

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

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Number 3, 2011



How conservation, working agricultural land and profitable farming can combine forces to improve our communities (see pages 5, 10, 22 and 24).

— *Communities & Beginning Farmers* —

— *Wildly Successful Seeds* —

— *The Leopold Legacy* —

— *Weakening Factory Farm Rules in the Midnight Hour* —

— *Taking on Corporations* —

— *Latino Economic Development Center* —

— *Grassing Down a Farm*



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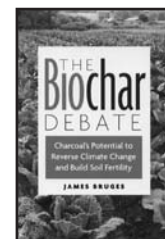
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Investing in farming's future... one community at a time

By Amy Bacigalupo

I was recently asked what I would do if I had money to invest on a national scale to make a difference for beginning farmers. My thoughts jumped immediately to a resource we have right in front of our eyes: established farmers who have proven over the course of their lifetime that they know how to succeed. Ultimately, their connection with beginning farmers will make the difference for the next generation of agrarians. Any investments we can make that help connect established farmers with beginners is money that will pay dividends long into the future.

Established farmers know there are no silver bullets. A farmer's knowledge comes from many years of seeking to understand the complexity of relationships involving soil, water, weather, crops, people, markets, technology and the land over a long time.

This complex system is unique for each farm and each farmer. It cannot be understood by boiling it down into discreet parts. It can only be understood as a whole system and this takes a lifetime of learning. If we want more farmers on the land, our approach for training beginning farmers has to be grounded in a community of existing farmers who are open and available to beginning farmers.

As the Land Stewardship Project has learned over 14 years of training beginning farmers, the leadership of established farmers is the key to creating a future generation of producers. In a sense, groups like LSP are trying to create a positive community for spawning new, successful farmers.

A community approach

It's no coincidence the community-based approach is deemed a priority in USDA's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP). Advanced in the 2008 Farm Bill, BFRDP is a comprehensive grants initiative that assists community-based organizations working with beginning farmers to address local approaches to starting and succeeding in agriculture. Since 2009, when the program was first offered, demand has far outstripped the resources available, with over 100 groups from across

the country applying for grants annually.

As we outlined in the last *Land Stewardship Letter* (No. 2, 2011, pages 10-11), there are some kinks to be worked out in the delivery of BFRDP, and it didn't start out being as community-based as its creators intended. However, with input and organizing from LSP and other groups, USDA has made substantial improvements in the way the program is executed.

Why is it so critical that beginning farmer training and support programs be communi-



Farm Beginnings graduate and vegetable farmer Josh Reinitz recently hosted a field day/workshop for current course participants. A key component of community-based beginning farmer courses is to create a way for information to be passed on from established producers to new and prospective farmers. (photo by Parker Forsell)

ty-based? Because they work. We advocated for the primary role of community-based organizations and approaches in the BFRDP because it is a model that has a successful and proven track record. For example, according to an LSP survey of Farm Beginnings graduates, 67 percent are managing their own farms and 65 percent are looking

to expand. This is similar to the compiled findings of other Farm Beginnings programs around the country which use this farmer-led, community-based model for training beginning farmers. Community-based approaches are successful because they create a support network around beginning farmers that facilitates the sharing of knowledge over a long time.

There are more community-based initiatives than ever being supported through BFRDP. This not only means the program is adhering more closely to the intentions of the 2008 Farm Bill, it also means the program is being more effective where it counts: in our communities. In other words, BFRDP is a good investment in the future of our food and farming system.

Several of our Farm Beginnings graduates have gone on to not only produce food in environmentally sound ways, but to become mentors to other new farmers and leaders in their community. One recent example of such leadership is how Farm Beginnings grad Nolan Lenzen has helped LSP reach out to Congressional ag leaders and inform them of the economic boost beginning farmers can provide rural communities (see page 15).

'Farmers Growing Farmers'

This past year, LSP's Farm Beginnings program applied for and received funding from BFRDP for the project "Farmers Growing Farmers." The focus of this project is to enhance and improve the delivery of farmer training by piloting new approaches that, together with successful existing trainings, will provide education and support for 1,230 beginning and prospective farmers over a three-year period. Specifically, LSP seeks to increase the skill levels of novice farmers through in-depth training, access to technical assistance, connections to a robust farmer-to-farmer support network and exposure to workshops covering advanced farming topics.

This project will also help beginning farmers build equity through options such as micro-loans and matched savings programs, as well as by creating community connections and strategies that lead to successful land transfers between beginning and established farmers.

Although not yet through our first year with this project, we are already seeing the impact that public funding of beginning farmer training and support can have in reaching our goal of getting more farmers on the land. Through our surveys, we have found the majority of Farm Beginnings

Investing, see page 4...

...Investing, from page 3

graduates are actively engaged in farming either on their own operation or other farms in the community. These preliminary findings are a good indicator that a community-based, farmer-led approach to beginning farmer training and support can build a future of more farmers.

Increasing the number of farmers is only the first return on investment. We are seeing firsthand how Farm Beginnings graduates are working to improve the communities they live and work in. They are hosting field days and workshops for other beginning farmers, getting involved in efforts to get more local food into schools and

restaurants, creating jobs and contributing to the local economy. They are also participating in activities through local organizations, as well as their township and county governments, to determine what role agriculture will play in the future of their community.

It's becoming increasingly clear that when an initiative like BFRDP can help rural citizens like this get established in the neighborhood, then it's not just providing support for our food and farming system, it's a wise investment in the future of our communities. □

• • •
“Knowledge does not reside in a book, a databank, a software program; they contain only information. Knowledge is always embodied in a person, carried by a person; created, augmented, or improved by a person; applied by a person; taught by a person, and passed on by a person.”

— the late Peter Drucker, author & management consultant

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Amy Bacigalupo directs the Farm Beginnings program. She can be reached at 320-269-2105 or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org. For more on Farm Beginnings, see pages 16-19.

Listen in on the voices of the land

For the past few years, the Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast has been showcasing 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.

The categories are:

- ◆ Ag and Food Policy
- ◆ Beginning Farmers/Farm Beginnings
- ◆ Culture and Agriculture
- ◆ Global Ag
- ◆ Grassroots People Power
- ◆ Innovative Farming and Farmers
- ◆ Innovative Marketing
- ◆ Local Food Systems
- ◆ Multifunctional Farming
- ◆ Stewardship Farming/Farming with the Wild

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

Letters

Why we farm the way we do

We graduated from the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program in 2002-2003, and the knowledge we gained from that program has been a keystone for the way we operate our farm. The assistance from LSP staff through the years, the many friends we made and the networking has been invaluable to us.

We continue to attend classes, seminars and conferences, and do a lot of reading to reinforce what we have learned and to explore new ideas as they become available.

Our priorities remain the same for improving our land, giving good care to the livestock entrusted to us and enjoying our farming lifestyle. We have also passed on some of the knowledge we gained through the Farm Beginnings classes to new farmers in our area who are interested in farming in an environmentally friendly way.

We direct-market beef, poultry and lamb. Last year, our final hatch of broiler chickens for the season was to be taken in to process in late November. The processor made an

error in scheduling and it was going to be weeks before they could reschedule. The day before we were to finally take them in, our area got hit with a horrific ice storm, which shut down power for weeks to many residences and businesses, including our processor.

We had to haul feed and water to the chickens, as well as fresh bedding, because the moveable pens had frozen to the ground. The chickens loved the sunshine coming into the pen and didn't seem to mind not being let out to roam because it was so cold. Because of the care the chickens got, we did

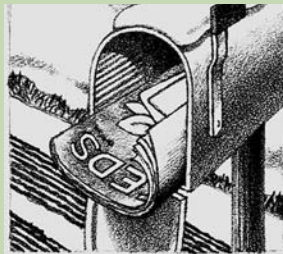
not lose even one due to the ice storm.

And guess what? The big CAFOs in our area had piles of chickens that had perished because of the power outages. That reinforces why we farm the way we do.

Whenever we think of that, we are so very thankful for the resources and people at the Land Stewardship Project, and the hard work you all do. Please accept our heartfelt appreciation for the effort you put into helping make our world a nice place to live.

— **Greg & Nancy Rasmussen**
Lockwood, Mo.

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.

Seeds of wildly successful stewardship

By Tex Hawkins

A few years ago, after collaborating with *Land Stewardship Letter* editor Brian DeVore on several articles featuring farm families pioneering wildlife- and water quality-friendly production methods, I suggested the term “wildly successful” be applied to this general idea of balancing conservation and food production. The result was a “Wildly Successful Farming” series, the latest installment which you can read on pages 24-27 of this *LSL*.

Neither Brian nor I could precisely define the meaning of wildly successful, because it is intended more as a meme – a conceptual seed that is planted in brains and spreads through communication and collaboration.

What we did recognize was that while not all success is financial, money is fundamental for farmers. If the economic model is unworkable, farmers can fail, and this is not a formula for successful stewardship. The same goes for communities — there has to be sufficiency and prosperity to assist and ensure the attainment of multiple benefits for people and nature. As Wes Jackson says, it’s now time to “solve for the whole.”

Wildly successful implies more than money and materialism; it involves the kind of personal satisfaction that comes when you know that you’re doing the right thing — it involves *real* family security and community sustainability. It’s a place where social justice and environmental ethics intersect.

Expanding the ‘working’ definition

Recognizing that everything is interconnected, we must proceed on that basis. For starters, let’s consider *all* lands as “working lands” in the sense that they provide essential ecosystem, as well as economic, services. Some lands may be less productive than others, in an economic sense, but even marginal lands have a critical role to play in the overall vitality and productivity of the “land organism,” as Aldo Leopold defined it.

Keeping all the cogs and wheels is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering, Leopold famously said. He was referring to ecological integrity as reflected in biological diversity — healthy habitats for native terrestrial and aquatic species. So when Brian and I and others collaborated on the 2002 book, *The Farm as Natural Habitat*, with editors Dana and Laura Jackson, we recognized that even the most production-intensive farming operations have marginal sites along travel corridors, fencerows, streams and floodplains, steep slopes, woodlands or meadows. These marginal sites can

provide esthetic, recreational and ecosystem services.

These are truly “working lands,” even though their owners or managers might not be paid to sustain them. These working wild lands represent the healing connective tissue that keeps the landscape as a whole from unraveling, deteriorating and taking livestock and crop production values down with it. Resilience — the capacity of socio-ecological systems to withstand climate and market shocks in the future — depends on *our* collective ability to maintain healthy hydrology, rich soils and the land’s capacity for self-renewal.

Instead of waiting for things to unravel,



Tex Hawkins (center) on a farm in southeast Minnesota. (LSP photo)

we can take a precautionary approach and assess both opportunities and risks. We can describe baseline conditions as we monitor selected indicators through time to detect change. We can model different scenarios and test preferred options and methods before broadly applying them. Both preemptive and adaptive management are necessary to advance the cause of sustainability.

From monitoring to action

But how do we integrate such management onto individual farms? It starts by creating a shared vision. For example, during the 1990s the Land Stewardship Project began organizing landowner workshops featuring the principles of Holistic Management. Larry Gates (a recently retired Minnesota Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologist and watershed specialist) and I were invited to participate. Larry and I were given an opportunity to participate in a series of workshops with some of southeastern Minnesota’s more innovative farmers and community leaders. A shared vision evolved favoring resource sustainability.

Soon, Larry and I were invited to become members of an interdisciplinary team of

researchers, farmers and agency specialists. Led by LSP Executive Director George Boody, this team spent three years developing relatively simple methods for monitoring on-farm progress toward sustainability using biological, economic and quality of life indicators.

One result of this work was the production of *The Monitoring Toolbox* by LSP. This resource was meant as a tool for farmers and other land managers to monitor the impact they were having on the land’s health, and to make adjustments accordingly. For example, the grassland breeding bird survey component of the *Toolbox* was designed to detect and follow trends in nesting activity. Farmers were paired with experienced birders on the six participating farms, which were pasturing dairy and beef cattle in managed rotational grazing systems. We would quietly watch, listen, record observations on data sheets, and later enter these and other observations in journals.

As a result of this, farm families without much previous interest in birds became proficient birders, and in some cases, bird enthusiasts, deciding to put up bluebird houses, to establish rest paddocks to facilitate nesting in areas normally disturbed, and to walk, instead of riding a motorized vehicle, to get the cows. And now, at least some of the farmers have a decade of phenology observations to help guide management.

Grassland migrant species such as meadowlarks, dickcissels and savanna sparrows were holding their own on the rotationally pastured farms, while they were absent from adjacent intensively farmed lands. The overall diversity of birds, frogs and soil organisms was higher on healthier and more sustainable farms. Some farms were able to translate these environmental benefits into financial success by connecting with eaters who were willing to pay for food produced on land that was well taken care of. And thus, through such a market relationship, non-farming consumers have been able to share in this vision of resource sustainability.

Creating such shared visions in communities across the countryside requires not only saving all the cogs and wheels that come with biological diversity. It also means keeping and supporting the cogs and wheels of diversified small- and medium-sized family farms flexible enough to try sustainable production systems. □

Tex Hawkins is an LSP Board member and a watershed biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, based out of Winona, Minn. More information on the Monitoring Project is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/mtb/lsp_toolbox.html.

Remembering a conservation pioneer

Nina Leopold Bradley: 1917-2011

By Dana Jackson

Nina Leopold Bradley died on May 25 in her home on the Leopold Reserve, not far from the Leopold Shack and the new Leopold Center near Baraboo, Wis. She was 93.

Nina wrote the foreword for *The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems to Ecosystems*, a collection of essays edited by my daughter Laura and me and published in 2002 by Island Press. The book was inspired by the writings of Nina's father, Aldo Leopold, and our experiences with farmers we knew who were striving to make their farms economically and ecologically sustainable. *The Farm as Natural Habitat* was planned at a retreat held at the Leopold shack in 1998 with colleagues who expressed interest in contributing chapters to the book. Nina was an active participant in our discussions and encouraged us to go forward with the book.

I attended a memorial gathering for Nina on Aug. 3. As all the speakers at the gathering testified, she was the kind of person who inspired, encouraged and affirmed family and friends as they struggled through difficulties or started new ventures.

Before *The Farm as Natural Habitat* was conceived and after it was published, Nina was my friend and mentor. I met her in 1984 when I attended a Leopold Shack seminar for the first time and was invited to eat soup and bread in the Bradley house. Our paths crossed numerous times after that.

