 2009 through the mutual goals of leadership development, community building and organizing. In the long term, we want to build community power and capacity to shape a strong neighborhood-scale system that ensures reliable, affordable and equitable access to healthy food in the community where the garden is located.

Hope Community is a place-based community development organization that is entrenched in the Phillips Neighborhood, one of the most economically challenged and diverse neighborhoods in Minneapolis. Hope provides 173 units of affordable housing that is home to some 400 people. It approaches its core mission by developing affordable housing and public spaces that include a community center, playgrounds and gardens. Extensive community engagement involves hundreds of youth, adults and families each year in learning, leadership and community opportunities.

According to the U.S. Census, the Phillips Neighborhood is made up of 20,000 residents, and 70 percent of them are people of color, compared to 35 percent in the metro area as a whole. Demographically, economically and socially, Hope residents and the participants in Hope's Community Engagement work reflect the Phillips neighborhood: primarily low-income, working families, racially and ethnically diverse, primarily renters, and many new immigrants and refugees. The median annual household income for families of three or more people living at Hope is $17,700.

Racial justice focus

Historically, LSP's work has focused on engaging farmers and rural residents and building the power of rural communities that have been disenfranchised from the political process. A portion of this organizing has focused on ending the racial disparities that are at the core of what is broken in our food and farming system. In the past few years, LSP has deepened its focus on racial equity through an organization-wide strategy that includes working in alliance with leaders and communities of color that are building a just and sustainable food and farm system. As part of these efforts, we have begun engaging LSP members in speaking out and acting for racial equity in their rural and urban communities.

LSP board member Rhys Williams (*right*) oversaw a recent work day at Hope Garden involving the Franklin Library's 4-H Mentoring Club. (*LSP photo*)

LSP's work with Hope Community is a natural fit for this work, and gardening and other food-related activities are an excellent way to engage people around their interests. LSP and Hope together have transformed what had been an almost abandoned piece of dirt into a community garden with 21 gardeners and a large communal plot to grow melons, squash, corn and other large crops. Almost all of Hope's gardeners are brand new to gardening. Under the tutelage of LSP board member and master gardener Rhys Williams, many Hope gardeners have been able to save money on their food bill this summer and fall while learning valuable skills such as how to turn garden waste into fertile soil.

Although Hope residents have said that having the garden has provided them with more fresh, organic produce, as well as an opportunity to get away from the stress of daily life, the garden has not been entirely idyllic. Some of the challenges are similar to ones faced by all gardeners, such as the destruction of crops by squirrels. But there has also been a lot of damage done by children taking and throwing produce. There has been occasional theft of ripe produce, which has caused a lot of discouragement in the garden. We're currently looking at community-based solutions to these problems, and ways to inform and educate neighbors about the garden.

Looking to the future

On Sept. 24-25, four Hope gardeners attended Growing Power's Training Weekend at the Women's Environmental Institute in North Branch, Minn. They learned beginning and advanced gardening skills that resonate with Growing Power's mission of "inspiring communities to build sustainable food systems that are equitable and ecologically sound, creating a just world, one food-secure community at a time."

After returning from the Growing Power weekend, these four Hope gardeners came together for a community dinner and dialogue to talk about winter plans and the future of the community garden. Some winter ideas that gardeners are excited about are composting with worms (vermiculture), indoor seed planting for the spring, cooking classes and a local foods-centered movie/discussion series. Through all of this, our focus will continue to be on food justice and access for all. ❒

Anna Cioffi is a Land Stewardship Project organizer working on urban food and farming systems. She can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or annac@landstewardshipproject.org.

A systems approach

The U of M's Markhart talks about developing the next generation of farmers, eaters & decision makers

EDITOR'S NOTE: A decade ago, the University of Minnesota's College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences was reporting that virtually none of its graduates were seeking careers as farmers. That trend seems to be changing, thanks in part to people like Bud Markhart. Markhart, a professor of horticultural science at the U of M, has spent over three decades studying and teaching about fruit and vegetable production. He was trained as a biochemist and plant physiologist and spent his early academic career doing basic research. However, during the 1990s Markhart turned his attention to researching and teaching about organic farming systems. Since then, he's done cutting edge research on cold-resistant tomatoes, was instrumental in launching a student-run farm at the U of M, has developed and taught courses on organic agriculture and the role it plays in society and become the "Sustainable Gardener" columnist for *Northern Gardener Magazine*, which is published by the Minnesota State Horticultural Society. He is currently involved in developing an organic agriculture major at the University and regularly gives a talk called, "Can Organic Ag Save the World?" Markhart recently talked to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about taking a systems approach to agriculture, the increased interest in farming and local food systems on the part of U of M students, and ways that local communities can support this new generation of farmers. Here is an excerpt of Markhart's comments.

A systems approach

"I realized through conversations with people like LSP's Dana Jackson that organics is not just substituting one input for another—it was really a new way of looking at a farm. It was not just the organic solution to this conventional chemical. And part of that goes back to a quote I came across related to when the word 'organic' was first used in the literature to describe agriculture—it described the farm as essentially an organism where all parts have to work together, and that to me is a really useful model in viewing what a healthy farm system is like."

His class

"I now teach a course called, 'Organic Food: How to Grow it. Where to buy it. Can it feed the world?' I teach it on the Minneapolis campus with the goal of attracting students that are outside of horticulture and outside of the traditional Saint Paul campus. I get students from all over the University and from different majors, and that's really an exciting classroom experience. I think we've had a lot of students that are coming to the class because of interest in either social justice, or economic justice, or the cultural sociology aspects of food systems."

The student certified organic farm

"Cornercopia Farm started in 2004 with a few students who were concerned that we didn't have any place on campus to grow food. So they went to MISA, the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, and asked if there were a way that MISA could arrange some land to start growing food. It started with just a few students under the leadership of Courtney Tchida. It has slowly grown from a couple hundred square feet to now three acres of land.

"And we have a class that's part of our organic curriculum that's called the 'Student Organic Farm: Planning, Growing and Marketing' class. That's a spring class where the students meet and we start figuring out how to apply these organic principles they've learned in other courses to a specific site, in this case the student farm. What I hope happens with the student farm is it becomes more integrated into the learning experiences of the campus. I'd really like to see the college embrace it as a college program."

Bud Markhart

Connecting with farmers

"The new generation of professors need to be open minded enough to learn from the farmers, because there are some really creative, terrific problem-solvers out there. I just hope the University looks at them as a resource as much as possible. We need to look not only at the organic production systems farmers are using, but the cultural differences. I'm on the board of directors of the Minnesota Food Association, which has an Immigrant Farmer program, and I've worked closely with Dream of Wild Health [the Native American farm program], so I have a lot of experience with our diverse immigrant farming population. These new immigrants have so much knowledge to bring to agriculture with their varieties and techniques that you know we can learn from them as much as we can teach them.

"And we also need to learn from the diverse populations in our cities and our rural communities and see them as resources, not just problems to be solved. The University has had this approach oftentimes where we'll go into a community, identify the problem and say, 'Here's the solution,' rather than working with the community to learn from them and look at them as a source of knowledge."

Increased student interest in sustainable & local ag

"It's been one of the biggest transformations in our student population I've seen since I've been here. We went through a period when I first came here where we had an active vegetable production faculty. When those faculty members retired or left the University, they were not replaced. So there was a real decrease in the food production part of our faculty and an increased emphasis on the landscaping industry. Now it's come back the other way. Over half of our students in horticulture now express an interest in organic farming and local foods in general, one way or another. That's as majors. And then we have a plethora of students who want to do a minor in this area."

Urban ag policy

"What are the policies that get in the way of local food production on urban lots? What do we do for soil remediation in places where there's been contamination? How much local food do we want?

"Those are cultural, governmental kinds of questions that are critical for us to start answering. The people who are going to be developing and answering those questions are the students now that are coming through this program and are studying at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs and the Carlson School of Management at the U. Hopefully they'll be the ones influencing the Metropolitan Council to think more than just about sewer systems and high density housing, but thinking about the land for food production and where we're going to preserve it.

"We've made conscious decisions on the government level to support bike paths and open space and parks. I'm hoping we get to

Markhart, *see page 20…*

…Markhart, *from page 19*

the point where the government plays a role in securing land for a healthy food system. I'm not convinced the marketplace is going to be able to do that, just like the marketplace wouldn't build bike paths and the marketplace wouldn't preserve parks."

A new organic major

"One of the things we're in the middle of developing right now is a new major for the college with the working title of, 'Organic Food Systems: Local to Global.' To me, that offers a tremendously exciting possibility to offer a lot of experiential learning so from the word go students are out in the community, on the farm, working on the student farm, getting their hands dirty, not only in the soil but in all aspects of the food system."

