

Local foods for all

By Sarah Claassen

In March, the Organizing Apprenticeship Project (OAP) released two important publications related to social and economic justice: the *2008 Minnesota Legislative Report Card on Racial Equity* and *Pocket Guide: Racial and Economic Equity Assessment Questions*. The *Report Card* assesses the racial and economic equity of Minnesota legislation in 2008, and this year it found, among other things, that while legislators sent 15 racial equity bills to Gov. Tim Pawlenty's desk, only seven of those bills were signed into law. The *Pocket Guide* offers a series of questions (see sidebar) that help policy makers, community leaders, and organizers analyze the equity impact of policy, and ensure that the outcome will have positive outcomes for people and communities of color and working poor communities.

The Land Stewardship Project has had a long relationship with OAP—many of our organizers have been trained through the initiative. I am the latest LSP organizer to have the opportunity to take OAP training. As part of my work trying to make local, sustainably-produced food available to people in the Twin Cities no matter what their income level, I have been using the *Report Card* and *Pocket Guide* as organizing tools. Specifically, we've been engaging with a program called Homegrown Minneapolis and assessing whether it is adhering to acceptable levels of racial equity. Homegrown Minneapolis is an initiative by Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak to build local food systems that make a positive difference in the city's economy, health, food security and environment. Homegrown Minneapolis' steering committee is in the process of developing

recommendations for city officials to build a sustainable local food system. Following the release of the *Report Card* and *Equity Assessment Questions*, I delivered these tools to members of the Homegrown Minneapolis steering committee and met with several members of the committee to discuss how the tools might be applied when forming the recommendations.

LSP also joined up with Valerie Martinez of the Indigenous Peoples Green Jobs Taskforce to push for a racial equity assessment of the Homegrown Minneapolis steering committee's policy recommendations around job creation and training. The Indigenous Peoples Green Jobs Taskforce is a growing statewide initiative that empowers indigenous people, people of color and working poor people to rebuild healthy and sustainable communities through green jobs, including jobs in sustainable agriculture and community food systems.

In late May, Martinez and I met with Mayor Rybak's top policy aide, also a Homegrown Minneapolis steering committee member, to present the *Equity Assessment Questions* and engage the aide in that assessment. We asked that the city's recommendations on green jobs reflect the goals presented by the *Equity Assessment Questions*, and that

Homegrown Minneapolis use the *Pocket Guide* to assess racial equity impacts of all their recommendations, beyond jobs.

Homegrown Minneapolis is an opportunity to create better care of the land and improve the well-being of the city's residents, but to do that it cannot just focus on where a garden is planted or how many farmers' markets are placed in a community. A truly comprehensive initiative must address racial and economic disparity and consider the experiences of those who have the closest relationship with the problems of our current system. The initiative, and the city of Minneapolis, will be stronger when that is done. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for updates on how this important work is progressing. □

LSP's Sarah Claassen recently graduated from the Organizing Apprenticeship Project. For information on getting a copy of the Legislative Report Card or the Pocket Guide, see www.oaproject.org or call 612-746-4224.

Racial & Economic Equity Assessment Questions

- How does the proposed action (policy, budget or investment decision) impact racial and economic disparities?
- How does the proposed action support and advance racial and economic equity in such areas as education, contracting, immigrant and refugee access to service, health, workforce and economic development?
- Have voices of groups affected by the proposal, budget or investment decisions been involved with its development? What solutions were proposed by these groups and communities?
- What do you need to ensure that proposals are successful in addressing disparities—what resources, what timelines and what monitoring will help ensure success of the proposal for achieving racial and economic equity?
- If your assessment shows that a proposed policy, budget or investment decision will likely increase disparities, what alternatives can you explore?
- What modifications are needed to maximize racial and economic equity outcomes and reduce racial and economic disparities?

LSP receives healthy food funding

The Land Stewardship Project has received funding from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota's tobacco settlement proceeds to promote healthier eating.

LSP was chosen to receive the funding to work with local groups and citizens in west-central Minnesota who have limited access to a green grocer. This initiative will explore how local farmers, gardeners and community gardening projects can help people improve the community's access to

good food.

The project will include working with University of Minnesota Extension, the University of Minnesota's West Central Sustainable Development Partnership and the Crossroads Resource Center to help area residents assess the strengths and challenges of access to good food in their communities. LSP's staff in Montevideo will partner with communities to plan how access to good food can be improved through a variety of

methods, including community gardening, improving produce preservation skills and building markets and venues for locally produced food.

For more information, contact Terry VanDerPol, Director of LSP's Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program, at 320-269-2105 or tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org. You can also contact LSP organizer Tom Taylor at ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org. □