The memorial for Nina was held at the Leopold Center, which was built in 2006 just down Levee road from the Leopold Shack and the home where Nina and Charley Bradley lived. Both the house and the Center were built with lumber from pine trees that Nina and her siblings had planted in the 1930s when they spent weekends with their

parents, Aldo and Estella, at the Shack. Nina's house can't be seen from the road, but big bluestem, Indian grass and tall yellow prairie coneflower that Nina and Charley planted are visible along the driveway. In the middle of the three buildings that make up the Leopold Center is a beautiful prairie watered by run-off from the roofs. It was in full bloom on Aug. 3, a brilliant living tribute to Nina on the day of her memorial.

I heard Nina's rich, cello-like voice as I walked into the Interpretive Wing in August. Her words pulled me into the room, past large black and white photos of Leopold family members on the walls, to a video screen which showed Nina talking about her youth at the shack and the values imparted by her father. Her face and voice are familiar to thousands, maybe millions, these days



Nina Leopold Bradley (photo by Ed Pembleton)

as the work of the Leopold Foundation has become known worldwide through the many books written about the Leopold family and Aldo Leopold's land ethic, through visitors making pilgrimages to see the Shack and the Center, and via the Foundation website and the new film *Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time*.

The home page of the Foundation website (www.aldoleopold.org) features photographs of Nina Bradley from babyhood to great-grandmotherhood. My favorite is one showing Nina in her 90s, cross-country skiing on the Leopold Preserve.

Nina and her siblings (Starker, Luna, Carl and Estella) established the nonprofit Aldo Leopold Foundation in 1982, with Nina on-site as a full time

volunteer. Today it is an internationally recognized organization with nine staff members and several interns working in the Platinum LEED Certified research and education facility.

The forerunner to this new facility was the Bradley Study Center, set up on the lower floor of Nina and Charley's house as an ecological research program hosting University of Wisconsin graduate students. There, Nina revived her father's practice of recording the first occurrence of natural events in their annual cycle. Aldo Leopold kept such phenological records from 1936 until his death in 1947; Nina did the same from 1974 until the week of her death in 2011. Nina was a co-author of a 1999 paper published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* showing that several phenological events on the Leopold farm had been increasing in earliness over 61 years of records, indicating the effects of climate change.

Nina Leopold Bradley graduated with a degree in geography from the University of Wisconsin in the 1930s when not many women attended college. She assisted her first husband, zoologist William Elder, in his wildlife research in various parts of the world, but became respected as a scientist in her own right when she returned with her second husband Charley Bradley to live on the Leopold farm in the 1970s.

Through the Bradley Study Center and the Leopold Foundation, she was the spokesperson for land restoration and an interpreter of ecological principles first articulated by Aldo Leopold. She was the recipient of numerous awards, including the distinguished service award of the Society of Conservation Biology and honorary doctorates from Northland College and the University of Wisconsin.

Nina's brothers and her husband Charley preceded her in death, and she is survived by her sister Estella Leopold, her two daughters, two step children, and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Her spirit and wisdom lives on in the work of family, friends and colleagues. □

Dana Jackson coordinates the St. Croix River Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local chapter out of the Land Stewardship Project's Twin Cities office.

Since its publication in 2002, The Farm as Natural Habitat (www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_agroecology.html) has become a key component of discussions around balancing food production with ecological health.

• • •
"Farmers have contributed a lot to conservation and biodiversity, as well as putting food on our plate each day. Aldo Leopold spoke clearly that we have to make a living from the land, that we all need shelter, clothes and food. But he also realized that we need a great deal more if we are to lead sane and honorable lives; we need beauty, community, and purpose; we need 'spiritual relationships to things of the land.' "

— Nina Leopold Bradley,
writing in *The Farm as Natural Habitat*

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Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

→ **Myth:** Using crops to produce biofuels does not raise food prices.

→ **Fact:**

This summer, former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture John Block wrote a newspaper commentary that dismissed as an “urban myth” the claim that making more of our crops like corn into biofuels has raised food prices. Wrote Block: “There just isn’t any statistical evidence that increased ethanol production results in rising food prices...”

This is just the latest in a long line of responses to concerns that there is a connection between food-shortage-fueled political unrest in places like Egypt and Algeria, and making food crops into biofuel. Much of the nay-saying that there is little or no connection comes from groups like the Renewable Fuels Foundation, which is “dedicated to meeting the education, research and strategic planning needs of the U.S. fuel ethanol industry,” according to its website.

For example, Block bases his commentary mostly on a study conducted recently by Informa Economics, a market research firm that specializes in agricultural commodities. Not surprisingly, Informa was paid by the Renewable Fuels Foundation to conduct its latest biofuels study.

According to the Informa study, higher corn prices are not a major driver of higher food prices because corn accounts for only 11.6 cents out of every food dollar Americans spend on food. In addition, according to Block and Informa, weather disasters, the declining U.S. dollar and strong demand for livestock feed are combining to raise corn prices to record levels (it’s selling for well over \$7 a bushel at this writing, and \$8 corn is not out of the question later this fall).

Informa is correct: higher food prices are the result of a number of factors—wild speculation on the part of traders willing to cash in on uncertainty and fear being one of them—and no one single element can take all the blame. But there is plenty of evidence that higher corn prices play a bigger role in grocery store inflation than some would have us believe.

A paper by Purdue University agricultural economists Corinne Alexander and

Chris Hurt argues that there is often a very direct connection. And that connection often has its roots in one major factor: when more corn or other crop is planted for the biofuels market, that leaves fewer acres available for other food crops.

When wheat acreage, for example, is replaced by corn, it’s inevitable the price of flour will go up. And replacing soybean acres with corn means the resulting higher prices for soybean oil can affect the price of everything from salad dressings to cooking oils and margarine. (Indeed, the USDA reported this summer that when U.S. ethanol production increased from 1.6 billion gallons to 10.8 billion gallons annually between 2000 and 2009, harvested corn acreage increased by roughly 10 percent. That increased corn acreage came at the expense of, among other things, soybean plantings.)

On the local level, inflated land values caused by high corn prices makes it difficult for producers of fruits, vegetables or other specialty crops to come up with the money to rent or buy even a few acres. That means such products must travel more expensive miles to get to your supper table.

Alexander and Hurt estimate that in 2007, higher prices for commodities such as corn increased food inflation by \$22 billion annually. About two-thirds of that increase, or around \$15 billion per year, was related to biofuels.

“While the fear of hyper-food inflation similar to the early 1970s is vastly overblown, food price increases in the early years of the biofuels boom will likely be the largest in over 15 years,” conclude the Purdue economists.

It’s been argued that food price volatility is being caused by increased demands for grain and oilseed from a rapidly expanding middle class in places like China and Asia. In particular, the higher demand for meat means more of these crops are being diverted to feed use.

But this summer an interesting study emerged from the United Nations’ Committee on World Food Security that cast serious doubt on this theory. It found that in recent years there has been barely any change, and in fact a bit of a slow down, in the rate of grain consumption in China and India, which combined make up 40 percent of the world’s population. And use of grains and oilseeds for feed in countries where meat production

is going up has, with the exception of the Soviet Union, been slowing down.

So why so much food price volatility? The UN report points the finger at biofuels as one major cause. It found that using grains like corn and wheat to produce ethanol has added 0.5 percentage points to the growth in world cereal grain demand, pushing it from 1.3 percent annually to 1.8 percent. The use of vegetable oils in Europe to make biodiesel has had an even larger impact. The processing of these oils for food slowed down between the 1990s and 2000s—from 4.4 percent to 3.3 percent annually. But from 2000 to 2010 alone, industrial use (much of that for biofuels) of vegetable oils more than doubled from 11 percent to 24 percent of world use.

There is a growing call for countries to take a second look at national mandates and subsidies for biofuel production. For example, the U.S. Congress has mandated that biofuel use must reach 36 billion gallons annually by 2022 (that’s almost triple the 13 billion gallons that are used annually today). Currently, encouraged by subsidies, nearly 40 percent of the corn grown in this country already goes to make biofuel.

The food price volatility caused by using cereal grains and oilseeds to make fuel should also be an incentive to make options such as cellulosic biofuels—producing energy from perennial grasses, etc.—more economically viable, say economists. Perhaps some of the money being pumped into corn ethanol subsidies could be re-directed to researching how prairie grass can be part of a locally based, sustainable bioenergy future.

→ **More information:**

- To read the UN report, “Price volatility and food security,” see www.iatp.org/files/HLPE-price-volatility-and-food-security-report-July-2011.pdf.

- Purdue University’s “Biofuels and Their Impact on Food Prices” paper is at www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/ID/ID-346-W.pdf.

For information on the entire Myth Busters series, see page 21.



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LSP News

Twin Cities cookout/celebration showcases LSP work, local food

Local food, music, kids' games, a silent auction and a discussion about the future of sustainable agriculture and family farming were featured at the Land Stewardship Project's 10th annual Twin Cities-area potluck and cookout on July 28. LSP would like to thank all of the local businesses and artisans who donated and contributed to this event and helped make it a success. We'd also like to thank all the volunteers that helped with everything from grilling and greeting to composting and cleaning up afterwards. □

RIGHT: LSP volunteers Tim Holt (*left*) and Brad Beal grilled locally produced brats and burgers for the cookout. The meat was sourced from LSP member-farmers Linda and Mike Noble of Farm on Wheels/Cozy Meadows in Kenyon, Minn. (*LSP photo*)



BELOW: LSP's Dana Jackson talked at the event about work the organization has been doing during the past few years in the Saint Croix River Valley to promote local food production and consumption as part of efforts to improve the health of local residents while protecting the environment and improving the economy. For details, see the No. 1, 2011, *Land Stewardship Letter*, pages 24-25. More information on this work is also available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/bfbl/index.html. (*LSP photo*)



LSP members named '2011 Farm Families of the Year'

Several Land Stewardship Project members were recognized this summer as 2011 Farm Families of the Year for their respective counties by the University of Minnesota. The Farm Family Recognition Program honors farm families from throughout Minnesota for their contributions to the agriculture industry and their local communities.

LSP members honored were:

- **Alan & Lori Callister**, Dodge County—chickens and eggs.
- **David & Patricia Craigmile**, Lac qui Parle County—crops.
- **Dave Massey**, Ramsey County—vegetables.
- **Loretta & Martin Jaus**, Sibley County—dairy.
- **Joel & Bernice Penner**, Watonwan County—hogs and crops. □

Gormans named 'Conservation Farmers'

Land Stewardship Project members Bill and Sue Gorman were recently named Goodhue County, Minn., Conservation Farmers of the Year. The Gormans have a grass-based organic dairy near the town of Goodhue, in southeast Minnesota. Bill is a member of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee. □



ABOVE: Over 240 people gathered on the lawn at LSP's office in South Minneapolis. George Boody, LSP's Executive Director, announced at the event that the organization recently purchased the building housing the office. The building is a former firehouse constructed in 1941. (*LSP photo*)



ABOVE: LSP members and friends contributed a number of items to the Twin Cities cookout potluck table. (LSP photo)



ABOVE RIGHT: Music for the cookout was provided by Gabe Barnett and the Big House Jug Band, collaborating with Jack Klatt and the Cat Swingers. (LSP photo)



RIGHT: A beanbag toss, jump rope contest and other games for kids were featured on the grounds surrounding LSP's office. (LSP photo)

Resiliency through diversity



Land Stewardship Project Executive Director George Boody (*left*) gave a presentation Aug. 18 on how diversified farms can provide multiple ecosystem services such as improved soil and water quality. The presentation was part of the annual field day at the USDA North Central Soil Conservation Research Lab in Morris, Minn.

Speaking with Boody was Abdulh Jaradat (*right*), research leader at the lab. Jaradat's lab is one of the collaborators on the Chippewa 10% Project, an initiative led by LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project.

Boody said that Chippewa 10% is looking at how farmers can profitably add biological diversity to their operations. "Biological diversity in farming systems can help farmers deal with shocks to the system by providing more resiliency," he said. "Those shocks can be weather and pests, but those shocks can also be economic."

For more on Chippewa 10%, see page 23. (LSP photo)

CSP snapshot: the Jovaag farm

They are using the program to continue & enhance a conservation legacy

By Hannah Hutchins & Adam Warthesen

From the time Arvid and Lois Jovaag began renting land near the Cedar River in southern Minnesota, conservation played a key role in their farming goals.

“It’s important to do things that are good for the land,” says Arvid on a recent summer day while giving a tour of their farm near the community of Austin. “Diversity is good for sustainability.”

Now, three decades later, the Jovaags, who were recognized as “Outstanding Conservationists” in 2010 by the Mower County Soil and Water Conservation District, are utilizing a program that is helping them achieve and maintain the stewardship that’s important to them as farmers and residents of their community.

In 2009, they signed up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). CSP is a working lands conservation initiative the Land Stewardship Project worked to strengthen and expand in the 2008 Farm

Bill. It was started in 2002 and the 2008 Farm Bill made numerous improvements to the initiative, which provides payments for producers who historically have practiced good stewardship on their agricultural lands, and provides financial incentives for those who want to do more. The program is being administered by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

In many ways, it was tailor-made for farmers like the Jovaags. After renting land for a few years in the early 1980s, they purchased their 475-acre farm in 1985. It sits along a stretch of the Cedar River — a picturesque location that is also quite environmentally sensitive. Protecting the river is important to the Jovaags who, along with their daughter Kari and son Jon, have long enjoyed canoeing its waters. In fact, the Cedar has been in the news lately because of unprecedented flooding downstream in Iowa. Increasingly in the watershed, the replacement of perennial plant systems like pasture and hay with annual row crops is being fingered

as a major culprit in this extreme flooding.

The Jovaags raise cattle, chickens, sheep, corn, beans, oats and hay. They’ve long used conservation farming techniques such as managed rotational grazing and resource conserving crop rotations. With the help of Minnesota’s Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program, they have developed a 21-acre buffer of prairie grass, which runs along the river next to their corn and soybean fields. This has reduced soil erosion and improves the quality of the water that runs off into the Cedar. The Jovaags have also established grassy waterways that direct water into the

Jovaag contract snapshot

Maintaining existing practices:

- Rotational grazing.
- Cropping diversity and a resource conserving crop rotation that includes hay, oats and grass.
- Planted trees and adjacent wildlife areas.
- Permanent prairie grass buffer and waterways.