Can organic ag save the world?

"What I want to do in that talk is look beyond just the food production benefits of organic production, because we focus so much on that. What I want to look at are other aspects of a production system and its benefits to the world. And so what I look at is fossil fuel use, soil health and carbon sequestration on organic farms. Choose your environmental concern, and look at how organic production systems can help.

"And the last one that I emphasize in this talk, because I think it's really important, is the social justice aspects of our food system in terms of the farmer. It breaks my heart to hear the stories of increased Parkinson's disease, decreased sperm counts, decreased fertility in women in rural parts of our country, diseases related to the farming practices used. Is our production system inhumane for the farmers and farm families, the children of the farmers who are suffering because of the way we vote with our food dollar?"

Organic ag as a public good

"Hopefully there will be an awareness that research and teaching in this area is a public good worth supporting. If we were to look at how many billions of dollars have been invested in the land grant research that's gone into developing our industrial agricultural model — let's just take a fraction of a percent of that and invest it in organic research. Organic 15-20 years from now is not going to be the same as it is now. It's going to take new science, new understanding, new research, new knowledge in order to make these systems more profitable. And I use that term profitable not just in terms of yield, but in that big picture of sustainable.

"It's not something where we flip the switch and we go from one to the other, but we've got the opportunity to make those changes over time, and I'm hoping that our students are going to be part of making those changes." ❐

Give it a listen

To listen to a Land Stewardship Project podcast featuring Bud Markhart, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html. It's episode 109.

A spark of life on Main Street

Residents of one Minnesota community are hoping an old diner can serve as an epicenter for a new era of local food & farming

When a business closes in a rural community, the following 24 months or so are key. Whether it be a farm, small town grocery or repair shop, if the real estate it occupied is still lacking a day-to-day human presence a year or two down the road, it sends a troubling message about the future not only of that particular enterprise, but the community as a whole. That's why the mayor of one western Minnesota community is so anxious to see her town's diner full of clattering cups and lively chatter again.

"It is my home," Shirley Finberg says emphatically on a recent afternoon in October, referring to the Big Stone County community of Clinton (pop. 449). She is saying this while sitting in the booth of the Clinton Kitchen, a narrow space on Main Street wedged between a 24-hour fitness center and a long-abandoned pool hall. With the exception of a two-year break a while back, the energetic Finberg, who is 74, has been the mayor of Clinton since 1990. She moved here from nearby Ortonville in 1963.

One of the main issues on Finberg's mind these days is how to keep the Clinton Kitchen from becoming a twin of the wrecked pool hall next door. The Kitchen, located in the town's historic Masonic Temple Building, has housed various cafes over the decades. The last restaurant to operate in the space, Joanie's Kitchen, closed Dec. 31, 2010.

A few years ago, the City of Clinton acquired the Masonic building, as well as the old pool hall next door, and had been renting the restaurant space to the operators of Joanie's. Being a property owner is not ideal for a small town like Clinton, but sometimes it's the only way to keep real estate from becoming an abandoned eyesore.

In fact, one of Finberg's current headaches is figuring out how to come up with enough money to demolish the old pool hall — a peek through its front window makes it clear this building is beyond saving. The ceiling has collapsed and the floors and walls are dilapidated. An outside brick wall facing an open lot next door is in such a shaky state that plans to locate a farmers' market next to the building were abandoned for safety reasons.

That's why Finberg is so excited about efforts on the part of a group of committed citizens to inject new life into Clinton Kitchen. In April, the Land Stewardship Project began leasing the old restaurant space and started hosting discussions on how Clinton Kitchen could serve as a hub for sustainable economic development. These discussions have been led by the Big Stone Local Foods Group, which is made up of farmers, business owners and others who feel the production and consumption of local food could be a cornerstone of a thriving Main Street.

LSP and the Big Stone Local Foods Group are looking at using the Clinton Kitchen as a location for doing everything from cooking and processing local food to serving community meals that are healthy and sourced from area farmers.

Big Stone County has been officially designated a "food desert" by the USDA because residents on average have to travel several miles to get to a grocery store. In fact, a lot of food is produced in the area under the radar, according to Rebecca Terk, an LSP organizer working with the Local Foods Group. Big Stone Lake is the headwaters of the Minnesota River, and the micro-climate produced by this body of water once provided ample protection for numerous apple

Kitchen, *see page 21…*

…Kitchen, *from page 20*

orchards in the county. In addition, cannery crops like sweet corn and peas were a major presence here years ago.

"There's a huge amount of food that is produced in this area, whether it be through home gardens, market gardens, truck gardens, a few orchard trees, or whatever," says Terk.

A lot of that food is shared amongst friends, neighbors and relatives in transactions where little or no money is exchanged. In effect, such an informal distribution network provides a significant source of food security for low income residents and people on fixed incomes such as the elderly.

The bad news is that newer residents to a place like Big Stone County usually don't have access to this insular network, which is characterized by older people teaching younger ones the skills of raising, preserving, storing and preparing fresh, whole foods. In addition, such a tightly-knit system is limited in its ability to support extensive economic development in the area.

And there's not a good, consistent way of processing, aggregating, transporting and making use of the food being produced on various farms in the region. The large co-op elevator that can be seen through the front window of Clinton Kitchen is a testament to the kind of infrastructure that dominates here — an infrastructure that is very good at transporting raw commodities out of the region, taking local wealth with them.

Big Stone County can't be its only customer if local food is to generate wealth in the region in the long term, says Terk. That's why it's so critical to have a transportation system that is as good at getting potatoes from a farm in Beardsley to a store in Graceville as it is at shipping those spuds to the Twin Cities, says Terk.

"We need to figure out what to do with that excess," she says. "That's where we get into discussions of that infrastructure that's needed for storage, for aggregation, distribution—all of those questions that are really huge everywhere in local foods work."

Other questions must also be addressed. For example, Finberg makes it clear that she and many of the other long-time residents would also like to see Clinton Kitchen become a community gathering spot for drinking coffee, munching pastries and trading news. There's a convenience store/coffee shop out on the highway at the edge of town, but Finberg says it's not the same.

"We need a gathering place," she says.

A gathering place is no minor thing at a time when people even in small towns feel increasingly isolated from their neighbors. And isolation makes it more difficult to brainstorm ideas for a brighter future.

Clinton Mayor Shirley Finberg (*right*), shown here with LSP's Johanna Rupprecht (*left*) and Rebecca Terk, believes a strong local foods system could help keep young people in the community. (*LSP photo*)

Hatching new ideas

Finberg feels confident that, given a chance, area residents can brew up some innovative ways for revitalizing Main Street and environs. Just up the street from Clinton Kitchen, an old railroad depot that was slated for demolition was saved when citizens got together and raised funds to remodel it. A recently launched farmers' market has been a minor hit. And when the 24-hour fitness center opened recently, 200 people bought memberships. Not all of those people are using the gym's facilities, but many joined just to show their support for a health-based business in the community.

In fact, on this particular day in October, the big news is that around $800 was raised the day before during a community celebration. That money is going towards upgrading the Kitchen's facilities so that it's in a better position to serve as a place to cook, store and serve local food (a "Fall Gala" later in November raised another $2,200).

"In a community like this, just doing one thing isn't probably going to cut it," says Terk of efforts to create sustainable economic development in the region. "The trick is to get something that can be sustained as a profit-generating business that gets young people interested in making this area home."

Finberg is excited about the possibilities of using the Clinton Kitchen as a hub for local food activities. After all, this is a farming community with rich soil and flat fields, and anything that can help keep agriculture economically viable — even if it's a departure from the traditional corn-soybean paradigm — is a good idea, as far as she's concerned.

"I think it would help get more young people to stay," she says of a system based on a local foods economy. "If we don't have young farmers in the area, we won't have much." ❐

Clinton Kitchen is undergoing remodeling to make it a hub for local foods in the community. (*LSP photo*)

Give it a listen

To listen to a Land Stewardship Project *Ear to the Ground* podcast featuring Rebecca Terk talking about developing a local food system in the Big Stone County region, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?s=a+closed.

Farm to school's unrealized potential

Getting local, sustainably-produced food into cafeterias is a public relations bonanza; now it's time to look beyond the hype & sustain this movement

By Caroline van Schaik

Remember the youngster who called the emperor on his new clothes? That child could whisper the same pronouncement on locally grown food found on Minnesota school lunch trays.

The posters are hung, the press has come and gone, and for the farmer, a 20-pound bag of carrots or 100 pounds of potatoes sold to schools turns out to be little more than an inconvenience.

Still, enthusiastic optimism in the potential for what is termed the "farm to school" movement remains high, with the national buzz extending all the way to the First Lady. A few organizations and farmers have worked extraordinarily hard these past several years. There are a few exemplary schools, and some farmers have found success in supplying them.