Enhancements with CSP:

- Shallow water habitat.
- Retrofitting watering facilities for wildlife escape.

river. Before the family started renting the farm, there was a city dump on the land. They cleaned it up and planted four acres of trees and pasture on the site.

When the family applied to CSP, the local NRCS office scored them based on what conservation measures they already had in place, and which ones they agreed to add in the future. Their rotational grazing system, resource conserving crop rotation, minimum tillage system and water-friendly buffer plantings yielded a relatively high score in the “existing conservation” category.

The Jovaags accumulated more points by agreeing to add other conservation measures. These ranged from significant projects (a sediment pond along the river) to the relatively simple (retrofitting watering facilities for wildlife escape). The sediment pond supports a shallow wetland site that has been particularly effective at collecting sediment that runs from the fields and filtering water before going into the river. It also provides habitat for wildlife, say the Jovaags.

Overall, the family qualified for a five-year contract valued at \$6,631 annually.

There was a significant amount of paperwork involved, but the Jovaags say their experience with applying to CSP was positive overall. Their local NRCS officials were helpful in the process, say the farmers.

“If we had to do it on our own, we



Managed rotational grazing is one of the tools Arvid and Lois Jovaag use on their southern Minnesota farm to protect the land while generating income. “Diversity is good for sustainability,” says Arvid. (photo by Hannah Hutchins)

CSP, see page 11...

wouldn't have been able to make it," says Lois. Their local NRCS office was in constant contact with Lois and Arvid, and had kept a record of what conservation measures had been implemented, which made the process less overwhelming for the family.

The Jovaags feel that there needs to be good support for working lands conservation programs and less dependence on USDA commodity programs such as direct payments.

"It doesn't have to be a choice between being a working, productive farm and conservation," says Arvid. "Programs like CSP can help farmers strike a balance between

profits and sustainability." □

Hannah Hutchins served an internship with LSP's Policy program this summer. Adam Warthesen is an LSP organizer. For more information on signing up for CSP, contact Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.



Enhancements the Jovaags agreed to implement to increase their CSP score range from the simple—a wildlife ramp in a livestock tank, shown in the left photo—to the more complex—a sediment basin.

Minnesota Farmers are top users of CSP

Since the Conservation Stewardship Program was revamped in the 2008 Farm Bill, three sign-ups have been conducted. According to USDA data, Minnesota farmers' use of the program has consistently placed the state in the top ranking nationally in terms of CSP contracts awarded and total public investment obligated to conservation through the program. There are more than 2,000 Minnesota applicants annually.

2009

LAND USE	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION	AVG. \$/Acre	AVG. \$/Contract/year
AG* 2009	649	410,815	\$9,578,110	\$23.31	\$14,758
NIPF† 2009	260	56,967	\$353,228	\$6.20	\$1,358
TOTAL	909	467,783	\$9,931,338		\$10,925

2010

LAND USE	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION	AVG. \$/Acre	AVG. \$/Contract/year
AG 2010	510	406,744	\$11,094,682	\$27.28	\$21,748.28
NIPF 2010	159	41,356	\$351,300	\$8.49	\$2,209
TOTAL	669	448,100	\$11,445,982		\$17,109

2011

LAND USE	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION	AVG. \$/Acre	AVG. \$/Contract/year
AG 2011	625	522,778.3	\$16,032,485	\$30.67	\$25,651.98
NIPF 2011	136	27,488.6	\$346,697	\$12.61	\$2,549.24
TOTAL	764	552,156	\$16,457,101		\$21,540.71

Minnesota CSP	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION
Total:	2,342	1,468,039	\$37,834,421

*AG = Agricultural land †NIPF = Non-industrial private forest

MN Legislative Update:

Last minute budget deal weakens CAFO rules

By Bobby King

As part of the budget negotiations to end the Minnesota government shutdown this summer, Republican leaders insisted that language be included in the finance bill which weakens environmental standards for factory farms. The Land Stewardship Project and our allies have opposed this proposal in the past, and it failed to pass the normal legislative committee process this year and last year due to strong public opposition. So pro-factory farm Legislators thought, “Why not sneak it through when the public is locked out of the process?”

Indeed, budget negotiations to end the government shutdown were done behind closed doors. In fact, the entire Capitol was closed to the public during the process. We were not able to see the budget bills until they were presented publicly as the final product. The final budget agreement that included this language was spin-doctored as a “compromise,” but that’s far from the truth. This was one-sided—corporate special interests didn’t compromise and, with policy changes like this, they actually came out ahead. It was our air, water and family farmers that were compromised.

Public policy created behind closed doors is contrary to democratic values and almost always ends up favoring corporate special interests over the public good. And that’s exactly what happened here.

Here’s some background on this law: under federal changes made during the last Bush Presidential Administration, feedlots over 1,000 animal units are not required to get a Clean Water Act National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit if they certify that they will not discharge to public waters. However, under Minnesota law, operations of this size were still required to get a Clean Water Act NPDES permit—something we should have been proud of here in the land of 10,000 lakes. During the past few years, this state provision has helped protect our water despite the lowering of federal standards.

But all that’s changed as of this summer. The new law forces Minnesota to follow the weaker federal standard for feedlots over

1,000 animal units. So now the state’s largest factory farms will not be required to get Clean Water Act NPDES permits if feedlot operators claim that they do not intend to discharge into waters of the state.

Benefiting a select few

There are more than 30,000 registered feedlots in Minnesota, with about 1,100 of them larger than 1,000 animal units, according to the MPCA (1,000 animal units = 2,500 sows, 10,000 swine under 55 pounds, 1,000 head of cattle, or 700 dairy cows).

In other words, the largest livestock operations make up less than 4 percent of all feedlots in the state. But because of the extremely large amounts of liquid manure they concentrate in one place, these operations pose inordinately large air and water pollution risks. It’s well documented that the nation’s biggest manure-related fish kills have been caused by the largest livestock operations, which, by their very nature, far too often treat manure as a waste product, rather than as a valuable fertilizer. Here in Minnesota, the record for number of fish killed by a single manure spill is held by a large hog operation in Renville County.

And as we’ve reported in the *Land Stewardship Letter* previously, the gigantic Excel Dairy in northwest Minnesota is a prime example of how failure to bird-dog a factory farm can create a public health risk long into the future. In fact, it was only by pulling Excel’s Clean Water Act NPDES permit that state officials were finally able to begin addressing the problem.

This summer’s special session should have been exclusively about ending the government shutdown and addressing the revenue crisis. It should not have been used to push policy for corporate special interests. That the Environment Finance Bill benefits a handful of corporate special interests is bad enough. Even worse, it has the potential to do great harm to thousands of rural residents throughout the state. And those folks most affected had no say in the matter.

Here’s the kicker: this weakening of our state law will not save money. In fact, the Legislature budgeted \$700,000 for the next two years to cover the costs of “implementing general operating permits for feedlots over 1,000 animal units.” In most other

industries, the firm applying for the pollution permit covers, through fees, most of the cost of administering that permit. But in Minnesota, factory farming is different — its permitting system is heavily subsidized by our tax money.

For example, before this bill was passed, the fee for a large feedlot to apply for an NPDES permit was in the hundreds of dollars—a drop in the bucket for a 700-cow dairy or a 10,000 head swine operation. Why aren’t these agribusinesses required to pay real money to get a pollution permit?

Putting corporate interests ahead of the public good isn’t limited to Saint Paul. And eliminating input from the people affected by legislation doesn’t always have to be done in the middle of the night.

This summer and fall, in broad daylight, lawmakers in D.C. have been working to slash funding for programs that benefit family farmers—the Conservation Stewardship Program, for example (see pages 10-11 for more on CSP). They are doing this outside of what is supposed to be the key public input-driven vehicle for determining how much funding agriculture receives: the Farm Bill.

And guess what programs are not being cut in these times of “we all must share the pain”? Federal commodity crop programs that benefit large-scale corporate agriculture are somehow getting off relatively unscathed. Again, the excuse being used for cutting budgets outside the regular legislative process is that it’s a crisis situation and that we all have to sacrifice. It’s a crisis alright, a crisis for democratic decision making — and corporate interests are not sharing in the sacrifice. □

Bobby King is an LSP state policy organizer. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

Local democracy tool

The Land Stewardship Project’s *When a Factory Farm Comes to Town: Protecting Your Township from Unwanted Development* provides guidance on using the Minnesota Interim Ordinance and other tools in the state’s Municipal Planning law.

Paper copies of the 52-page guide are available from LSP’s Policy and Organizing program by calling 612-722-6377, or e-mailing bking@landstewardshipproject.org. The cost is \$8 if shipped. It can be downloaded for free off of LSP’s website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/township_manual06.pdf.

LSP lays the groundwork to take on corporate abuse

By Bobby King

As part of the debate this spring and summer over how to address Minnesota's revenue crisis, we heard repeatedly that everyone would have to accept compromise. In reality, one element of our society did not have to compromise — corporate special interests.

In fact, corporate interests came out ahead. Just one example that the Land Stewardship Project exposed is that while the budget was being negotiated behind closed doors at the Minnesota Capitol, language was inserted into the "compromise" that weakened environmental standards for our state's largest factory farms (see page 12). At the federal level, farm programs that benefit family farmers and land stewardship like the Conservation Stewardship Program (pages 10-11) and the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (pages 3-4) are being put on the chopping block by corporate-backed politicians.

Virulent corporate opposition to rules aimed at restoring fairness to livestock markets has prevented the strengthened Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) rule from being released. But commodity subsidies that feed the corporate agriculture system are left untouched.

Corporate America making profits is not the problem. The problem is when corporate interests make profits at the public expense. These are lean times for many Americans, and yet corporate America — Wall Street and investment bankers especially — are making record profits. After receiving a trillion-dollar bailout, the biggest banks are still foreclosing on homes at record rates. Too often we have seen their profits stay private — and often tax free — while their losses have been picked up by the public.

This is happening at a time when we don't have enough revenue to maintain our roads, schools and water systems, much less provide beginning farmers the assistance they need. And as health care costs skyrocket for all of us, insurance companies make record profits and their CEOs are paid

millions in salaries and bonuses.

Citizens for Tax Justice analyzed the effective taxes paid by 12 major Fortune 500 corporations: American Electric Power, Boeing, DuPont, Exxon Mobile, FedEx, General Electric, Honeywell, IBM United Technologies, Verizon, Wells Fargo and Yahoo. From 2008-2010, these 12 major corporations reported profits totaling \$171 billion, but collectively they paid *no* taxes. In fact, they were subsidized with \$2.5 billion from taxpayers, many of modest incomes. And corporate-backed politicians say we have to cut the \$20 million per year Beginning Farmer

"This massive ascendancy of corporate power over democratic process is probably the most ominous development since the end of World War II, and for the most part 'the free world' seems to be regarding it as merely normal."

It is increasingly clear that we cannot achieve prosperous rural communities and ensure stewardship of our land without understanding and confronting this corporate abuse of our democracy and corporate control of our economy. The stories of corporate abuse of our economy, democracy and land have become so commonplace as to be

almost impossible to keep track of. An alarming testament to corporate power is that a majority of elected officials either avoid the issue, or even worse, defend corporate interests. A successful movement to rein in corporate power and hold the common good above corporate profits must be a grassroots movement of diverse interests. In coming months and years, LSP plans on playing an important role in this movement of bringing a rural and farm voice to the discussion.

LSP has started a conversation with allies in Minnesota, the Midwest and the nation about what we can do to check this corporate abuse. We held two membership meetings in late August — one in southeast Minnesota and one in the western part of the state — for LSP members to discuss the issue and help decide how we can most effectively confront corporate abuse of power that increasingly affects

our lives. We are planning more meetings for this winter.

As always, the success of this work will depend on strong engagement from LSP members. If you have thoughts about this important work, contact me. □

Bobby King is an LSP organizer who works on state policy. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

The CR4* in Agricultural Markets 2011

Beef Slaughter CR4 = 82%

Historical CR4

1990: 72%

1995: 76%

1998: 79%

2000: 81%

2005: 83.5%

Flour Milling CR4 = 52%

Historical CR4

1982: 40%

1987: 44%

1990: 61%

2000: 81%

2005: 63%

Pork Slaughter CR4 = 63%

Historical CR4

1987: 37%

1989: 34%

1990: 40%

2001: 59%

2005: 64%

2011 CR4 of various ag industries

Broiler Slaughter: 53%

Turkey Slaughter: 58%

Wet Corn Milling: 87%

Soybean Processing: 85%

Animal Feed: 44%

* According to one economic rule of thumb, when at least four firms control over 40 percent of a market — called the four firm concentration or "CR4" level — it is no longer a competitive situation.

Source: "Concentration of Agricultural Markets 2011," Mary Hendrickson, University of Missouri, & Robert Taylor, Auburn University; www.foodcircles.missouri.edu/consol.htm

and Rancher Development Program because there just isn't the money to do that?

Corporate consolidation and abuse of power has been addressed throughout history by some of our nation's most prominent leaders.

Thomas Jefferson said, "I hope that we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations, which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength, and bid defiance to the laws of our country."

"To befool the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of the day," was Theodore Roosevelt's take on the issue.

And recently, Wendell Berry, a farmer and LSP member, and one of the leading thinkers and writers on sustainable agriculture and rural communities, has written:

Give it a look

To watch brief videos of Land Stewardship Project members talking about corporate abuse of democracy and our economy, see www.youtube.com/user/LSPNOW#p/u.

Social justice through business development

The Latino Economic Development Center sees farming potential in the immigrant community

The Latino Economic Development Center was founded in 2003 with a simple guiding principle: small- and medium-sized business development can be one important path toward social justice in a local community. Since then, the small nonprofit has provided business consulting, education, support services and loans to new immigrant entrepreneurs in Minnesota's Twin Cities.

In recent years, LEDC has been working with outstate Minnesota's growing Latino population, helping people from various

Land Stewardship Project Policy organizer Doug Nopar says having a way to get more new immigrant farmers started fits well with LSP's mission to build healthy communities.

"Many of these new immigrants' experience with agriculture in the Midwest is working on factory farms where they can be exploited," he says. "This could be a way for them to participate in the food system in a positive way, as entrepreneurs who own their own farm businesses."

an authentic Latin American marketplace on East Lake Street. Opened in 1999, Mercado Central functions as a small business incubator and cultural center.

What's become clear over the years is that Latinos have been traveling from all over Minnesota to shop at Mercado Central and other businesses on East Lake Street.

"They are coming to Lake Street because that's where the services are located," says Cotterall.

In recent years entrepreneurs in west-central, southwest and southeast Minnesota have seen opportunities for creating their own version of Mercado Central. Worthington already has 50 new immigrant businesses; Willmar has 35 to 40.

"They often open up in buildings that were abandoned," says Flory.

LEDC has assisted many of these outstate entrepreneurs the way it helps those right in its South Minneapolis neighborhood: offering classes on starting and managing a business.

"It's can be as basic as, 'This is how to write a receipt,'" says Cotterall of the classes, adding that LEDC also helps potential business owners prepare for the effect that such a venture can have on a family. "Small business disruption to a household is no small thing—it can be very stressful for a family."

But before someone can receive services or take an LEDC class, they are required to attend an orientation where they have a chance to learn more about the organization and receive an overview of what they should consider before opening a business. Because LEDC is member-based, they are also invited to join the organization. Among some of the things new or potential business owners learn during the orientation is the importance of being a positive presence in society.

"This isn't just about making money—it's about being a good member of the community by treating workers fairly, for example," says Cotterall. "There's also some cautionary information in the orientation. We consider it an inoculation against making rookie mistakes."

LEDC has provided its eight-week "Business Start Up" course in St. Cloud,



LEDC provides classes that cover everything from how to write a receipt and obtain licenses to preparing a family for being part of a new business. (photo courtesy of LEDC)

backgrounds start and maintain businesses in rural areas and regional centers such as Long Prairie and Willmar. Now, the Center's dozen staffers are hoping to reach out to new immigrants who want to start farm businesses. This, says Yolanda Cotterall, LEDC's Greater Minnesota Rural Program Director, is a natural step for LEDC, a way to make those rural populations more self-sufficient while tapping into the ag entrepreneurial spirit many new immigrants have.

"Many of these people come from farming and rural backgrounds and end up working in agriculture here in Minnesota," she says. "Why not take advantage of that and spread some seeds?"

A successful model in the city

LEDC is located at the intersection of Lake Street and Bloomington Avenue in South Minneapolis, an area that's been revitalized in recent years by restaurants, grocery stores, clothiers and other businesses that serve new immigrants.

Of the 300 Latino businesses that exist in the East Lake Street area, half of those have worked with LEDC, according to John Flory, Special Projects Director for the Center. At the epicenter of all this economic activity is Mercado Central, a member-owned cooperative of some four dozen Latino businesses that has the mission of recreating

LEDC, see page 15...

Owatonna, Madelia and Willmar. In that latter community, LEDC has also provided a “Train the Trainer” program and collaborative efforts there have resulted in the Willmar Multicultural Business Center (WMBC), which provides technical assistance to aspiring Latino entrepreneurs. The WMBC has, among other things, an incubator kitchen and a place where business owners can come in for advice and resources on a regular basis.

Cotterall says LEDC would eventually like to start such centers in locations around the state, placing them in areas where new immigrants have settled to work in canneries or packing plants.

Taking it to the farm

So far, almost all of the businesses LEDC has worked with have been “town” ventures — groceries, restaurants, hair salons, etc. But there’s no reason outstate business centers couldn’t serve new immigrant farmers as well, says Flory.

Because of LEDC’s connections to so many food-related businesses, he feels the Center is a natural for bringing together farmers and markets. One Minneapolis grocery store that serves the immigrant community buys 25 hogs a week from a small farm in western Minnesota. Flory estimates that if the majority of food-related new immigrant businesses he knows of joined a buying cooperative that purchased from local farmers,

it could be a \$10 million to \$20 million annual market.

“We’re seeing if we can connect local producers and local businesses,” he says.

Cotterall and Flory say the missing element in bringing farmers and retailers together is something that’s familiar to anyone involved in the community based food movement: the lack of intermediate

More information

For more information on LEDC, see www.ledc-mn.org, or call 612-724-5332.

businesses that can provide processing and warehousing for these localized connections.

Filling that gap by helping those intermediate businesses get started and connected with farmers and end markets will be key.

“We want to expand beyond the farmers’ market system that has traditionally been the way new immigrants get involved in operating their own farms,” says Flory.

One significant barrier to new immigrant businesses — farm-related or otherwise — is access to capital. In the Twin Cities, there are various options for nontraditional loans; in rural areas credit is more limited. Pile on top of that language and race issues, and the hurdles to obtaining even basic start-up loans can be tremendous, says Cotterall.

LEDC hopes to help fulfill that need for credit with a new loan program it’s started.

“If we can help clients buy a million-dollar building, why not help them buy a million dollars worth of farmland in a cooperative way?” Flory asks.

LEDC would eventually like to feed new immigrant farmers into the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings program (see page 16).

LSP and LEDC are working together to adapt the Farm Beginning’s curriculum so that it better meets the needs of emerging Latino farmers, according to Amy Bacigalupo, Farm Beginnings’ program director.

“Most important in this collaborative work will be bringing Latino farmers into relationships with established farmers in their community to ensure there is enough ongoing support as they launch and operate their enterprises,” says Bacigalupo.

Flory and Cotterall concede that LEDC lacks expertise when it comes to farming, particularly in areas like sustainable agriculture, which relies heavily on farmer-to-farmer knowledge transmission.

But tapping into a community of established farmers and other ag professionals through LSP’s Farm Beginnings program could help fill that knowledge gap while helping answer the call for more farmers, locally and nationally.

“The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture thinks we need 100,000 new farmers a year,” says Flory. “One place to look is new immigrants.” □

Farm policy talk down on the farm



Beginning farmer policy, working lands conservation, commodity program reform and the timing of the next Farm Bill were the focus of a discussion during a LSP meeting and farm tour Aug. 17 at the central Minnesota farm of Nolan and Vanessa Lenzen.

Pictured here is Minnesota U.S. Representative and ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee, Collin Peterson (left), talking to Nolan. The Lenzens, who are recent Farm Beginning graduates, are beginning farmers who operate an organic, grass-based dairy farm near Eagle Bend.

“We wanted to have you to our farm and show you first-hand how federal policies aimed at beginning farmers have helped us get started” said Nolan to Rep. Peterson. “We wouldn’t be near this far along in our farm operation if not for the support from existing beginning farmer programs.” See pages 3-4 for details on one key federal beginning farmer initiative: the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

Some two dozen LSP members and neighbors were also present on the farm to talk with Peterson about where savings can be identified in farm policy such as the wasteful commodity subsidy programs.

For more information on LSP’s federal policy work, contact Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org. (photo by Vanessa Lenzen)

Farm Beginnings

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

The current session of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course is full, and classes are set to start later this fall in the Minnesota communities of Rochester and Hutchinson. If you missed out on 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 2012, 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. □

Is Farm Beginnings right for you at this time?

LSP's Farm Planning and Skills Assessments package provides a way for prospective Farm Beginnings students to determine where they are at with their goals and whether the course is the right fit for them at this time. See the bottom of this page for details. □



East Henderson Farm hosted a "Troubleshooting a New CSA Farm" field day this summer for Farm Beginnings participants. On-farm educational events are a major part of the course. (photo by Parker Forsell)

Farm Beginnings Farm Planning & Skills Assessments

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program is based upon the idea that beginning farmers can greatly increase their chances of success by continually investing in their education over time. Such an investment can be made by seeking out experts, attending field days and other educational events, and making skills assessments and annual learning plans part of their overall farming plan. Here are resources that can help beginning farmers begin that lifelong learning process:

• **Farm Planning Track.** This document is a tool to help prospective farmers map three years of learning through educational

skills sessions, one-on-one consultation, skills assessments, learning plans, field day workshops, Farm Dreams workshops and the Farm Beginnings course.

→ **Vegetable Farming Skills Evaluation.**

This document can be used by farmers and prospective farmers to assess competence areas in vegetable farming.

→ **Livestock Farming Skills Evaluation.**

This document can be used by farmers and prospective farmers to assess competence areas in livestock farming.

→ **Growing Season Learning Plan for Livestock.** After completing the Livestock Farming Skills Evaluation, this document can

be used to identify a number of livestock production skill areas someone may want to develop competency in.

→ **Growing Season Learning Plan for Vegetables.** After completing the Vegetable Farming Skills Evaluation, this document can be used to identify a number of vegetable production skill areas someone may want to develop competency in.

To download any of these documents, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/tracks.html. For more information, contact LSP's Parker Forsell at 507-523-3366 or 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? The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program has simple application forms available for people seeking farmland or farmers. Once a form is filled out, the information can be circulated by LSP via the *Land Stewardship Letter*, the *LIVE-WIRE* and online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/land_clearinghouse.html. This service is free of charge for LSP members. 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 our *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse* section on the LSP website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/resources.html#land. Here are the latest *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse* listings:

• Seeking Land: Twin Cities Area

Proeun and Amy Doeun are seeking to buy 30 acres of tillable land in Chisago, Isanti or lower Pine counties, near the Twin Cities. They would prefer land that has not been sprayed in recent years. They do not require a house, but want to build on the site. Contact: Proeun or Amy Doeun, 651-330-1034; amydoeun@yahoo.com.

• Ainsley and Tim are seeking to rent 10 or more acres of farmland within one hour of Saint Paul, Minn., although they are flexible on location. They would like land that is certified organic or hasn't been sprayed during the past five years. They would like a house and water. Contact: Tim or Ainsley, 651-341-5999; ainsleygrant@gmail.com.

• Tou C. Vang is seeking to rent or buy 10 acres of farmland in the Twin Cities area counties of Washington, Ramsey or Dakota. Vang would prefer that the land be certified organic or to have not been sprayed in at least a year. If possible, the land should include a house and outbuildings. Contact: Tou C. Vang, 763-227-2074; toucvang@gmail.com.

• Kelli Tennyson is seeking to rent 2 to 5 acres of tillable farmland within 45 minutes of Minnesota's Twin Cities. Tennyson would prefer land that has not been sprayed in at least three years, but will consider all options. A house is not required. Contact: Kelli Tennyson, tilthfarmer@gmail.com.

• Dayna Burtness is seeking to purchase 40-60 acres of farmland within one hour of Minnesota's Twin Cities, preferably in the Northfield/Lonsdale area. A house isn't required but the land must have at least one building permit. Contact: Dayna Burtness, dayna@puravida-farm.com.

• Seeking Land: NE Iowa

Anne Bohl is seeking to rent 2-30 acres of land in northeast Iowa's Winneshiek County. She would like some tillable and

some pastured acres. Bohl does not require a house, but some type of building for storing tools and washing vegetables would be ideal. She would prefer that the land be certified organic or to have not been sprayed in the past five years. Contact: Anne Bohl, 414-791-5519; Anne.E.Bohl@gmail.com.

• Seeking Land: Western Iowa

Seth Ludwig is seeking to rent at least 40 acres of tillable land in western Iowa's Crawford or Carroll counties (near the communities of Vail, Westside or Arcadia). He does not require a house or outbuildings. Contact: Seth Ludwig, 712-269-9565; seth_ludwig@hotmail.com.

• Seeking Land: Colorado

Timm Buchanan is seeking to rent or buy 5 to 50 acres of land in Jefferson or Boulder counties, Colo. He would like tillable and pastured land, and does not require a house. Contact: Timm Buchanan; timmbuck2@yahoo.com; 720-243-2092.

• Seeking Land: Southern MN

Sharon and Steve Utke are seeking to buy 30 to 50 acres of land in southern Minnesota (in the region covering Mankato, Minn., to La Crosse, Wis.). They would like to raise fruits, vegetables and possibly some livestock. They do not require a house, but would like a building site or a fixer-upper. Contact: Sharon (763-438-0267) or Steve (651-270-4673) Utke; sutke@hotmail.com.

• Seeking Land: SE MN

Jayson Foster is seeking to rent or purchase 10 or more acres of farmland near the southeast Minnesota community of Lewiston. He would like tillable and forested land, and does not require a house. Contact: Jayson Foster, 651-235-7184.

• Seeking Land: SW MN

Greg Tusa is seeking to rent or buy 40 to 400 acres of tillable land in the southwest Minnesota counties of Jackson, Martin, Nobles or Cottonwood. He does not require

a house. Contact: Greg Tusa, 507-841-1738; gregtusa84@hotmail.com

• Seeking Land: SW Michigan

Heather Colburn is seeking to rent or purchase 10 to 100 acres of farmland in southwest Michigan, within 45 minutes of the community of Kalamazoo. She would prefer that the land be certified organic or to have not been sprayed for at least two to three years. She needs a house. Contact: Heather Colburn, elderfirefarmarts@gmail.com; 269-352-4711.

• Seeking Land/Farmer: IL, WI, IA, MI

Tom DeBates is seeking to purchase a small farm and would like to find a farmer to operate it organically. He is looking for around 20 acres of farmland in northwest Illinois, southwest Wisconsin, northeast Iowa or southwest Michigan, and would like it to have not been sprayed for approximately five years. DeBates is open to various farming enterprises. Contact: Tom DeBates, tdebates@sbcglobal.net; 630-373-3831; 630-262-8193.

• Seeking Land: New York

Jeyaprakash Kathiresan is seeking to rent 25 to 100 acres of farmland in New York's Orange County, in the Hudson Valley. Kathiresan would like to use the land for small-scale vegetable and goat production. A house is needed. Contact: Jeyaprakash Kathiresan, 260-918-1862; jeyaprakash78@gmail.com.

• Seeking Land: Texas

John E. Gangstad is seeking to buy 25 to 50 acres of farmland in south-central Texas, in the Travis County area. He would like tillable, forested and pastured land, and would like it to be certified organic. Contact: John E. Gangstad, 512-404-7827; jgangstad@bickerstaff.com; 7924 Cobblestone Dr., Austin, TX 78735.

Farm Beginnings

Alison & Jim Deusch

On the home farm...at last

It's early July—a time on one Wisconsin farm when there's a brief reprieve between the spring rush of putting in crops and the mid-summer hurly-burly of making sure the land and animals are as productive as possible by fall. What better time to take a breather and assess where you've been, and where you're going.

"This past year has been crazy," says Jim Deusch while taking a break from grinding feed. As he says this, the 33-year-old is sitting in the shade of his front yard with his wife Alison and their two children: Lou, 4, and Lily 2. "We've just been running from fire-to-fire."