But it is hard not to notice that most potatoes, apples, strawberries and mystery beef "crumbles" prepared in school kitchens come from somewhere not Minnesota or even a neighboring state. We grow so much over an ever-lengthening season and much of it is storable (think root crops, meats and dairy).

So really, why are Minnesota schools even thinking about serving anything except Minnesota potatoes, apples, strawberries, radishes and beef until they are gone from the storage facilities of our best farmers?

As an organizer with the Land Stewardship Project's Community Based Food Systems program, I see firsthand that schools have not generated the demand we worried about failing to meet some five years ago. School boards have not acted on the documented correlation between clean food and active brains, and it follows that (state-mandated) wellness policies bear little commitment to good food, let alone to locally-grown-with-stewardship-practices good food.

No wonder farmers view schools as a market of last resort, "a place for extras." After some years of presenting can-do solutions to schools, foraging for one ingredient or 20, organizing food sampling events, finding grant money and educational materials, overseeing a successful pilot to transport the goods from farm-to-fork, writing text for family outreach, gathering monthly menu input, initiating systems for farmer contacts, nurturing a student garden club, and more, I too wonder if all the buzz is about to go the way of a mere fad. Call me impatient, but just when do we harness the potential and put the emperor to shame?

I can already hear the cacophony of "yes, but..." and I do have a certain amount of sympathy: finding cooks (as opposed to box cutters, as author Janet Poppendieck notes in her new book, *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America*), budget cuts exacerbated by an irresponsible state government, misguided regulations, processed-food palates, over-worked staff, and even finding local farmers present legitimate challenges.

Another challenge is USDA's commodity program, which effectively usurps a cook's ability to buy local when she has a freezer full of un-ordered (but invoiced) Big Ag crops, and an order to shut down the walk-in cooler by June 5. Despite the enticement of Minnesota's spring crops, where can there possibly be room for local anything in that scenario?

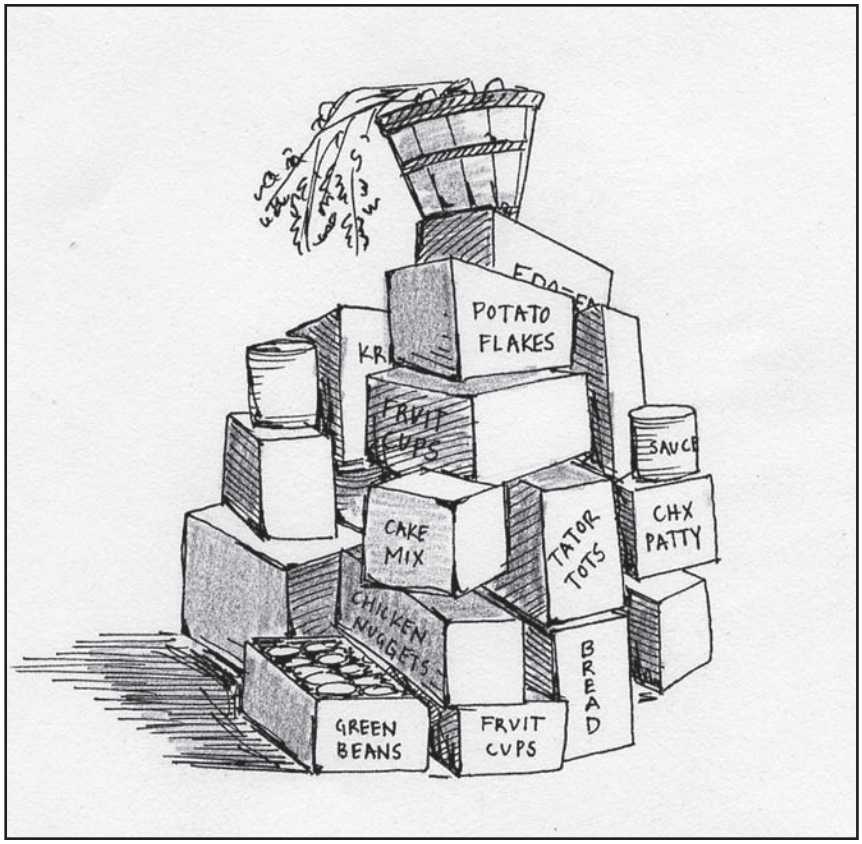


Illustration by Anna King

Ignore the hype

Meanwhile, citizens all over the state read the headlines and feel good about their kids eating plenty of locally grown food. The real story, though, is what the articles fail to mention — that "local" might happen once a month or even once a year; that the purple broccoli was a one-time item and the farmer who grew it never saw another sale; and that a 20-pound bag of local carrots is rarely replaced by another bag of local carrots once it's consumed.

In addition, the articles confuse "local" with food that is free of the chemicals, hormones and antibiotics that contaminate both the ingredients and the ground they grew in. There is no such guarantee; some local farmers use these inputs just as some far-away ones don't. If clean food is important, we all have to ask for it, no matter the size of our table.

I grant fully that farmers have to step up to this plate, too. With few exceptions, most have not availed themselves of a ubiquitous market, the national clamor for home-grown goodness on lunch trays, and in southeast Minnesota, a ready-made delivery system piloted last winter by LSP (*see No. 1, 2011, Land Stewardship Letter; www.landstewardshipproject.org/lsl/lspv29n1.pdf*). There

Farm to School, *see page 23…*

…Farm to School, *from page 22*

is money to be made and farmers are not getting in line.

They are not alone. Were there the demand, the business of nutrition grown locally would be worth real money to the home crowd. Research published in 2010 points to thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in net income to Midwestern states that supplant row crops (for livestock feed and processed food) with produce (directly for human consumption).

• • •

…down-pricing local farmers so that the food budget is untouched but the PR machine is cranked, won't have a place in the new game rules.

• • •

It is true that food grown for taste is found at scales that do not lend themselves to the same economy as food grown for travel. The "taste" economy is local. Money generated by local food sales goes to sponsoring the track team and funds your cancer benefit and hires your teenagers. Yes, the taste economy can cost more, even though it also generates state monies that in turn fuel schools.

But cost is relative. A 20-pound bag of carrots from a local farmer practicing sustainable methods costs about $25 (or half that if forked and broken carrots are used). If a school committed to serving this single well-grown local ingredient until supplies ran out, the farmer could consider a wholesale price rather than the piecemeal price of an occasional order. Maybe a school can just swing enough of this product to sample it or serve it as a snack every week. Perhaps the PTA could pay for carrots along with its Halloween Party candy. Or the school board could allocate the price of local carrots as its starting commitment to incremental changes — even a little good food in keeping with that requisite wellness policy.

Pay for what you want

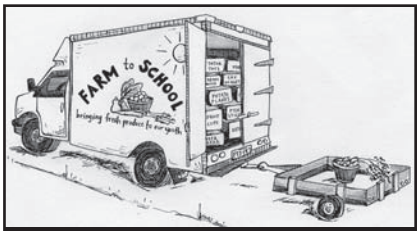
If everyone agrees that fresh food provides better nutrition for school students (and staff) — and we say we do — then certain things fall automatically into place.

First of all, let's pay for locally grown food and the labor to prepare it. Second, a dusty potato grown without chemicals is just that, a potato that requires a scrub rather than a de-tox bath. This will take time and labor. So third, it will take more time and labor to prepare real food. Fourth, reliable demand will spur the infrastructure that could easier aggregate, store, process and transport food grown by small and mid-sized farmers who will not farm for an invisible market. Finally, if "supporting local farmers" is a stated goal, then down-pricing local farmers so that the food budget is untouched but the PR machine is cranked, won't have a place in the new game rules.

Because whether you term it a paradigm shift or a pain in the neck, buying from local farmers is not business as usual. It's not even required, now or in proposed federal regulations that significantly increase the role of fresh produce in school breakfasts and lunches. Providing the food industry and Congress do not gut these new regulations, cooks will find themselves chopping and dicing more just to be able to afford the nudge back to "scratch" cooking.

In the meantime, pick your fable (The Emperor's New Clothes, The Boy who Cried Wolf…) to understand the story of Farm to School in Minnesota, so far. And if you prefer a different ending, call your school on what "local food" means — really. ❒

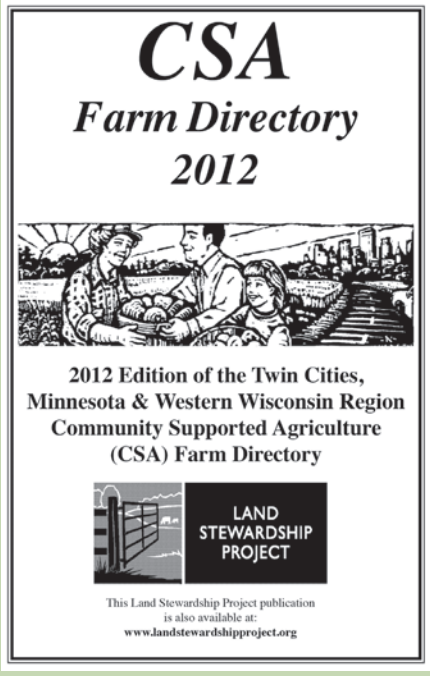
Caroline van Schaik is an LSP Community Based Food Systems organizer working in southeast Minnesota. Among other things, she is working on developing farm to school programs in the region. Van Schaik can be contacted at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.



Time to start thinking about the 2012 CSA season

For over 16 years, the Land Stewardship Project's *Directory of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farms* has been the go-to resource for eaters in the Twin Cities area looking to take part in a more sustainable relationship with their food and the producers of that food. The *Directory* lists CSA farms that deliver to communities throughout Minnesota and western Wisconsin, as well as the Twin Cities.

The *2012 Directory* will be available March 1 on LSP's website (www.landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html). Paper copies will be available at the LSP's offices in South Minneapolis (612-722-6377), Lewiston (507-523-3366) and Montevideo (320-269-2105). Subscriptions are often sold out by early spring and people are encouraged to reserve their shares early.



Community Supported Agriculture is an arrangement where consumers "put a face on their food" by buying shares in a farming operation on an annual basis. In return, the farmers provide a weekly supply of fresh, natural produce throughout the growing season (approximately June to October). Most of the farms focus exclusively on fresh produce, although a few also offer meat shares and other products. The *CSA Farm Directory* provides contact information for the farms and details of the share arrangements, such as how much and what kind of produce and other products are offered.

Want to be listed in the *CSA Directory*?

Are you a CSA farmer who would like to be listed in the *2012 CSA Farm Directory*? Contact LSP's Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.

Ganging up on grass

Greg Judy is using intensive grazing & innovative leases to make pasture a valuable asset with minimal risk

On a hot September afternoon, Greg Judy leads a group of farmers, extension educators, natural resource professionals and college students to a hilltop near the western Minnesota community of Alexandria. It's a 20-acre spot of pasture and trees that before this year was enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for two consecutive, 10-year contracts, and it's an island in a sea of corn and soybeans, crops likely to be sold for high prices after harvest.

The owner of the grassy knob knows the value of all those commodities, and was planning on having it put into row crops once the CRP contract expired. Such a move could result in serious environmental problems: much of the land is on a 17 percent slope and is highly erodible.

But a young farmer who lives next door to the property, Andy Siira, kept the land from being plowed by agreeing to pay the landowner the going cash rent price for cropland to graze his cattle on it.

He's begun grazing the former CRP ground, and concedes he has a ways to go before he can make those pastures produce an income comparable to raising corn and soybeans.

Judy is here to talk about how, if done right, grazing this land could make it quite valuable—economically and environmentally.

"The more of this kind of marginal, vulnerable land you can keep in profitable perennial production, the better for everyone," says Judy.

Judy, a grazier, author and teacher, was in Alexandria in early September as part of two-days of workshops put on by the Chippewa 10% Project (*see sidebar on page 27*) and its partners.

During his in-depth presentations, he talked about how to increase the value of perennial landscapes such as pasture at a time when more grass than ever is being plowed up to make way for annual row crops like corn and soybeans.

Making pasture pay

In the rolling hills of north-central Missouri, Judy is proving perennial grasses can pay. But he's the first to admit that when he first started farming, he made every mistake possible: investing in expensive equipment, borrowing lots of money and piling up so much debt that by the time he was 37 he wasn't sure agriculture was in his future.

But in the late 1990s, he started noticing there was a lot of fallow land in his neighborhood that was in poor condition. He started approaching landowners—many of whom were absentee—and asked them if they'd like to make some money on those acres while improving the soil quality.

He was going to do this by rotationally grazing cattle on these lands, a method of livestock production that improves the nutrient cycle while allowing grasses to get established and thrive. The problem was, Judy didn't own any livestock. So he struck a deal with local livestock owners to custom graze cattle through leasing arrangements.

Within two years, he was grazing on five leased farms. Judy's investment consisted of portable electric fence and a four-wheeler. The monthly checks he was receiving from livestock owners allowed Judy to pay off his debts and start building a nest egg. He was also able to build up his own herds of livestock. Today, Judy, 52, owns around 325 head of cattle—mostly stockers and cow-calf pairs. He also has a sheep herd.

All of this stock is grazed on some 1,200 acres spread across eight farms. He is still renting land, and no longer leases livestock. But Judy would recommend custom grazing to any beginning farmer who wants to get started in the livestock business with a minimum of investment.

"I wouldn't be where I'm at without custom grazing," Judy says. "For a young person getting started in livestock, custom grazing is the way to go."

But Judy's Green Pastures Farm isn't practicing just any old type of rotational grazing. He is exposing those pastures to what is referred to as "mob grazing." This consists of bringing a relatively large amount of livestock onto a small area of pasture for 24 hours or so, and then moving them. During that short, intense period, cattle, for example, will deposit a lot of nutrients in the form of urine and feces, stomping them into the ground where they can help revitalize the soil. Judy feels that during this short period livestock focus on taking the top one-third of the plant, which is the most nutritious.

Before he was mob grazing, Judy was stocking pastures at a rate of four acres per 1,000 pounds of live weight. Now he's got that down to 1.8 acres per 1,000 pounds.

"If you double the cattle you are running on a piece of land, that's like someone

Gang, *see page 25…*

Greg Judy led a pasture walk on former CRP land in western Minnesota that had been slated for conversion to row crops. (*LSP photo***)**

…Gang, *from page 24*

giving you another piece of land," he says. "You can double your production without increasing the input."

Judy relies on long periods between grazings, resting a pasture for as long as 100 days to stockpile grass—a strategy that paid off for him this year as north-central Missouri underwent a severe drought. Judy watches his rotations closely, and will pull livestock off sooner if it looks like the pasture needs a break.

The result is not only a more efficient way of producing livestock, but an improvement in the landscape. Judy says much of the marginal land he's grazing is starting to build up organic matter. One day this summer the farmer counted over 460 earthworms in one 12-inch patch of manure that was two inches high.

"I'm giving [landowners] an opportunity to take a bare piece of ground and improve it. You give them a blueprint of what their farm can look like in five years and then you leave it better than you found it."

Judy provides absentee landowners regular written and even video updates on how their land is doing. Some are avid deer hunters, and greatly appreciate how grazing has improved wildlife habitat.

He is the first to admit that north-central Missouri is not northern Minnesota, or even southwest Minnesota. Judy grew up on a dairy farm in the Pine City, Minn., area, and knows the limitations severe winters impose.

"I realize you cannot graze during those winters," he concedes, noting that sometimes he is able to have cattle out on pasture throughout the winter by supplementing their diet with hay.

> ***"I'm giving [landowners] an opportunity to take a bare piece of ground and improve it."***
>
> **— Greg Judy**

But Judy feels farmers in northern climes can make better use of grazing lands by stockpiling grass in the late summer and early fall, providing some browse if there's an early snow melt in March, for example. Such a strategy could knock as much as a month off of supplemental feeding, which is more dollars in the farmer's pocket.

Even in Minnesota's Corn Belt (and north of there), there are marginal lands that could be made profitable through managed rotational grazing, says Judy.

Give it a listen

To listen to a Land Stewardship Project podcast featuring Greg Judy talking about how he launched a grass-based livestock operation with little investment, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?s=How+one+farmer+used.

"When I see these rolling hills around here with corn on them, the hair goes up on the back of my neck thinking about what you could do if you got a hold of this land and grazed it," he says. "Let's get it into production with grass, good grass, and healthy livestock. And let's let the young people get back on the land." ❐

Mob grazing video

Mob, strip and rotational grazing are compared in a new online video, "Cattle Grazing for Healthier Pastures," developed by Iowa State University's Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. This video is the result of research the Leopold Center has been doing on various grazing systems. To view the video, see www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/on-the-ground.

A new way to talk about cover crops

In one North Dakota county, a holistic view is helping get at the heart of not only saving soil, but building it

By Julia Ahlers Ness & Richard Ness

The land in south central North Dakota has a gentle roll to it that can result in serious soil erosion problems, particularly on intensively cropped acres. Such problems can often prompt the use of rather simplistic solutions. Jay Fuhrer, a USDA soil conservation official in the area, jokes that during the 1980s he was known as "Mr. Grass Waterway." No matter what problem producers would be having on their land related to soil erosion, the answer Fuhrer always gave was, "You need grass waterways." It eventually became apparent that this reductive, narrow view of land conservation was purely a Band Aid solution, and was not getting at the root of the problem.