"This is the third farm we've been on in five years," says Alison, also 33. "But we're finally here."

"Here" is a 160-acre farm that the Deuschs own, an operation that is intact and has solid buildings and a good selection of field equipment. It is also a place that's in close proximity to the eaters, institutions

and retail establishments they direct-market pork and chicken to. It's a welcome change from renting and working on farms owned by others, constantly moving livestock and equipment while trying to stay in touch with markets—something the couple has been



doing since they graduated from the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course in 2006.

"Now we can look to the future and get things up and running," says Jim. "In the past we've always had to know in the back of our heads that we would need to prepare to maybe move. Now we can set some plans

up for the long term."

Negative environment

Jim and Alison's ability to feel settled enough to plan ahead is also a testament to the fact that they've found a supportive community of beginning and established farmers through LSP and Farm Beginnings to help them jump-start a viable ag enterprise. That kind of support wasn't always there.

The Deuschs didn't grow up in farming, although they both had relatives who farmed. Alison is from southeast Minnesota and studied horticulture in college. Jim is from northern Illinois and trained as a tool and die maker. Both had a desire to farm early on and were drawn to livestock production, particularly dairying and pork. After settling in the southeast Minnesota community of St. Charles in the early 2000s, they began looking around for farming options.

"Pretty much everybody we talked to was pretty negative," recalls Jim, adding that they had a particularly hard time finding someone who would rent them a farm for livestock. "Everybody said, 'You can't do that.' You listen to people long enough who say you have to be born into farming, that's the only way, and it wears on you."

Finally, they ran into a positive vibe when Alison met Arlene and LaVerne Nelson while she was working as a meter reader in the St. Charles area. The Nelsons are LSP members and have a certified organic dairy operation that their son Ross is part of.

LaVerne and Arlene made it clear to the Deuschs that they believe there is a bright future for young farmers, particularly if they avoid the high-input, expensive model of conventional agriculture. Jim said that was a welcome message, given that the type of agriculture he had grown up around in Illinois was "huge and confinement everything."

That's how they learned about Farm Beginnings, which for 14 years has been training beginning farmers who are interested in innovative management systems.

The course emphasizes goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and innovative production techniques. Farm Beginnings participants also have the opportunity to attend on-farm events where they see firsthand the use of innovative management techniques.

During the fall and winter of



The Deusch family raises hogs without antibiotics or hormones in deep straw bedding and on pasture. They sell to Niman Ranch and direct-market pork in the region. (LSP photo)

Fresh Faces, see page 19...

2005-2006, the Deutsches drove to New Prague, Minn., twice a month for classes, which were taught by established farmers and other ag professionals from the community. Although they were a little surprised that not all of their fellow students had their farm goals and plans defined, Alison and Jim were able to get a lot out of the class by following up with the presenters and asking lots of questions. What they found was that these established farmers, who were producing food using a range of alternative systems, were positive about the prospects of getting an operation going from scratch, but were also realistic about what it takes to be successful.

"It's a business—you have to have your ducks in a row," says Alison.

The Deutsches settled on raising hogs without antibiotics or hormones in pastured and deep straw systems. With the help of some breeding stock from fellow Farm Beginnings graduate Justin Leonhardt, they started raising pigs for Niman Ranch, which requires animals to be raised to their own antibiotic-free humane standards. They also began building up a direct-marketing clientele of individual consumers, restaurants and retail establishments.

But bouncing around from one rented farm to the next between 2006 and 2010 was hard on the animals—and the farmers. The Deutsches had money saved up to make a down payment on a farm, but were having a hard time finding whole, intact operations where the buildings and equipment weren't worn down to the point where they were almost unusable—perhaps another product of a lack of confidence in the future of agriculture in numerous communities.

"They let the farm get run down and then say there's no young people interested in farming," says Alison of some of the retiring farmers they ran into. "The other misconception is that as beginning farmers we can't pay a fair market price for the land and the equipment."

In early 2010, soon after a deal to buy another farm fell through, they learned of this farm near Osseo, Wis. It had a lot going for it: sound buildings, good soil and relatively good accessibility to markets in western Wisconsin and southeast Minnesota. Even better, it was a working farm: dairy cows were being milked on it up until a week before the Deutsches moved onto it. And to top things off, at the last minute they were able

Give it a listen

To listen to a Land Stewardship Project podcast featuring Jim and Alison Deutsch talking about how important it was to purchase a whole, intact farming operation, see www.landstewardship-project.org/podcast.html?s=Beginning+farmers+find+a+working.

to talk the owners into selling them field implements and other equipment as part of the overall deal.

"That really helped to buy a working farm and being able to buy the equipment with the farm," says Jim. "I don't think we would have been able to do it otherwise."

Alison agrees: "We had to have it ready to go to start making money right away."

It was a bit of a win-win. The farm's owners were interested in selling it to the Deutsches because they wanted to keep it a small family operation with livestock.

"There's a large grain farmer here, as there is everywhere, and he would have bought it in a heartbeat and leveled the buildings," says Alison.

The couple bought the farm in March of that year and by that spring had their crops planted and their hog operation relocated.

With the help of people

they'd met through Farm Beginnings, the Deutsches were able to relocate fairly quickly from a rented farm 30 miles away to the one they bought near Osseo.

Diversity is security

Today they raise finished pigs for Niman, which accounts for about a quarter of their market. The rest of their hogs (as well as chickens and eggs) are sold direct to consumers, grocery stores and restaurants in the area.

They will finish out some 250 hogs for these direct markets this year, as well as around 800 chickens. They also raise squash for Organic Valley Cooperative. The Deutsches goal is to be finishing 400 hogs annually by a year from now. They are raising hay, corn, oats and wheat to provide as much of their own feed and bedding as possible. Half of the farm is certified organic now; by 2012 the plan is for all of it to be certified. Alison says diversity is key to the farm's business plan

"It makes for some long days, but we are never going to have all the enterprises fail at once, hopefully," she says. "It's good risk

management."

But the stability of being on a farm you've purchased doesn't mean you are immune to curve balls. As Alison alluded to earlier, it's been "a crazy year." The market for hogs, even sustainably-raised ones, is not as lucrative as it was just a few years ago, when feed was relatively cheap and there was fast-rising demand. During the summer of 2010, some of the pastures they were farrowing hogs on were swamped by flooding.

"We spent many a night, all night, bailing the water to keep the pigs from floating away," says Alison.

As a result, last fall they did a quick construction job: erecting a low-slung open-faced hog building with good drainage and ventilation, as well as loading and unloading facilities. It augments nicely the large hip-roofed dairy barn they also raise hogs in. Getting the emergency loan for the shed was possible because the Deutsches have a good relationship with their Farm Services Agency lender. Of particular help was having a business plan, something they learned to do in Farm Beginnings.

"At the end of the year we go over what we did and where we want to go and where our markets are," says Alison. "We create a kind of narrative. Our lender appreciates that. It doesn't do any good to keep it secret."

As they settle into farming in a permanent place, the Deutsches say there is still some negativity among a few rural residents about the ability of beginning farmers to contribute to the community's future. But just within the past year, there's been a growing interest in local foods in their region. And they've also been able to connect with other beginning farmers in the area, sharing equipment, knowledge, even childcare duties.

Perhaps most importantly, the business community is showing signs of seeing these newcomers as financial assets. Jim says when young farmers like he and Alison spend money on goods and services in town, it gets noticed.

"When Alison went into the bank to set up a checking account, the banker said we were the third young couple that had moved into the area and bought a whole farm recently," says Jim. "They're starting to realize that it's an advantage to have beginning farmers in the area." □

More Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming profiles

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

Community Based Food Systems

Transport workshop pushes pencils

Calculating the costs of transporting farm products to customers was the focus of a Land Stewardship Project workshop in southeast Minnesota on July 18. Presenting at the workshop was orchardist and berry producer Jackie Hoch, who discussed how Hoch Orchard decides when to use its own trucks and when to contract with a carrier to ship apples.

Participants learned how even small shifts in such variables as the length of a route, tire replacement or cost of fuel impact the real cost of moving their products from the farm to a customer. Using their own numbers or general examples, participants learned exactly where they can find significant savings.

Alternatives to self-delivery that are either being planned or are in place in southeast Minnesota were discussed as well. The goal of the workshop was to save area farmers fuel, time and money without sacrificing

their connections to customers.

For more information on LSP's work in southeast Minnesota on community food systems and transportation, contact Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

Transportation workshop Nov. 8 in St. Croix River Valley

On Nov. 8, LSP will sponsor a farmer workshop on product transportation costs from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the public library in Bayport, Minn. The fee is \$5 to cover a meal of soup and bread.

Watch LSP's website and upcoming issues of the *LIVE-WIRE* e-letter for details. For more information, contact LSP's Dana Jackson at 612-722-6377 or danaj@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Matt Dietz of Whitewater Gardens in Altura, Minn., participated in the July 18 transportation workshop. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)

Market fresh



On a recent Saturday in Winona, Minn., Chef Ryan Stechshulte of Lucia's Restaurant prepared fresh food he and Lucia's food procurer Lori Valenziano had picked up at the Winona Farmers' Market just a few minutes before. This was the fifth consecutive year that Lucia's, a Land Stewardship Project member and Minneapolis eatery that has long supported local food systems, has had a presence at the Winona market to highlight southeast Minnesota farmer fare. This year's demonstration was presented by the Winona Farmers' Market and the Local Foods Committee of the Winona County Economic Development Authority. LSP is an active member of the committee and helped organize this event. For more information on LSP's work on community based food systems in southeast Minnesota, contact Caroline van Schaik at 612-722-6377 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)



LSP blog

The Land Stewardship Project writes weekly on food and sustainable agriculture issues for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership's *Looncommons* blog.

To view the blog, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org and click on the **Blog** link under the **LSP on the Web** heading. You can sign up for an RSS feed at <http://looncommons.org/category/food-and-sustainable-agriculture/feed>. □

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@landstewardshipproject.org and put in the subject line, "Subscribe *LIVE-WIRE*." You can also sign up at www.landstewardshipproject.org. □

Huber presentation on Roundup/glyphosate

The Summer 2010 *Land Stewardship Letter* featured a *Myth Buster* (page 7) on the threat Roundup herbicide (glyphosate) poses to the long-term health of the soil.

The Land Stewardship Project has produced a video of a presentation given by plant pathologist Don Huber, the Purdue University emeritus professor who has been researching some of the problems associated with continued use of the weed killer.

LSP has available DVD copies of Huber's three-hour presentation for \$15, plus \$3 for shipping and handling. To order a copy or pick one up directly and avoid the \$3 shipping and handling fee, contact LSP's offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377).

In addition, you can listen to LSP's podcast featuring Huber's presentation at www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=3. It's episodes 98-102.

To assist DVD viewers or podcast listeners in following Huber's presentation, the plant pathologist's PowerPoint presentation is available as a free pdf document on LSP's website: www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/UnderstandGlyphosate.pdf. □

Myth Busters series available

The *Land Stewardship Letter*'s popular *Myth Busters* series (see page 7) is available on the Internet at www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-myth.html. For paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org. Here are the *Myth Busters* available thus far:

- **Myth #1:** Anti-corporate farm laws stifle rural economic development.
- **Myth #2:** Strict "Right to Farm" laws help alleviate land use conflicts in rural and suburban areas.
- **Myth #3:** There are so few small- and medium-sized farms left that it is not worth saving them.
- **Myth #4:** The only way to get started in dairy farming is by investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in high-cost, full confinement systems.
- **Myth #5:** The only way for family farmers to survive in the livestock market is to sign an exclusive contract with a packer or sell specialty products through niche markets.
- **Myth #6:** Genetic engineering is the only viable method available for improving food crops.
- **Myth #7:** We no longer have a soil erosion problem in this country.
- **Myth #8:** Insecticide sprays eliminate pest problems in farm fields.
- **Myth #9:** All certified organic milk comes from cows that spend most of the year grazing on pastures.
- **Myth #10:** It will be prohibitively expensive to tell consumers what country their food comes from.
- **Myth #11:** Large-scale factory hog farming creates strong local economies.
- **Myth #12:** Global climate change will benefit agriculture.
- **Myth #13:** Industrial agriculture is efficient.
- **Myth #14:** Meat that's labeled "all natural" is produced in a significantly different manner than meat produced in a "conventional" system.
- **Myth #15:** Organic vegetable production spawns outbreaks of deadly bacteria.
- **Myth #16:** Large-scale factory livestock farms succeed because of the efficiencies of the free market.
- **Myth #17:** Conservation tillage reduces global warming by trapping much more carbon in the soil when compared to conventional tillage.
- **Myth #18:** Federal law makes it illegal to favor local farmers when purchasing food for public schools.
- **Myth #19:** Genetically-engineered products like Roundup Ready crops will reduce the presence of dangerous pesticides in the environment.
- **Myth #20:** Because of petroleum-based fertilizers, we do not need to build soil using plant residue and other natural sources of organic matter.
- **Myth #21:** Sustainable farming methods cannot feed the world.
- **Myth #22:** Buying locally produced food will automatically reduce your ecological footprint.
- **Myth #23:** Organic and sustainable farming systems are a luxury only well-fed countries like the U.S. can afford.
- **Myth #24:** Country of Origin Labeling will make it impossible for farmers to market their products through local stores and restaurants.
- **Myth #25:** Undocumented immigrants drain the U.S. economy by not paying taxes and by being a tremendous burden on the health care system.
- **Myth #26:** Genetically modified crops have reduced pesticide use.
- **Myth #27:** Local and regional food systems don't help the economy.
- **Myth #28:** Roundup is not a long-term environmental threat.
- **Myth #29:** Producing clean water in rural areas will require taking the majority of our farmland out of production.
- **Myth #30:** Banning subtherapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock production will be an economic disaster for farmers.
- **Myth #31:** Soil erosion is at sustainable levels.
- **Myth #32:** Using crops to produce biofuels does not raise food prices.