When five of us traveled to this part of North Dakota in mid-September for a "Soil Health" tour, we witnessed how a more holistic, big picture approach to land conservation can produce major environmental and economic benefits. We had first been tipped off to the revolutionary things going on in that area by Joshua Dukart, a Holistic Management instructor who also happens to be a technician with the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District in North Dakota. While speaking this summer at a pair of Land Stewardship Project-sponsored Holistic Management classes on Biological Monitoring and Land Planning, Dukart said some very innovative things were being done in Burleigh County around cover cropping.

Innovations in cover cropping? On the face of it, it's not exactly the sexiest topic.

But after touring the area, we are amazed at what is happening in that part of North Dakota using Holistic Management principles. When it comes to agricultural stewardship, it was one of the most exciting things we've seen in a couple of decades.

Cover crops 101

Cover crops have become a hot topic these days, even in mainstream agricultural publications like *Successful Farming*. In Minnesota and other parts of the Midwest, a cover crop is typically thought of as a planting that is seeded in a field after the main crop is harvested in order to protect the soil and provide some type of benefit for the following year's crop, such as adding nitrogen to the soil or suppressing weeds.

The typical practice is to seed a single species, such as winter rye, or maybe a simple mix such as oats, field peas and tillage radish. If the cover crop goes in after a small grain such as wheat, the seeding date may be sometime in early August. If it goes in after corn or soybeans or sugar beets, the cover crop may not get seeded until late September or even October, obviously limiting the amount of growth that can happen before winter sets in.

And, as was demonstrated at a cover crop field day Oct. 27 at the University of Minnesota's Southwest Research and Outreach Center near Lamberton, a dry fall like we've had can make establishing a late seeded cover crop a challenge.

In some cases, such as with winter rye, the cover crop will overwinter and grow up

Cover Crops, *see page 26…*

Profits from Perennials

…Cover Crops, *from page 25*

in the spring and then get knocked back, either via tillage or a herbicide, before the season's main crop, such as corn, is planted.

Using a single species of cover crop to manage land isn't exactly revolutionary. After all, just like any farming technique, planting a single cover crop can be a fairly narrow response to one problem — soil erosion control, building organic matter, etc. But what happens when you make a tool like cover cropping part of an overall system such as Holistic Management?

What was so exciting about what we saw in North Dakota was not the technique of cover cropping per se, but the thinking and the mindset behind the region's push to promote and establish a more diverse mix of plant species. Fuhrer, the district conservationist for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Burleigh County, says that by the late 1990s it became clear that just managing to *minimize* soil loss wasn't good enough—grassy waterways and similar techniques were simply attempts to maintain the status quo, and weren't always accomplishing even that modest goal. It was time to restore the land and *rebuild* the soil.

At the root of this new approach was to create an overall strategy that could address this issue from many different angles. Fuhrer says that creating a team consisting of people from diverse backgrounds was key to this strategy. Besides NRCS and Soil Conservation District staffers, the team consists of farmers and scientists from a broad geographic area. Having such a diverse team is critical to tackling this problem from a holistic point of view.

A holistic approach

Holistic Management, developed by Allan Savory over three decades ago, is a proven decision making framework that has helped farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs and natural resource managers from around the world achieve a "triple bottom line" of sustainable economic, environmental and social benefits. This framework is built upon the idea that all human goals are fundamentally dependent upon the proper functioning of the ecosystem processes that support life on this planet — water cycling, mineral cycling, energy flow (conversion of solar energy) and community dynamics (biological diversity).

The lessons from Holistic Management around "community dynamics" are in part what led to the insight in Burleigh County of needing to make changes.

The team that was created soon realized that the cropland suffered from too much disturbance and not enough diversity of plant species. And the pasture/rangeland suffered from season-long grazing or continuous grazing.

The team set out to find ways to make changes for both the pastures/rangeland and cropland. They started by focusing on rangeland renovation. According to Dukart, on any given farm or ranch, the aim is to figure out a grazing set-up that allows for adequate rest for the plants to recover after being grazed and to provide for the level of animal impact you need, which can vary from paddock-to-paddock, pasture-to-pasture. In other words, how many

Cover crops are used in Burleigh County to prevent erosion, build fertility and break up compacted soil. (*photo by Julia Ahlers Ness*)

paddocks you have, their size (in acres) and where, when and how often you move your animals depends on your situation and what your goals and needs are. The benefits these producers are seeing through this kind of "planned grazing" are improved grass health, higher soil quality, better quality feed, healthier animals and — coupled with good financial planning — more profit.

At roughly the same time, the team looked at moving away from maximum disturbance and minimum biodiversity on crop fields to systems that support minimum disturbance and maximum diversity. The team and the producers they worked with started out experimenting with different approaches to cover cropping fields.

In some cases, the traditional cover crop techniques were used to fill a void in the growing season, such as after the harvest of an annual crop like wheat. Interestingly, the team had better success with multi-species mixes of four or more species, which tended to get established and grow better than when just a single species of cover crop was used.

The team also did some experimenting with interseeding a cover crop into a row crop such as corn or as part of a mix with a harvestable crop like barley and field peas — similar to when a legume like red clover is drilled in with oats and the red clover is allowed to grow as a cover crop after the oats are harvested.

Where they are seeing the most benefits from cover crops, however, is from growing these plants as the main "crop" on a given percentage of acres for the entire growing season. The amount of acres put into full-season cover crops depends on how much land the farmer can afford to devote to soil building rather than growing a cash crop in any given year.

"We encourage producers to do this on a small scale, especially at first," says Dukart. "It has to fit into their financial plan."

Adjusting the mix

As part of their goal to advance the soil health of cropland, the team has experimented with cover crop mixtures of eight to 12 and even 16 species of plants, with the goal of including both cool and warm season grasses, cool and warm season broadleafs, and various other species such as brassicas. The exact mixture depends on the resource concerns that the individual farmer is trying to address in a specific field. If there is a need to add a lot of carbon to the soil, maybe a warm season grass is used. If fixing nitrogen is the goal, a legume or two can be planted, while large tap-rooted plants like turnips or tillage radish can help break up a tight soil.

Cover crops have become a bridge between the livestock camp and cash grain camp. There is, of course, a financial benefit for the livestock farmer in using cover crops for grazing, and there is a biological benefit to cropland derived from grazing cover crops with animals.

We saw this in a dramatic soil "slaking" demonstration during the second stop of the Burleigh County tour. Soil clods of similar soil types from six fields under different management systems were all placed on a piece of wire mesh and dunked into a clear container of water. The goal was to see

Cover Crops, *see page 27…*

…Cover Crops, *from page 26*

which clods held together — an indication of more microbial life in the soil, higher aggregate stability and better soil structure — and which ones fell or "slaked" apart.

The clod from a field conventionally cash grained for the past 20 years immediately started to disintegrate and break apart when immersed in water. The other five clods from fields with low tillage and high diversity slowly absorbed the water and held together. Only one of those five latter clods had a slight amount of slaking — the one that hadn't had any livestock on the land.

Indicators of adoption

All of this is good news, but wouldn't mean much unless it is adopted by farmers and ranchers in the area. As one indication that it is catching on, a farm supply company in the region reported selling out of cover crop seeds more than once each season. Another positive sign is the fact that typically 350 to 450 producers a year attend the Soil District's annual soil health workshop — in January no less.

Part of the reason it is catching on is economics. One of the producers participating in the tour described how by using multi-species cover cropping to improve soil health, his cost of production for raising 120 bushels per-acre corn (in a county with a 100 bushel per acre average) was $1.50 per bushel, including land costs and getting the corn delivered to the grain elevator. He is doing this without purchased fertilizer. He said his family was making significant profits with current high grain prices, but even if prices collapse down to pre-ethanol levels, a farmer like this is sitting well financially. Those kinds of stories catch producers' attention in an era of constantly and dramatically increasing costs for inputs such as fertilizer.

During a dramatic "slaking" demonstration, soil that had been cash grained for several years was much less stable in water than soil that had been growing cover crops and exposed to minimal tillage and livestock. (*photo by Julia Ahlers Ness***)**

A new language

Perhaps the most exciting part of all this is how the language of stewardship has permeated the area. Everyone from farmers to soil conservation technicians was talking about the need to use a holistic approach to improving soil health, and thus advance the sustainability of crops, livestock, farms and eventually the community as a whole. That journey starts with being able to identify what the real resource concerns are, rather than just focusing on symptoms like soil erosion or nutrient loading in waterways.

We suspected that the Holistic Management framework for decision-making played a key role in helping both the agency staff and the producers identify those resource concerns, and we were right. But as both Fuhrer and Dukart reminded us, Holistic Management has not only helped them see the clear relationships between management, soil health and profitability. It's also helped them to see opportunities and given them the tools to catalyze human creativity to achieve their goals. Once such big picture ideas become part of everyday language, it's almost impossible to go back to a narrow, reductionistic way of thinking where there's nothing wrong with the land that a grassy waterway won't fix. ❐

Julia Ahlers Ness coordinates the Chippewa 10% Project and can be contacted at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org. Richard Ness is a Farm Beginnings organizer and coordinates LSP's offerings of Holistic Management classes. He can be reached at 320-269-2105 or rness@landstewardshipproject.org.

Soil workshop, Holistic Mgt. classes this winter

The Burleigh County Soil Conservation District is holding a soil health workshop Jan. 18 in Bismarck, N. Dak. There will be presentations on mob grazing, no-till's effects on soil quality and the ecosystem, and cropping systems based on soil health. LSP's Julia Ahlers Ness is organizing transportation to the workshop. If you're interested, contact her at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

See page 14 for details on Holistic Management workshops LSP is holding in December and February.

Profits from perennials

Julia Ahlers Ness and Richard Ness, along with LSP staffer Terry Van Der Pol, attended the "Soil Health Tour" sponsored by the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District as part of a Chippewa 10% Project trip. Chippewa 10% is a community initiative that recognizes the significant potential for citizens in the region to work together to help agriculture provide multiple benefits to the watershed utilizing the "profits from perennials" concept.

The initiative is working with farmers/landowners, scientists, nonprofit organizations, local governments and natural resource agencies in western Minnesota's Chippewa River watershed, a major feeder stream of the Minnesota River. The Chippewa 10% Project's name is derived from the fact that significant environmental and economic benefits can result from diversifying the agricultural landscape in just a small percentage of the watershed. LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project are leading this initiative.

For more information, see www.profitsfromperennials.org, or contact LSP's Julia Ahlers Ness at 320-269-2105; janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

Reviews

Gathering
Memoir of a Seed Saver

By Diane Ott Whealy
2011; 256 pages
Seed Savers Exchange
www.seedsavers.org

Reviewed by Dana Jackson

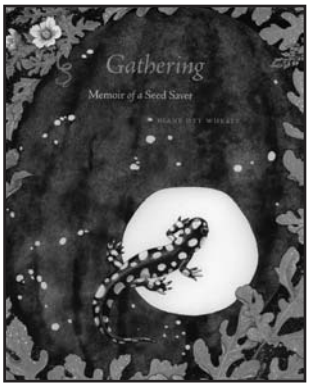
Starting in mid-July this past summer, I walked around the outer edge of my perennial flower garden several times a day with a container of water in which to drown Japanese beetles. The beetles especially liked the leaves of Grandpa Ott's morning glories, planted in one of the few sunny spots in my garden on a fence next to the neighbor's lawn. Brilliant blue flowers with red centers decorated the fence by late August, even though the beetles turned many leaves into lace.

For many years I had seen photos of Grandpa Ott's morning glories in Seed Savers Exchange publications and finally bought some of their seed. I was intrigued by the fact that Diane Ott Whealy's great grandfather had brought the morning glory seeds from Bavaria. As a child, Diane helped her grandfather gather seeds from the vines growing on his porch, and Grandpa Ott gave morning glory seeds to Diane and Kent Whealy during their first year of marriage. Planting and saving Grandpa Ott's morning glory and German Pink tomato seeds was the beginning of a seed saving passion, which led to the development of a network of seed savers around the country connected through a catalogue of seed listings coordinated by the Seed Saver's Exchange.

Seed Savers Exchange was founded in 1975 and developed on the Whealys' homestead in Missouri, but established a permanent home in a beautiful northeast Iowa valley in 1986, the region where Diane Ott grew up. They left Missouri to find land to grow out the seed they had collected, which was necessary to keep it true and fresh. With the help of donors, the organization bought Heritage Farm near Decorah, Iowa, and today it owns over 890 acres, with a special office building and seed preservation labs (holding, for example, 8,000 varieties of beans), visitors' center, extensive gardens, an orchard and vineyard, plus a trout stream and many acres of woods. Grandpa Ott's morning glories grow to the roof's edge on one side of the iconic red barn restored by Amish friends at Heritage Farm.

Gathering: Memoir of a Seed Saver is Diane Ott Whealy's life story, but it's also the story of the grassroots organization that was born in her home and grew up along with her five children. Kent and she produced the first mimeographed seed listing in a back bedroom of a rented house in 1976, and the house they built and lived in for six years near Princeton, Mo., filled up with organizational correspondence and the heirloom seeds people sent them. When they moved their then-four children and Seed Savers to Decorah, the organization's office occupied the basement of the house they rented. Two years later in the farmhouse at Heritage Farm, the family helped prepare bulk mailings at the kitchen table and host many visitors and dignitaries. Today the five Whealy children are adults, Kent lives in Michigan with his second wife, and Diane is vice President and the public voice of Seed Savers Exchange.

Memoir of a Seed Saver is a humble title by a humble author. Diane Ott Whealy is not just a seed saver; she's a biological diversity saver, a human culture saver, possibly a savior of the world's food supply. Many old varieties disappeared when seed companies focused on high yielding hybrids, and through Seed Savers' members, the Whealys found and preserved heirloom vegetables, fruits and flowers long forgotten by horticulturists. They were not scientists, yet scientists outside the mainstream of industrial agriculture began to recognize the scientific value of their work. Funders gave them the means to expand the organization's reach, and since Kent was freer than Diane (the mother of five children) to travel as the spokesperson for Seed Savers, honors came his way.



Diane Ott Whealy's memoir is filled with interesting stories and photographs of the many people who helped them start Seed Savers. In 1981, the Whealys wanted to see the faces of their 60-some members and hear firsthand stories about their heirloom seeds, so they held a "campout" at their home in Missouri. The 12 seed-saving families who came that weekend told stories, traded seeds, cooked and ate together while becoming fast friends. Fifty attended the third campout in 1983. The fourth campout was held at Pine Bluff 4-H camp near Decorah, and campouts are held annually at Heritage Farm to this day. Diane identifies individuals with their seeds: "Ted Gibbs with his okra collection; our dear friend Thane Earle with tomatoes; John Swenson…with garlic, onions and other alliums; John Amery with soybeans; Barbara Bond and her herbs; Jim Henry and his carrots."

On Sept. 3, I observed Diane when she was signing books at a Heritage Farm tomato festival and listened to visitors talking to her about the special tomatoes their grandfather grew or how Aunt Mary kept seeds of a special green bean to plant each year—stories she must have heard thousands of times. She recognized their eagerness to share and looked directly at them, listening attentively.

In reflecting on the success of this internationally famous organization, Diane writes: "Kent and I realized that we could never have done this alone. Our talent—and our good luck—was in finding the perfect blend of friends, family, supporters and associates. These people have remained in the life of Seed Savers Exchange ever since."

Gathering also recognizes dedicated employees of Seed Savers, such as Arllys Adelmann, their only office assistant for many years, and David Cavagnarro, who ran the garden but was also a famous and extraordinary photographer whose color photos of peppers on the cover of *Audubon Magazine* "nearly tripled" membership inquiries. The dazzling photographs of Rosalind Creasy, a current board member, still grace the calendars for sale by Seed Savers every year. Much credit is given to Maryanne Mott and her husband Herman Warsh and Amy Goldman and other members of Seed Savers' Board of Directors, not only for raising the funds to buy Heritage Farm and adjoining land, but also for their overall dedication to the success of the organization. In this book, Diane Ott Whealy handles her personal disappointments and troubles, including estrangement from Kent, with a light touch, concluding the book on a positive note with the best interest of Seed Savers in mind.

Gathering begins with the story and a photo of Grandpa Ott's morning glories and ends with another photo of them bearing the caption: "Grandpa Ott's morning glory growing strong," an analogy for Seed Savers Exchange. ❐

Dana Jackson coordinates the St. Croix River Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local *chapter out of the Land Stewardship Project's Twin Cities office. She can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or danaj@landstewardshipproject.org.*

Conversations with the Land

By Jim Van Der Pol
Foreword by David Kline
2012; 184 pages
No Bull Press
www.nobullpress.com

Reviewed by Brian DeVore

Many good arguments can be made for supporting a type of agriculture less reliant on energy, technology and Wall Street, and more on soil, communities and people: it's better for the environment, produces good food and keeps more Main Street businesses open, to name a few. But after reading Jim Van Der Pol's collection of essays, *Conversations with the Land*, another benefit of sustainable farming occurred to me: it allows for the kind of observation, contemplation and human relationship building that makes for good reading.