The grassing of a Midwestern farm *Can EcoSun make perennial agriculture pay?*

EDITOR'S NOTE: EcoSun Prairie Farms was established in 2007 as a demonstration of the economic and ecological benefits of grass-based working farms on converted cropland. Founded by four scientists with decades of experience researching various agricultural and environmental aspects of land use, the nonprofit organization is leasing 640 acres of corn and soybean land near Brookings, in southeast South Dakota. Since 2008, the researchers have been restoring native tallgrass prairie as well as 40 temporary and seasonal wetlands that were drained by previous operators of the land. EcoSun is working to show that numerous income streams can be generated by perennial plant systems such as grasses. Beef cattle are being grazed on the land, and hay and grass seed are being harvested for local markets. EcoSun's directors would eventually like to see the land generate income through the biofuels market, as well as the sale of medicinal and ornamental native plants, among other things.

In August, the Chippewa 10% Project sponsored a field trip from western Minnesota to see EcoSun. Land Stewardship Project staffers Julia Ahlers Ness and Terry VanDerPol took part in the tour, which included farmers, natural resource professionals, scientists and students. Ahlers Ness coordinates the Chippewa 10% Project, which is a collaboration of LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project. VanDerPol directs LSP's Community Based Food Systems program and is co-director of the Chippewa 10% Project. She also raises grass-based beef in western Minnesota.

After visiting EcoSun, VanDerPol and Ahlers Ness shared some of their impressions of the operation with the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

LSL: The idea for this venture has an interesting history, doesn't it?

Ahlers Ness: One of the founding directors, Carter Johnson, who is a scientist at South Dakota State University, had a great-grandfather who was a pioneer in the region. In the 1920s he started to notice that equipment costs for cropping in the region was getting too expensive. He made this decision to, as he called it, "grass down" his farm, and to essentially become a rancher in farm country.

LSL: He realized that all the way back in the 1920s?

VanDerPol: It takes some people a lot shorter time to realize they are on a treadmill.

Ahlers Ness: So Carter Johnson and other scientists from SDSU and the USDA's Agricultural Research Service started looking at the costs in natural capital of our current ag system—natural capital in terms of soil, water quality and biodiversity. They began asking the question: why should farming deplete soil and water and rural communities? This is all about balancing environmental quality with productiv-

ity. They used the term "back to the future." It's not about going backwards; it's about going forward.

LSL: This farm is in the middle of corn and soybean country. Describe your initial

impression of the place.

VanDerPol: Overall the land has a rolling quality to it. The diversity just reaches out and touches you. You can see so many different shades of brown and green, especially after a long ride through corn and soybeans. The presence of birds and insects is unbelievable.

Ahlers Ness: The mosaic is impressive. What was also different was to have all the water features like prairie potholes as well. To me, having a water feature like that adds an almost spiritual quality to that natural environment. We learned on the tour that having these shallow potholes surrounded by grass provides a microhabitat that warms up earlier in the spring, providing a place for ducks and geese as well as habitat for insects, which the waterfowl can use to fatten up early in the season.

VanDerPol: A lot of these prairie potholes disappear as a presence if you drag tillage equipment through them. But as a geological feature they are still there and can play an important role in the health of the landscape if allowed to return.

LSL: Isn't leasing land and putting in all the expense and effort of establishing perennials a little risky?

VanDerPol: Yes, they are in the fourth year of a five-year lease, and hope to get it renewed for another five years. They are generating income right now through leased grazing as well as the sale of prairie

EcoSun, see page 23...



The operators of EcoSun Prairie Farms are in the process of restoring native tallgrass prairie as well as 40 temporary and seasonal wetlands on 640 acres of land. The land is starting to produce income through beef grazing as well as prairie seed and hay sales. (photo by Julia Ahlers Ness)

seeds and grass hay, which is going to a beef farmer who raises grass-finished beef. But there has been a lot of cost involved in switching from row crops. Most of the cost of establishing a farm like that is in the establishment of the perennials. I think they can amortize those costs over seven or eight years of harvesting grasses through various means. But in the short term, trials always, always look bad for perennials.

On the other hand, people don't think about establishing perennials on rented land and this could be message that it could work, especially with long-term leases. It could work for a landowner who wants to rent the entire farm out and have it managed as a whole, rather than just renting the prime cropland and not the wetlands, etc.

LSL: What new questions were raised in your mind by seeing EcoSun?

VanDerPol: I think we want to look carefully into seed harvesting as an option for making grasses more profitable. Farms like these could provide a lot of potential for boosting grass-fed beef operations in the non-grazing system by providing grass-based hay. EcoSun didn't have nearly enough cattle to make use of all the grass on the operation.

One of the questions that's going to be addressed by their research is if you're going to establish perennial grasses and harvest them for, say, biofuels, how much can you take off and maintain the quality of your soils? How much switchgrass can you harvest before you have to start applying fertilizers?

Ahlers Ness: I'd be interested in knowing how different it would be for a farmer trying to make a living to grass down a farm, as opposed to a research demonstration farm like EcoSun. We have examples of farmers in western Minnesota who have done this sort of thing. How would someone with some Holistic Management training think about making this kind of transition? What kind of financial plan would they lay out over a five to 10-year period? That's a real question that farmers are going to want answered.

Also, it's going to take some creativity and initiative from a marketing standpoint to pull something like this off. What would be the infrastructure help farmers need to make this transition? EcoSun is an example of changing a whole farm over to perennials. How could pieces of this be incorporated into a row-cropped farm that is only transitioning say 10 to 20 percent of its landscape to perennials?



Thomas Schumacher described the process of improving soil structure during a recent EcoSun field day. He is one of the scientists who founded the nonprofit organization, which is conducting extensive research on the environmental and economic effects of converting row crops to perennial plant systems like grass. (photo by Julia Ahlers Ness)

VanDerPol: I would like to see a demo farm like this in the Chippewa watershed. Where do farmers go for this kind of information, to see this in action? Farmers need to have access to information on how to manage land in ways that allow it to be what it's going to be, rather than just hammering corn and soybeans into it.

They need the information to come from farms that are in their community. And

that information can't just come in chunks, where one piece is provided by a grazing specialist, another by a soil expert, etc. It needs to be integrated as a system. □

For more on EcoSun, including details on a new documentary about the farm, see <http://ecosunprairiefarms.org>.

Chippewa 10% & profits from perennials

Julia Ahlers Ness and Terry VanDerPol, along with Land Stewardship Project staff members Dana Jackson and Megan Smith, visited EcoSun in August 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.



Pieces of the working lands pie

If our ag areas are to realize their potential to provide ecosystem services & economic benefits, a few key elements must be in place

By Brian DeVore

It's a sunny day in August, and an ecologist who studies native prairies is in her element: standing waist high in the middle of big bluestem, prairie clover and sideoats grama while bees and other insects fill the air with the electric buzz of plant sex. But these few acres of prairie aren't exactly nature's ideal. They were planted just a few years ago on the west-central Minnesota farm of Luverne and Mary Jo Forbord, and there are under a dozen species of plants growing here, a far cry from the hundreds that could be found in virgin prairie. The ecologist, Margaret Kuchenreuther, concedes that a healthy ecosystem doesn't always mean pristine wilderness.

"This is an extremely simplified prairie with only 10 species," says Kuchenreuther, an associate professor of biology at the University of Minnesota-Morris. "And yet I'm very excited about it because of all the ecosystem services it can provide."

An environmental capitulation in farm country? Not quite. More of an acknowledgement that this is a working farm, not a nature preserve. It's a place that must generate economic activity for its owners, but also has the potential to provide a significant amount of clean water, wildlife habitat and sequestration of greenhouse gases. And let's face it: 10 species is a huge improvement over the number that dominate the corn and soybean farms in the Forbord neighborhood.

How farming operations strike a balance between profitable food production and conservation is becoming increasingly critical at a time when economic, political and logistical realities are limiting the positive impacts of public wildlife areas, land retirement and even traditional farm conservation programs.

That's where "working lands conservation" comes into the picture. The concept is capturing the attention of environmental scientists like Kuchenreuther, as well as natural resource professionals and environmental groups who have long relied on public lands or retirement programs to protect the environment.

Even private organizations such as the Nature Conservancy, which is perhaps best known for its purchase and preservation of

natural areas, are realizing the limits of such a strategy.

"We realize that there isn't enough money out there to buy up all the land. Besides, people make a living from this land," says Neal Feeken, who works on prairie recovery and renewable energy in the Nature Conservancy's Minnesota office. "We need to show economic activity can take place on land that's producing environmental benefits."

But in order for working lands conservation to go beyond a nice sounding concept only talked about amongst government agencies, politicians and a few select farmers, a few critical pieces must fall into place.

Wildly Successful Farming



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Here are just a few of those key elements:

A common goal—different reasons

"We all want the same thing — we want grass," says Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Stacy Salvevold while standing in a grazing paddock on a beef farm in west-central Minnesota's Pope County. The paddock is one stop on a field day involving farmers, natural resource agencies and conservation groups. "We just want it for different reasons."

Salvevold is getting at an important starting point for working lands conservation: a mutual goal. For example, this field day is sponsored by the Pope County Working Lands Initiative, part of a statewide program that's bringing together farmers, natural resource agencies and conservation groups to explore ways of generating ecological services on working farmland.

As the tour participants ride a hayrack along dusty gravel roads, they can't help

but notice the poor condition of many of the pastures. The last glaciers in this region have left behind boulders ranging in size from a small basketball to a large chest freezer. In between the boulders are growing eastern red cedar, Siberian elm, buckthorn and other invasive trees that destroy grassland habitats.

But the field day participants also get to see how the DNR, Fish and Wildlife Service and around 10 farmers are working together in a 14-square-mile area to bring some of the pastures back to life. In one field, goats are being used to clear out buckthorn; in another, re-seeding of native prairie is already producing good land cover. This is all happening because both the wildlife biologists and the farmers involved in the project have a mutual desire to see more healthy grass on the landscape 365-days-a-year.

"We could agree that we wanted more high quality grass," says Mary Jo Forbord, one of the participating farmers. "Then we could go from there on how to attain that. Why we want it, we don't agree on, and that's okay."

Grass is prime habitat for everything from ducks and geese to pheasants and bobolinks. It keeps soil in place and sequesters carbon. But it is also an increasingly valuable feed source for farmers like the Forbords, who in 2002 started converting their row crop acres to grass and now raise beef cattle on rotationally-grazed pastures.

That mutual desire for grass dovetailed a few years ago when the wildlife biologists and farmers got together for the tedious process of sorting through a special seed mix: one that contained species native to the area, but was also palatable to cows and good for wildlife.

Forbord says the initiative has done a good job of piggybacking onto existing government programs that help establish perennial cover on the land. For example, a few of the landowners had contracts through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, a USDA initiative that provides cost-share monies for, among other things, establishing rotational grazing systems. The initiative was also able to fund the hiring of a private grazing consultant to help the farmers improve their grasslands.

"It was a lot of work," says Salvevold of coordinating conservation on working farms via various tools and programs. But all that extra effort has paid off.

Since 2007 this working lands group has collaborated with landowners to seed 70 acres of crop fields to native grasses and forbs for pasture and to remove invasive trees from 445 acres of grasslands. Farmers

Working Lands, see page 25...

have implemented managed rotational grazing on 690 acres.

The Pope County Working Lands Initiative has not been as active recently, but Forbord says its success at bringing farmers and natural resource professionals together has given her hope and could be a good model for other such initiatives.

“In the past 30 years, this is the only thing I’ve seen that might just work,” she says.

Mutual respect—knowledge flows both ways

A few years ago, Jon Stravers was doing research in some woods overlooking the Mississippi River town of McGregor, Iowa, when he noticed that a dairy farm he had to walk through to get to the trees was full of bobolinks. This caught Stravers’ attention because bobolink populations have plummeted in recent decades. Audubon has listed them as one of North America’s eight most threatened birds, mostly because the Midwestern landscape has been converted on a wholesale basis from perennial grasses to annual crops like corn and soybeans.

since he is the Driftless Area Coordinator for the National Audubon Society’s Mississippi River Initiative.

So he started talking to the dairy farmer, Phil Specht, and it turns out there was a connection. All that fence movement is part of Specht’s managed rotational grazing system, which he uses to produce milk from a 170-cow herd. Managed rotational grazing has developed into a low-cost, profitable way for livestock farmers to produce meat and milk from grass. The added benefit is that all that grass provides good ground cover year-round, protecting water quality and building soil quality. And, as Stravers discovered, it also provides great habitat for grassland birds like bobolinks and meadowlarks.

Specht was delighted to learn that a farming system he was utilizing was good for the birds. Over the years he has created a rotational grazing system he tweaks throughout the growing season so that it

provides optimal forage for his cows while building soil and reducing runoff on the steep hills of northeast Iowa.

“It is incidental,” Specht says of the

• • •
“We need to show economic activity can take place on land that’s producing environmental benefits.”

— Neal Feeken, the Nature Conservancy

• • •



Working lands conservation is a difficult balancing act. “Nobody has found the perfect scenario where we attain 200 bushels per acre corn and one pheasant per acre,” says Tabor Hoek of the Board of Water and Soil Resources. “It’s always going to be about compromise.” (photo by Melissa Driscoll)

The ever-observant Stravers also noticed he often had to modify his route through the farm because the fencing was being moved on a regular basis. Could there be a connection between the wandering fencelines and the fluttering bobolinks? This was an important question for Stravers to answer,

added benefit his system provides for birds. But Specht has a highly developed land ethic, one that is accentuated by a curious and open mind. So he’s modified his grazing system somewhat to make it even more friendly to grassland birds. “The expertise of Jon to note the benefits for birds just kind of

Give it a listen

To listen to a Land Stewardship Project podcast featuring Phil Specht and Jon Stravers talking about how managed rotational grazing can help birds, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?s=mutually.

gave me a little added incentive.”

And it still provides good feed for his cows throughout the growing season.

Stravers admits that in the past he often thought production agriculture and environmental sustainability were mutually exclusive. No more.

“It works,” he says of the balance farmers like Specht have struck. “Phil’s farm is a prime example of how agriculture and cow production can go along with bird populations and conservation. We’re both wanting long-term sustainability—me of bird populations and him of effective grasslands.”

This example shows how a relationship built on shared interests— in this case close observation of the land and a willingness to change the way it’s managed as a result— can go a long way toward establishing working lands conservation.

Such relationships can change how natural resource experts view land management in the long term. Kevin Kotts, an area DNR wildlife manager who worked with the Forbords and the other farmers in

Pope County, says he now sees the potential techniques such as rotational grazing hold for managing public lands. As a result of positive relationships developed between wildlife biologists and farmers in recent years, western Minnesota cattle producers are now rotationally grazing wildlife areas managed by the DNR and Fish and Wildlife Service.