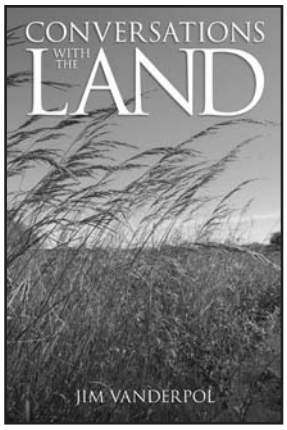
After all, if Van Der Pol's family wasn't raising a diverse mix of crops on their western Minnesota farm, the author wouldn't find himself on a small tractor mowing hay, working over in his mind his relationship to a family of foxes, the land and the community:

> "There is a sense in which the field is a commons for me and my family and livestock and the fox and her cubs, as well as the birds and insects that fly up from the cutter bar and everything else that calls the field home. To think of it as such, whether or not it is or could be, seems to me to be a way of encouraging kindly use of it by all of us. And kindly use is a result good enough that I tend to think that applying the philosophy of the commons is a good idea."

But farming that generates deep introspection doesn't pay the bills, and that's what makes Van Der Pol's book entertaining *and* grounding. He and his wife LeeAnn moved back to the home place in western Minnesota's Chippewa County in 1977 after Jim attended the University of Minnesota. Over the years, the Van Der Pols have become leaders in the development of pasture-based livestock production. Just as importantly, they've figured out how to get paid for it. Pastures A' Plenty Farm (http://pasturesaplenty.com) is a sophisticated direct-to-consumer meat business that supports Jim and Lee Ann, along with their son Josh's family—a true rarity in today's agriculture.

In the interest of full disclosure, I should say that over the past two decades I've interacted with the Van Der Pols numerous times through interviews and informal conversations. In addition, Jim has served on the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors. During that time, I've become quite familiar with his essays, some of which have appeared in local newspapers and the *Land Stewardship Letter*. More recently, Van Der Pol has written regularly for *Graze* magazine, among other publications.

Van Der Pol's writing is characterized by acerbic humor, a little cynicism and vivid descriptions — all fueled by the sharp-eyed observation skills of someone who's spent almost his entire life on the land. But can a lifetime of writing "columns" produce a book that hangs together as a cohesive piece—or will it read like just a "best of" collection of essays, with little in common with each other than the author?



In this case, *Conversations with the Land* works as a book, thanks to the fact that a common thread runs throughout: love of the land and love of the people who make a living on the land, as well as a sense that something isn't quite right and we all have a role—farmer and non-farmer alike, in correcting that. The front part of the book is full of character sketches of the "people" end of the equation, and make for perhaps the most entertaining reading, as when Van Der Pol describes all the old, sometimes quite colorful, farmers he learned the trade from, or the various people who served key supporting roles in the ag community, such as truckers.

In reference to the latter, a description of a boyhood trip he took to the South Saint Paul stockyards with a livestock hauler named Joe is a gem of an essay that puts the reader right in the truck as it "roared down toward Concord Street and the yards, the load of cattle pushing us toward the river." That piece at once shows off Van Der Pol's ability to set up a scene, and then with an economy of words transform a fairly routine haulage of livestock to the Twin Cities into a glimpse at a time when South Saint Paul was an important destination for small- and medium-sized family farmers who were raising livestock.

In a nice example of coming full circle, a later essay describes spending time in the late 1990s with a family of Hmong butchers who had started a business in South Saint Paul. At that time, Van Der Pol was "ground down" by farming and not sure where the future lay. But after hearing of the hardships this family from Laos had gone through, it helped put Van Der Pol's life in perspective: "It was this experience as much as any careful thought or financial analysis that started the process of turning this farm around."

Van Der Pol crafts his essays in a way that make us not only care about people who used to live in his community, but see why it's so important to create such communities yet again, and in fact go one better and try to make them sustainable this time. As he writes in his introduction, "From my awakening anger it was but a short step to the determination to do something about it."

That anger is simmering beneath the surface in almost all of these essays. In the last couple of sections of the book: "Enabling scoundrels," "How we might farm" and "How we might live," the anger finally boils over, as Van Der Pol rails against Wall Street, politicians, people who confuse "knowledge" with "wisdom" while viewing the land as simply "parks and recreation," and finally, corporations that foist the "cost" of doing business (pollution, health problems, a trashed economy) onto the public.

This could read like just another diatribe from an angry agrarian. But it isn't, because Van Der Pol has taken that key step from being mad to doing "something about it." One of the thing's he's done is to get involved with the local foods movement, an opportunity, in his opinion, for farmers and non-farmers alike to take control of their lives. And Van Der Pol is also aware that change will not occur overnight, and it's a game of inches. That's why it's fitting that he ends the book with an essay called "Archer," in which he describes how just a small puff of air in the direction of someone shooting an arrow can produce significant changes before that arrow hits its mark a thousand feet away. This idea of the "one degree deflection" can take many forms in real life: buying beef directly from a farmer, choosing to use the services of a local business, hosting a few beginning farmers for a few hours, climbing off the tractor to fly a kite with a grandchild.

Or sitting down to read a book formed by the land and its people. ❐

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Membership Update

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

By Mike McMahon

As the end of the year approaches, many of us are preparing for family gatherings and celebrations with friends, and busying ourselves with all of the things that go with such events. We will also be making decisions about what causes and organizations we will choose to support in the coming year.

The Land Stewardship Project is deeply grateful for all of the support we receive from members throughout the year. You've probably heard this from me before, but it bears repeating: LSP simply could not do the work we do without the support and engagement of members, period. It's not only the dollar amounts that matter, and they do make up a significant portion of LSP's budget, but it's also the type of donations individuals make that is so important. Membership dues and donations from individuals can be put towards the most pressing needs as they arise and allow LSP to take risks on innovative new work.

LSP simply could not do the work we do without the support and engagement of members, period.

Here's a quick example: LSP's Farm Beginnings program began when a group of LSP members in southeast Minnesota approached LSP about the need to help the next generation of farmers get started. The kind of training and education needed to get started farming successfully and sustainably wasn't being provided by other institutions anymore and the information was getting harder and harder to find.

After some planning and organizing with LSP staff and members, the first Farm Beginnings class was started almost 15 years ago. At the time, many institutional funders were a bit wary of this approach. Frankly, a community-based approach to teaching sustainable farming practices at a time when the conventional wisdom was that there were no opportunities in agriculture, was rather bold.

But because LSP members who were living and working on the land saw a need, knew there was an opportunity and had the knowledge and the skills to make it happen, Farm Beginnings was born.

Where did the resources come from to get this innovative new program off the ground? They came from you.

Fast forward to today. Farm Beginnings just celebrated its 500th graduate earlier this year. LSP now offers continuing education classes for graduates and young farmers. LSP has launched new farmer training programs in seven states in collaboration with local organizations. And LSP played a major role in the development, passage and implementation of the new Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program that provides resources to organizations around the country that are helping get the next generation on the land.

Last fall's campaign around the attempt to censor the documentary *Troubled Waters* and advance accountability at the University of Minnesota is another example of membership support allowing LSP to respond quickly to a very important issue. That campaign resulted in the uncensored release of the film and advanced our working relationship with the dean of the U of M's College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences.

These are just two examples where member support and engagement made the difference, a difference we can see on the land today. One measure of that success is that Minnesota is one of only a handful of states that has shown an increase in the number of farmers in the last two agricultural censuses, reversing what had been a 100-year trend of people leaving farms.

So as you are making your end-of-the-year giving decisions, I hope you will consider supporting LSP again.

One great way to help is by signing up as a sustaining member. By making a monthly pledge of $10, $25 or $50, you'll be helping family farmers care for the land and provide healthy food now and in the future.

Starting your pledge is easy. Fill out the envelope attached to the middle of this *Land Stewardship Letter*, including your monthly pledge amount and payment information. Send it in and your membership will be current as long as your pledge is active.

This is also a great time to renew your annual membership, make an extra gift, or join as a new member. As always, your contributions to LSP are tax deductible.