Biologists say grass flourishes in the wake of the cattle, providing habitat for mallards, shorebirds such as sandpipers, meadowlarks and bobolinks. According to Kotts, cattle can not only keep invasive plants in check, but do it more cheaply than burning or even mechanical control methods. In addition, having access to public grazing at affordable rates

means the farmers are able to give their own pastures a rest, improving forage quality at home.

Kotts admits that normally he wouldn’t have had conversations with farmers about

Working Lands, see page 26...

natural resource management.

“If we hadn’t been involved with the Working Lands Initiative, we probably wouldn’t have been in contact with these cattle producers and learned how grazing can be a management tool,” he says.

“I couldn’t believe what was coming from a DNR person’s mouth — that we need graziers, and managed graziers specifically, to meet our natural resource goals,” says Mary Jo Forbord, adding that she thinks it’s key that meetings for the Pope County Working Lands Initiative took place in the community where the farmers lived, rather than in government agency offices. “We were able to walk the land. There’s a lot of skepticism about working with government agencies. These concerns can be overcome with face-to-face interactions.”

A way to alleviate the risk

Experimentation is a key part of any farming system that melds production with conservation. And with experimentation comes risk. For example, the Forbords have planted 40 acres of native prairie with the idea that someday it could provide feedstock for a local biofuels energy plant.

But that day could be a ways off, given the fact that cellulosic biofuel production is not yet commercially viable.

“Selling biomass for \$50 a ton doesn’t pay for us,” says Luverne Forbord.

But biomass may be lucrative someday (there are biofuel plants in the Forbords’ part of the state, and at least one is attempting to use perennial plants as a feedstock),

and in the case of prairie systems, one can’t wait until the last minute to respond to that market opportunity. For one thing, it takes at least three years just to get a healthy prairie established.

“You don’t just go out and plant prairie grasses and expect to get a yield that fall like with corn or beans,” says Luverne. “You can’t wait for the biomass markets to emerge; you have to be ahead of the game and have the biomass ready for the market. So what do you do in the meantime?”

The Forbords are no strangers to risk — since 2002 they’ve converted most of the row-cropped land on their 480 acres to grass. Some of those acres are capable of

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producing corn at the rate of 200 bushels per acre, nothing to sneeze at in their part of Minnesota. Replacing the row crops with grass meant not only denying themselves access to an established market—it also means the Forbords are reducing their USDA commodity crop payments significantly.

Even small steps in the name of conservation can impose significant financial risks in farm country. Martin and Loretta Jaus estimate that by having a diverse crop rotation and pastured land on their dairy farm in western Minnesota’s Sibley County, they’ve lost half their USDA subsidy payments over the years.

One way to help farmers deal with risk is through short-term subsidies that can get a money-generating conservation project off the ground. A Working Lands Initiative project in Minnesota’s Scott, Rice, Dakota and Carver counties is paying farmers via five- to 10-year leases to grow prairie. Eventually, the prairies will produce bales of grass to be sold to a local biomass energy project. In the meantime, the rental payments are helping farmers recoup some of the start-up costs of converting croplands to prairie.

“The rental rates must be competitive with cash cropping rents,” says the Nature Conservancy’s Feeken. “If they were getting \$200 an acre, we paid \$200 an acre. We had enough to restore 104 acres and we had applications for over 750 acres. It was a great response.”

Ironically, a way to alleviate the financial risk of stepping off the commodity crop subsidy treadmill may come from the very 10,000 pound guerilla that’s seen as a barrier to diverse farming systems: federal farm policy. For example, the USDA’s Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) rewards farmers for practices that improve wildlife habitat as well as water and soil quality. It’s a results based program, where the more farmers do, the more they are eligible to receive (*see pages 9-10 for more on CSP*).

But ultimately, the success of working lands conservation hinges on whether farmers can make a profit from systems that are better for the environment. In the Forbords’ case, they are hoping that their prairie will eventually feed a lucrative biomass market. In the meantime, some flexibility has been built into the system—they’ve already used the prairie as a source of forage for their cattle.

“In designing the prairie from the start, we wanted to build in that flexibility,” says the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Salveold.

Willingness to compromise & appreciate the little things

It’s the little things that count, and compromising on what is considered prime ecologically-friendly habitat or blue ribbon agriculture



One key to making working lands conservation financially viable in the long term is to create a flexible environment where farms can draw various forms of cash flow off a single piece of land, thus reducing the risk imposed by diversifying. (LSP photo)

Working Lands, see page 27...

land is also key. Wildlife biologists say that farmers grazing public lands, for example, are not allowed to graze the cover down too short, and habitat that's established on farmland, in turn, is not a return to tallgrass prairies of yesteryear.

"Nobody has found the perfect scenario where we attain 200 bushels per acre corn and one pheasant per acre. It's always going to be about compromise," says Tabor Hoek, a Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources staffer who works with the statewide Working Lands Initiative. "Working lands is about compromising between those two extremes of let's do everything for wildlife, let's do everything for maximum production of corn."

Sometimes successful working lands conservation can literally be a game of inches. Leaving a little water on some cropland later in the spring can provide significant habitat benefits for nesting ducks. Farmers Martin and Loretta Jaus normally have a 25-day grazing rotation for their milk cows, but during the nesting season, extend it to 30 days to give the birds a break.

After meeting Jon Stravers and learning that a few minor changes to his farming system could do a lot for birds, Phil Specht has considered retaining a few inches of water in some of his terraces to attract leopard frogs, a favorite food of raptors.

On a larger scale, there has been some exciting research out of Iowa showing that planting just 10 percent of a row crop field to strips of native prairie can cut soil erosion by 95 percent. This idea of targeting key areas in a watershed for conservation measures such as plantings of perennials is the focus of the Chippewa 10% Project, an initiative in western Minnesota coordinated by the Land Stewardship Project and the Chippewa River Watershed Project (see page 23).

Examples of a few strategically targeted changes producing significant environmental benefits send an important message to farmers, who often are asking natural resource professionals: how much is enough?

"Even if we can get just 10 percent of a landscape planted to perennials, that's going to make a difference," says the UMM prairie

expert Margaret Kuchenreuther.

Get everyone involved

"We can't do it alone," says Mary Jo Forbord when talking about balancing conservation with farming.

So how do we make more members of society involved in this balancing act?

That was the question posed recently by Nick Jordan to his students. When Jordan, a University of Minnesota professor of agronomy and plant genetics, was teaching a class called "Ecology of Agriculture Systems," he had students interview participants in the Pope County Working Lands Initiative target area. They asked the farmers, natural resource professionals and others what it would take to spread the concept of working lands conservation beyond a few townships in western Minnesota. One idea that was dis-



Mary Jo and Luverne Forbord have converted almost their entire 480-acre farm from row crops to grass. "If people do want to see more grass and perennials on the landscape, they really need to buy grass-based agricultural food products and support farmers who are going this way," says Mary Jo. "We can't do it alone." (LSP photo)

cussed was making it possible for consumers to support working lands conservation through their food purchases.

"What the students found was there was a fair amount of enthusiasm for creating supply chains that would connect the changes in land use to a consumer market," says Jordan.

In other words, people in the community who want to directly support more wildlife habitat and better water quality could, for example, buy grass-fed beef raised in the area, thus rewarding local farmers for having more perennials on their farms.

Research by economist Ken Meter of the Minneapolis-based Crossroads Resource Center shows that in west-central

Give it a listen

To listen to a Land Stewardship Project podcast featuring Luverne and Mary Jo Forbord talking about how they see biodiversity as a risk management tool, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?s=Farm+banks+on+biodiversity.

Minnesota, which raises 23 percent of the state's corn and 22 percent of its soybeans, \$1 billion is being sucked out of the region annually because farmers are exporting raw commodities raised with imported inputs and consumers are eating food that's mostly brought in from outside the area. Producing, processing and consuming more food locally could keep much of that wealth locally, concludes Meter.

But both Meter and the students in Jordan's class have found that local food initiatives are at a severe disadvantage in a system where relatively cheap energy makes it possible to transport and mass-process food elsewhere. That's why one of the goals of the Chippewa 10% Project is to develop a processing, transportation and distribution system that better supports local food systems.

There is great potential for tying local food production to working lands conservation, says Mary Jo Forbord. She and Luverne have already found some people are willing to back up with money their verbal support for getting more perennial cover on the landscape. For the past few years, they've been direct-marketing their grass-fed beef to eaters who appreciate the farmers' extra efforts to increase biodiversity.

If people don't differentiate products like grass-fed beef from food produced utilizing monocultures and industrialized techniques, then even the most well-intentioned farmers will find working lands conservation economically unfeasible, says Mary Jo.

"I do try to make that point very blatantly now because I have discovered that people aren't practicing things in their everyday life, such as how they eat, that would match the goals they spend their lives working for," she says. "I can't stress enough the importance of people really knowing how their food is produced and supporting systems that they believe are healthy for the environment and their community." □



The Biochar Debate Charcoal's Potential to Reverse Climate Change & Build Soil Fertility

By James Bruges

2010; 128 pages

Chelsea Green Publishing

www.chelseagreen.com

Reviewed by Megan Smith

The topic of climate change is not a new one. However, James Bruges' new book, *The Biochar Debate: Charcoal's Potential to Reverse Climate Change and Build Soil Fertility*, brings a new element to the discussion. What role could the use of charcoal play in reducing the release of greenhouse gases while improving our soil quality? This is the question Bruges poses.

My familiarity with biochar is rather limited—I first learned of the technology while studying soil science in college. So my interest was piqued by the title of this book. The author presents the issue as a “debate”: can biochar really play a significant role in reversing climate change? However, it reads as though Bruges is already sold on the idea that biochar needs to be a part of global climate change policies.

Biochar is a type of charcoal made from organic materials — wood, animal manure or plant debris, for example. It's created through a process called pyrolysis, which is the heating of materials in the absence of oxygen. Specific stoves have been engineered for the safe and efficient creation of biochar. After it's created through this heating process, biochar is then applied to the soil either via plowing, which helps the biochar move deeper into the subsoil, or by surface application, which can be riskier if it's not incorporated into compost or liquid manure, covered with plant material or formed into solid pellets before application.

Biochar can benefit the soil by increasing moisture retention, stabilizing nutrients in the soil, loosening compacted and heavy

soils and providing surfaces on which microbes can colonize. An important key to these benefits is the mycorrhizal relationship that occurs with the biochar after application. The mycorrhizae hairs link the plant roots to the biochar and allow cation exchange to occur, which increases the amount of minerals being taken up by the plant. Over time, the biochar becomes fully aggregated with the soil, making it more stable.

Bruges begins his briefing on biochar with an abbreviated overview of the history of the climate change debate, how carbon exists in our environment, how ancient civilizations used biochar and how some of the economic and political players are involved in mitigating or perpetuating the detrimental effects of climate change.

One of the most intriguing chapters of *The Biochar Debate* is titled, “Biochar in Agriculture.” Bruges compares sustainable agriculture to industrial agriculture practices and how current policies (commodity subsidies in particular) promote a style of agriculture that is dependent on fossil fuels and other limited natural resources. He touches on the benefits of using natural ecosystem services as part of agriculture (agroecology) and closing the nutrient cycle on the farm.

Throughout the book, Bruges critiques our current systems—economic, agricultural and political. But the debate in this book isn't about whether or not biochar can improve soil fertility and reverse climate change, it is about how the use of biochar could be exploited if applied through our current systems. A consistent theme of Bruges is that the management of biochar cannot

be left up to the markets and it needs to be viewed as a regulated sustainable resource.

The author credits Craig Sams, owner of the chocolate company Green and Black, for an interesting statistic: “If all the productive arable land [in the world] was devoted to producing biochar for just one year, then enough carbon would be sequestered to reduce atmospheric concentrations back to pre-industrial levels.” This is obviously not a practical solution, but his statistic is meant to illustrate the immensity of the climate

change problem and the possible benefits of incorporating biochar into global climate change policy.

The Biochar Debate is intended to be a primer on the debate over biochar's prospective role in improving the world's soils and dealing with the problem of climate change. At times it was difficult to tell the difference between the author's opinion and factual data. Craig Sams' quote about the potential of biochar is a prime example of this problem — it's an exciting piece of information, but how credible is it?

Bruges is not a scientist — he worked as an architect in London, Sudan and India until 1995, when he retired in order to write about economic and environmental issues.

That doesn't mean he shouldn't write about a subject he's not an expert on, but the book's credibility would benefit from more detailed citations and bibliography. Additionally, I noticed a couple of editing mistakes where the wrong page numbers were referenced within the text—a minor irritation, but one that adds to the impression that the book was put together in a hurried manner.

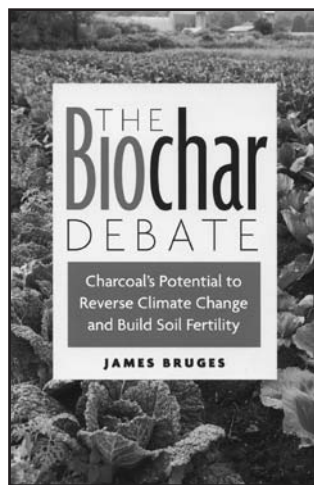
To be fair, this is a fairly recent area of study and not a lot of research has been done to provide accurate data. But that makes it even more critical to provide thorough information and resist making sweeping

statements such as “...enough carbon would be sequestered to reduce atmospheric concentrations back to pre-industrial levels.”

That said, this is a worthwhile read for anyone who has a passing interest in this technology. Bruges does a great job of describing the issues and providing an overview of biochar as one of the tools needed to mitigate climate change. *The Biochar Debate* motivates the reader to want to know more about and advocate for further research into biochar. After reading this book, I believe that biochar should be considered as a viable technique for improving soil quality. As far as being a part of global climate change policy? I think a more scientific debate is in order.

Bruges provides a good introduction to this fascinating idea, but his book is far from the final word on its viability. My next step will be to do some digging to find more research being done in the field. □

Megan Smith is a Land Stewardship Project membership assistant. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or megans@landstewardshipproject.org.



After reading this book, I believe that biochar should be considered as a viable technique for improving soil quality. As far as being a part of global climate change policy? I think a more scientific debate is in order.