If you have any questions, please contact me. Thanks again for your support. ❒

LSP membership coordinator Mike McMahon can be reached at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

LSP on the social media circuit

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

Direct any questions about LSP's social media initiatives to Abby Liesch at 612-722-6377 or aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org. ❒

Get current with LIVE WIRE

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* to get monthly e-mail updates from the Land Stewardship Project. To subscribe, call 612-722-6377 or e-mail aliesch@landsteward shipproject.org and put in the subject line, "Subscribe *LIVE-WIRE*." You can also sign up at www.landstewardshipproject.org. ❒

Volunteer for LSP

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

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact:

➔ **Lewiston, Minn. —** Karen Benson, 507-523-3366, lspse@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ **Montevideo, Minn. —**Tom Taylor, 320-269-2105, ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ **Twin Cities—**Abby Liesch, 612-722-6377, aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org. ❒

Turkeys, trees, tees & more — LSP can help make your holiday season more sustainable

By Megan Smith

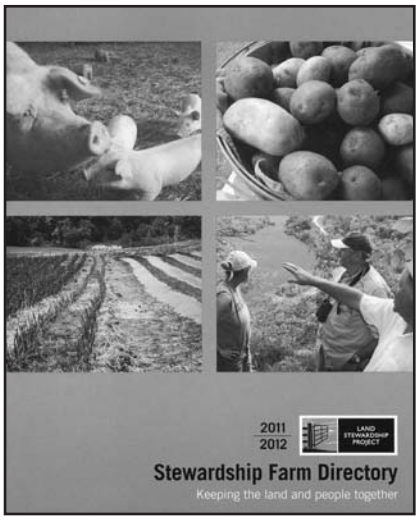
The holiday season is a great time to connect with local farmers and retailers. The Land Stewardship Project's 2011-2012 *Stewardship Farm Directory* lists over 230 LSP members that direct-market sustainably raised food, fiber, Christmas trees and farm stay retreats. Look to the *Stewardship Farm Directory* for creative, local, sustainable gift and meal ideas to make your holiday special.

The new limited edition LSP t-shirts also make great gifts for friends and family. The LSP logo is easily recognizable on the front with "Land Stewardship Project" on the back. They are USA Union Made, 100 percent preshrunk cotton and available in adult sizes: medium, large and extra large. The fit is true to size. The shirts are $15 each.

Gift memberships to the Land Stewardship Project are another way to give. With a gift membership the receiver will get a year's subscription to the *Land Stewardship Letter*; keeping them up-to-date on the latest food and farming issues. Also included with membership is the 2011-2012 *Stewardship Farm Directory* and access to well-researched articles, an informative website, an online monthly newsletter as well as opportunities to take part in on-farm field days and practical seminars. To give a gift membership, please use the enclosed membership envelope and indicate who the gift membership is for along with their address so we can send them a welcome packet.

For more information on gift memberships, ordering an LSP t-shirt or requesting a copy of the *Stewardship Farm Directory,* contact me at 612-722-6377 or megans@landstewardshipproject.org ❐

Megan Smith is an LSP membership assistant.



In memory…

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gift made in the name of a loved one over the past few months.

In memory of Henry Lacher
◆ Gretchen Cook

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

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 work-place 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.

MINNESOTA Environmental Fund

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

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT
821 E 35TH ST STE 200
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55407-2102

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
ROCHESTER, MN
PERMIT NO. 289

Address Service Requested

Printed on 50% recycled - 30% post consumer waste paper

The date above your name on the address label is your membership anniversary. Your timely renewal saves paper and reduces the expense of sending out renewal notices. To renew, use the envelope inside or visit www.landstewardshipproject.org.

STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

➔ *DEC. 8*—**LSP workshop on Diversifying Your Operation Through Growing 1-5 Acres of Vegetables for Wholesale,** La Crosse, Wis. (*see page 14*)
➔ *DEC. 9-10*—**Fearless Farm Finances,** La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org/farmfinances.html; 715-778-5775
➔ *DEC. 12*—***Northern Heartland Kitchen* by LSP member Beth Dooley book signing,** Linden Hills Co-op, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: www.upress.umn.edu; 612-627-1932
➔ *DEC. 18*—***Northern Heartland Kitchen* by LSP member Beth Dooley book signing,** Linden Hills Co-op, Edina, Minn.; Contact: www.upress.umn.edu; 612-627-1932
➔ *DEC. 13-14*—**LSP Intro to Holistic Mgt. Course**, Twin Cities area (*see page 14*)
➔ *DEC. 16*—***Northern Heartland Kitchen* by LSP member Beth Dooley book signing,** Cooks of Crocus Hill, St. Paul, Minn.; Contact: www.upress.umn.edu; 612-627-1932
➔ *JAN. 8*—**LSP's Farm Beginnings Farm Dreams workshop**, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., Clinton Kitchen, Clinton, Minn. (*see page 14*)
➔ *JAN. 8*—**Performance of LSP's *Look Who's Knockin'*,** Madison, Minn., Prairie Arts, 2 p.m.; Contact: Amy Bacigalupo, 320-269-2105; amyb@landstewardshipproject.org
➔ *JAN. 12*—**2011 North Central Region SARE Youth & Youth Educator Grant deadline**; Contact: www.northcentralsare.org; 800-529-1342
➔ *JAN. 12*—**Minnesota Organic Conference pre-conference workshops on GAPS for vegetable farms, selling meat & beekeeping**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mda.state.mn.us/amd; 651-201-6012
➔ *JAN. 12-14*—**20th annual GrassWorks Grazing Conference**, Wausau, Wis.; http://grassworks.org; 715-808-0060
➔ *JAN. 12-14*—**Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conf.**, Iowa State, Ames; http://practicalfarmers.org; 515-232-5661
➔ *JAN. 13-14*—**Minnesota Organic Conference**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: Meg.Moynihan@state.mn.us; 651-201-6012; www.mda.state.mn.us/organic
➔ *JAN. 18*— **Soil Health Workshop featuring mob grazing, no-till & soil health**, Bismarck, N. Dak. (*see page 27*)
➔ *JAN. 18*—**Beginning Fruit & Vegetable Workshops**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mfvga.org; 763-434-0400
➔ *JAN. 19-20*—**Upper Midwest Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conf.**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mfvga.org; 763-434-0400
➔ *JAN. 22*—**Performance of LSP's *Look Who's Knockin'*,** Marshall, Minn., Black Box, SMSU.; Contact: Amy Bacigalupo, 320-269-2105; amyb@landstewardshipproject.org
➔ *JAN. 24*—**2012 session of Minnesota Legislature convenes**; Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 612-722-6377; bking@landstewardshipproject.org
➔ *JAN. 27*—**Beginning Fruit & Vegetable Growers Workshops**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mfvga.org; 763-434-0400
➔ *JAN. 27-28*—**Northern Plains Sustainable Ag Society Winter Conf.,** Aberdeen, S. Dak.; Contact: www.npsas.org; 701-883-4304
➔ *JAN. 28*—**Performance of LSP's *Look Who's Knockin'*,** Litchfield, Minn., Zion Lutheran Church, 2 p.m.; Contact: Amy Bacigalupo, 320-269-2105; amyb@landstewardshipproject.org
➔ *FEB. 4*—**LSP Quality of Life Workshop: Communications Systems for Farming Partners,** Twin Cities area (*see page 14*)
➔ *FEB. 7-8*—**LSP Holistic Mgt. Financial Mgt. Course**, Twin Cities (*see page 14*)
➔ *FEB. 11*—**LSP Workshop on Making $45,000 with Grass-Fed Beef,** St. Charles, Minn. (*see page 14*)
➔ *FEB. 17-18*—**Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Conference**, St. Joseph, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org/conference; 763-260-0209
➔ *FEB. 23*—**MOSES Organic University**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org; 715-778-5775
➔ *FEB. 23-25*—**MOSES Organic Farming Conference**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org; 715-778-5775
➔ *MARCH 3*—**Last session of Hutchinson, Minn., Farm Beginnings class** (*see page 14*)
➔ *MARCH 10*—**Last session of Rochester, Minn., Farm Beginnings class** (*see page 14*)
➔ *MID-MARCH*—**7th Annual LSP Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol**, St. Paul, Minn. (*details to be announced*); Contact: Amber Butcher, LSP, 612-722-6377, ext. 216; abutcher@landstewardshipproject.org
➔ *MARCH 17*—**LSP Workshop on Making $45,000 with Niche Pork,** St. Charles, Minn. (*see page 14*)
➔ *MARCH 23*—**LSP Workshop on Making $45,000 with Grass-Based Dairy,** St. Charles, Minn. (*see page 14*)
➔ *MAY 5-6*—**Minn. Living Green Expo**, St. Paul; Contact: www.livinggreenexpo.mn; 651-290-0154
➔ *AUG. 1*—**Application deadline for 2012-2013 LSP Farm Beginnings course** (*see page 14*)

Knockin' performances in Western Minn. & Twin Cities

Performances of *Look Who's Knockin'*, the Land Stewardship Project's play on the future of farming, will be held in the western Minnesota communities of Litchfield, Madison and Marshall in January (*see calendar on this page*). LSP is also planning on presenting the play in the Twin Cities this winter. Check www.landstewardshipproject.org for further details as they're finalized.

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