The Nature Principle Human Restoration & the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder

By Richard Louv

2011; 320 pages

Algonquin Books

<http://richardlouv.com>

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

The *Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder* is the most recent book by Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* and founder of the Children and Nature Network. Like *Last Child in the Woods*, *The Nature Principle* continues to discuss the impact of humanity's separation from the natural world and the negative consequences of this separation—what Louv calls “nature-deficit disorder.”

However, unlike *Last Child in the Woods*, which focused almost exclusively on children, *The Nature Principle* discusses the impact of this disorder on adults. Louv explains that our lifestyle, with its increased emphasis on technology and the sometimes haphazard hours that people in modern society work, makes it difficult, if not impossible, for people to connect with what he sees as the healing power of the natural world.

Imagination in Place

By Wendell Berry

2010; 196 pages

Counterpoint Press

www.counterpointpress.com

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

Imagination in *Place* promises to be another Wendell Berry classic. His latest collection of essays explains the importance of place, especially rural and open land.

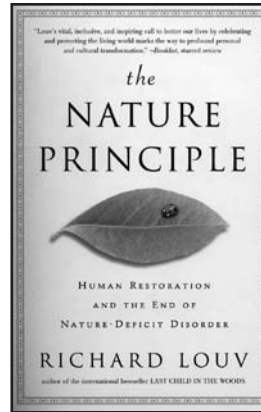
As any regular reader of Berry knows, place has played a key role in forming this writer/farmer's work. Berry also argues that place is key in the work of many authors, such as his mentor Wallace Stegner and his friend New England farmer and poet Hayden Carruth.

Berry speaks of the intimacy such places provide, whether it is Lane's Landing

Louv argues that there are consequences for this separation—failure to see ourselves as part of the natural world, as well as an increase in cancer rates, heart disease and mental illness, to name a few. Louv also explains that this separation can stress family units as parents frequently have less time to spend with their children in the natural world, resulting in a generation of children who also fail to see themselves as part of nature, and who frequently fear rather than respect and appreciate it.

Even though Louv sounds the alarm about the impact of nature-deficit disorder, he also brings hope through the stories of individuals who have fought back against our fast-paced technological society. Janet Keating is a former public school teacher and current executive director of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, a group that has countered adult nature-deficit disorder by fighting Appalachian mountaintop removal and the placement of a chlorine-based paper mill in West Virginia.

Louv also discusses the Quivara Coalition, a New Mexico-based group consisting of environmentalists, ranchers and others that strives to foster ecological health on western landscapes through public and private stewardship. This is a coalition that



(his farm in Kentucky) or Crow's Mark (the New England farm of Carruth).

As Berry writes:

“I believe I can say properly that my fiction originates in part in actual experience of an actual place; its topography, earth, plants, and animals; its language, voices and stories. The fiction I have written here, I suppose must somehow belong here and must be different from any fiction I might have written in any other place.”

This book shows that Berry, like Richard Louv (*see review above*), understands and appreciates the importance of place not just to artistic and other creative people but to the overall and spiritual well-being of people in general

As always, the language Berry uses is vivid, whether he is describing the open space of the West that served as the setting

outlines its mission by quoting longtime author and environmental activist Wendell Berry: “You can't save the land apart from the people, to save either you must save both.” In other words, the Quivara Coalition realizes that people and nature are completely connected—an understanding that Louv argues is often lost in our modern world.

Louv also realizes the importance of local open spaces such as yards, parks and community gardens as places to combat nature-deficit disorder and help individuals receive what Louv calls “Vitamin N”—the healthful benefits of our exposure to nature. Like Lyanda Lynn Haupt writing in her book *Crow Planet* (reviewed in the last issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*), Louv sees these open spaces as places of renewal—a process necessary for proper human and societal development.

Louv elaborates on this idea by identifying the following basic concepts that we can develop when we become reconnected with nature and open space in our lives: boosted mental acuity and creativity; improved human bonds; improved health and wellness; and more sustainable businesses, communities and economies. These are concepts that will improve the overall quality of life for everyone—children and adults alike. □

Land Stewardship Project member and frequent volunteer Dale Hadler has a master's degree in religion and theology from the United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities. In 2010, he helped organize a workshop at the Seminary for environmental educators of small children.

for much of Stegner's work, or his own farm along the Kentucky River.

Of course, Berry, being one of the foremost agrarian writers of our time, has a special place in his heart for rural places. He sees these places as critical not only for food production, but for human renewal and relationships.

At one point, Berry describes a visit to Carruth's Vermont farm after one of Carruth's first visits to Lane's Landing:

“We stayed up and talked in his writing shack, as we had done down here in mine, and I helped him put a load of firewood into his woodshed.”

This passage describes how an out-building and shared chores on a small farm can strengthen a good friendship—another positive outcome of a strong, rooted sense of place. □



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Membership Update

Creating the future we want

By Mike McMahon

I've been thinking about the corporate agribusiness giant Cargill's recent recall of over 36 million pounds of ground turkey. Just exactly how does 36 million pounds of ground turkey contaminated with a virulent strain of antibiotic-resistant salmonella make its way through the entire food system?

It's a failure on so many levels. It's the total confinement factory farms that pump antibiotics into livestock through injections, water and feed, creating ideal conditions for the evolution of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. It's the giant meatpackers that exploit workers, pushing them to butcher and process animals at ever-increasing speeds. It's the army of corporate lobbyists in Washington, D.C., and state capitols across the country who work day-in and day-out to roll back even the most rudimentary laws that protect people and the land.

And who pays the highest price when contaminated food winds up on kitchen tables? Not Cargill. It may have some short-term losses, but stacked up against its staggering profits, it'll keep forging ahead. The real losers are people who are unknowingly eating something that could kill them. So far, there has been one person we know of who died from eating the contaminated turkey, and 107 in 31 states who were sickened.

A problem this big requires a solution broad and deep enough to solve it. It was not one isolated element that led to the second largest meat recall in U.S. history, and thus the answer to preventing something like this from happening again requires action on many fronts.

It's stopping the spread of factory farms. It's reining in corporate meatpackers and breaking their hold over livestock markets. It's better working conditions and pay for slaughterhouse and farmworkers. It's strengthening our food safety laws and better enforcement of the laws we do have. It's diversifying and de-corporatizing our food system from the farm to the table.

If this sounds like a huge job, well, that's because it is.

Every day Land Stewardship Project

members are strategizing, organizing and taking action to build a food and farming system that cares for people and the land. LSP is helping new farmers get started, fighting factory farms that pollute the land

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and force family farmers out of business and building new systems that are delivering healthy, safe food while advancing stewardship and supporting rural communities.

And this work has generated lasting accomplishments, including:

→ **Protecting local democracy.** LSP has organized and won efforts to protect the right of people to act through their local units of government in stopping factory farms and other unwanted development in rural communities.

→ **Setting a new direction for agriculture policy based on stewardship of working farmland, not maximized commodity production.** Programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program, which LSP members helped shape, pass into law, and implement, are supporting family farmers who are protecting the soil and water through the use of sustainable agriculture practices.

→ **More farmers on the land.** LSP's

Farm Beginnings program is recognized as a national model for training the next generation of farmers.

But we need to do a lot more if we are going to have the kind of systemic impact that's required. And to do more, LSP needs to grow.

If you are already a member of LSP, thank you. Your financial support and engagement on the issues LSP works on are critical to our success.

I'd like to ask you to go a step further and ask someone you know to become a member. Think of someone whom you've talked to about family farms, sustainable agriculture or healthy food. Then share this *Land Stewardship Letter* with them and tell them why you're a member. Ask them to join and refer them to the self-addressed envelope enclosed in this newsletter which they can use to send in their dues.

Another way you can help LSP grow is by becoming a monthly pledger. Monthly pledges are a valuable way to contribute to the work on an ongoing basis. I can tell you that knowing each month that there is funding coming in to support the work makes a big difference.

If you are not a member of LSP, I invite you to join today. Basic membership dues are \$35 and are tax deductible. As a member, you'll receive updates on the latest food and farming news, opportunities to take action on the issues you care about and invitations to meetings, events, field days and more. You'll also receive a year's subscription to the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

Change in agriculture is inevitable, but what kind of change and who benefits and who loses is not yet determined. We can organize, fight back against corporate power and win changes that will have a lasting impact on our land, our farms, our food and our communities for years to come. I hope you will join us in this struggle today. □

Mike McMahon is LSP's Membership Coordinator. He can be reached at 612-722-6377, or by e-mailing mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

Joining LSP or renewing your membership?

Consider becoming a sustaining Land Stewardship Project member. As a monthly pledger, you are helping build a food and farming system that cares for people and the land, and your LSP membership is current as long as your pledge is active (no more renewal reminders).

If you have questions about the status of your membership or would like to set up a monthly or quarterly pledge, contact Abby Liesch at 612-722-6377 or aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org.

Continue your land's legacy by donating it to LSP

The Land Stewardship Project has launched an initiative that allows property owners to continue their family's legacy on the land while supporting the work of the organization as well as beginning farmers. This is a gifting opportunity for people who have a vital connection to a piece of land and want to maintain that legacy while supporting the work of LSP.

"When people have dedicated themselves to a given piece of land, their investment of stewardship transcends any given value," says Dan Guenther,



an Osceola, Wis., farmer and former LSP board member.

Through *Land & Stewardship Legacies*, LSP can accept gifts of farmland and other real estate. The *Stewardship Legacy* secures financial resources to support the work of LSP now and into the future. The *Land Legacy* is distinguished by accepting gifts of suitable parcels of farmland to serve as incubators for beginning farmers, or sold outright to promising graduates of LSP's Farm Beginnings

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.

program. For details, check the *Land & Stewardship Legacies* web page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-joinus-land-legacies.html, or call LSP Executive Director George Boody at 612-722-6377. □

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. lpse@landstewardshipproject.org.

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

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

Volunteer for LSP

Donating your time to LSP 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

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. □



In memory...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received gifts made in the name of loved ones over the past few months.

In memory of Deliah Kling

◆ Deliah Kling family

In memory of Lester Swanson

◆ Suzanne Swanson

In memory of Mark & Katie McManus

◆ Richard & Marjorie McManus

In memory of Warren O. Larson

◆ Gordon W. Cleaveland


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



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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **OCT. 8—Deep-bedded swine workshop**, WCROC, Morris, Minn.; Contact: Wayne Martin, 612-625-6224; marti067@umn.edu

→ **OCT. 8-9—Southeast Minnesota Sheep, Fiber & Farm Tour (4 SE Minn. farms)**; Contact: info@kindredspiritfarm.com

→ **OCT. 13—Dinner/benefit event for the Clinton Kitchen project in Big Stone County**, Clinton, Minn.; Contact: Rebecca Terk, LSP, 320-305-9685; rebeccat@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **OCT. 15—Energized Fencing Strategies for Graziers**, Minnesota State Community & Technical College, Fergus Falls, Minn.; Contact: Marci King, 218-736-1625; marci.king@minnesota.edu

→ **OCT. 22—“The Permaculture Lifestyle,” workshop**, Prior Lake, Minn.; Contact: Maggie McKenna, pricoldclimate.org; 314-922-9282; www.pricoldclimate.org

→ **OCT. 23—“Readings & Food” event featuring writers Catherine Friend, Brett Laidlaw & James Norton**; Contact: <http://slowfoodmn.org/events.html>

→ **OCT. 29—LSP Farm Beginnings course in Hutchinson, Minn., begins** (see page 16)

→ **OCT. 31—Deadline for Minnesota organic certification cost share program**; Contact: 651-201-6012; www.mda.state.mn.us/organic

→ **NOV. 3-5—Natl. Small Farm Conf.**, Columbia, Mo.; Contact: 800-633-2535; www.smallfarmtoday.com/tradeshows/

→ **NOV. 5—LSP Farm Beginnings course in Rochester, Minn., begins** (see page 16)

→ **NOV. 8—Farmer workshop on**

production transport costs, Bayport, Minn.; (see page 20)

→ **NOV. 11-13—11th Annual Fall Harvest Gathering for Women in Sustainable Agriculture**, Whalan, Minn.; Contact: stacyleighbrown@yahoo.com

→ **MID-NOVEMBER—Look Who’s Knock-in’ performances in the western Wis. communities of River Falls, Menomonie & Barron**; Contact: Karen Stettler, LSP, 507-523-3366; stettler@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **DECEMBER—1st in a winter series of LSP Holistic Management Classes** (details to be announced); Contact: Richard Ness, LSP, 320-269-2105; rness@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **DEC. 2—2011 North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) Program Farmer Rancher Grant deadline**; Contact: www.northcentralsare.org; 800-529-1342

→ **DEC. 7-8—Effective Cover Cropping in the Midwest**, Decatur, Ill.; Contact: www.swcs.org/covercrops; 515-289-2331

→ **DEC. 8—Grazing Research for Minnesota’s Future video conference** (sites to be announced); Contact: www.midwestforage.org/grazing.php; 651-484-3888

→ **DEC. 9-10—Fearless Farm Finances**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org/farmfinances.html; 715-778-5775

→ **JAN. 12—2011 North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) Program Youth & Youth Educator Grant deadline**; Contact: www.northcentralsare.org; 800-529-1342

→ **JAN. 12-14—20th annual GrassWorks Grazing Conference**, Wausau, Wis.; <http://grassworks.org>; 715-808-0060

→ **JAN. 13-14—Minnesota Organic Conference**, Saint Cloud, Minn.; Contact: Mary.

Hanks@state.mn.us; 651-201-6277; www.mda.state.mn.us/organic

→ **JAN. 13-14—Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conf.** (details to be announced); <http://practicalfarmers.org>; 515-232-5661

→ **JAN. 20-21—Upper Midwest Regional Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference & Trade Show**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mfvga.org; 763-434-0400

→ **JAN. 24—2012 session of Minnesota Legislature convenes**; Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 612-722-6377; bking@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **JAN. 27-28—Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society Winter Conference**, Aberdeen, S. Dak.; Contact: www.npsas.org; 701-883-4304

→ **FEBRUARY—7th Annual LSP Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol**, Saint Paul, Minn. (details to be announced); Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 612-722-6377; bking@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **FEB. 17-18—Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota 21st Annual Conference**, St. Joseph, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org/conference; 763-260-0209

→ **FEB. 23-25—23rd Annual 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 16)

→ **MARCH 10—Last session of Rochester, Minn., Farm Beginnings class** (see page 16)

→ **AUG. 1—Application deadline for 2012-2013 LSP Farm Beginnings course** (see page 16)

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