

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

Vol. 28, No. 3

www.landstewardshipproject.org

Summer 2010



What happens when farmers and a scientist begin a two-way conversation? (see page 28).

—A Letter to the Local Foods Community—

—Roundup's Dirty Little Secret—

—Manure, Taxes & Wrecked Roads—

—Farm Beginnings Deadline Sept. 1—

—Green Sprouts in the Food Desert—

—Profits From Perennials—

—Essays From a Farmer Philosopher—



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

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

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

Western Minnesota

301 State Rd., Montevideo, MN 56265; phone: 320-269-2105; fax: 2190; e-mail: lspwest@landstewardshipproject.org
Amy Bacigalupo, Julia Ahlers Ness, Richard Ness, Nick Olson, Tom Taylor, Terry VanDerPol

Twin Cities/Policy

821 East 35th St., Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55407;
phone: 612-722-6377; fax: 6474;
e-mail: info@landstewardshipproject.org
Louise Arbuckle, George Boody, Sarah Claassen, Ann DeLaVergne,
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This newsletter printed by Roscoe Printers, Wanamingo, Minn.

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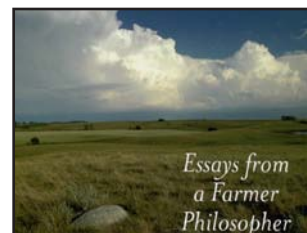
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An open letter from LSP Executive Director George Boody to the local foods community

I am writing this open letter to clarify possible confusion about the views of the Land Stewardship Project caused by the publication of a submitted commentary (“Springing out from the ‘belly of the beast’”) in the Spring 2010 edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

LSP believes we are well-served in this region by having a diversity of sizes and approaches within the area’s produce farms that are able to provide food direct to consumers or retail establishments and/or wholesale produce to distributors, restaurants and other retailers or institutions in the region. These farms range from small Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms to larger CSA farms, and also include other locally owned produce farms of various sizes, marketing models and ownership structures. Together they are able to effectively serve various markets and communities. The potential for growth in these markets is great and LSP believes we will need all of these farms and many more to build a more just, sustainable and healthy food and agriculture system in our region and our nation.

LSP acknowledges that the issue of scale and sustainability is an important subject for dialogue. A variety of opinions exist about scale and sustainability within the CSA, wholesale produce and local foods community in general. It is likely a goal of every farm, retail establishment, distributor, co-op and nonprofit associated with this communi-

ty to strive for sustainability. Whatever their size, many of these produce farms share the need for storage and processing facilities and for finding effective ways to aggregate more food products. Such an infrastructure is needed to be able to actually reach larger percentages of the community’s population with food grown sustainably in our region, including meeting the demands of retail and institutional purchasers and lower income communities. This will take a large measure of solidarity and cooperation. These challenges as well as other key issues need to be

• • •

LSP believes we are well-served in this region by having a diversity of sizes and approaches within the area’s produce farms...

• • •

part of the dialogue.

However, the regional/local foods movement will be best served by holding that dialogue in ways that builds on and strengthens farms and relationships. It is LSP’s view that the local farms that were named in the commentary and several others like them should be commended for their work to help grow the local foods community. We have updated LSP’s internal policies about commentaries in the *Land Stewardship Letter* to ensure that the Land Stewardship Project more appropriately achieves that aim in the future and we pledge to continue to engage the commu-

nity in other ways. To read that new policy see the sidebar at the bottom of this page.

LSP strongly believes the local foods community should build from the base of excellent smaller and larger produce farms focused on sustainably grown food and distributors such as Co-op Partners Warehouse, as well as the region’s many forward-thinking co-ops, restaurants, other businesses and the thousands of consumers who are part of the local foods community. LSP is committed to helping open up new markets for younger farmers, experienced farmers and both smaller and larger farmers who help each other to grow the healthy food that an increasing number of people want to eat.

As the markets grow and the need for new farmers expands, it is also critically important to provide enhanced training opportunities for farmers—be they CSA operations, smaller or larger produce farms, or farmers involved in other crop or livestock enterprises. The Land Stewardship Project is proud to be able to coordinate part of the work of our Farm Beginnings program with the Organic Field School at Gardens of Eagan through its staff and consultants, as well as its owner, the Wedge Natural Foods Co-op, to advance this critical training need.

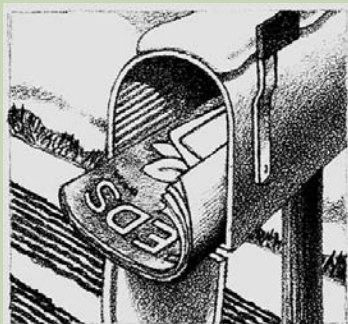
I encourage anyone who has questions about LSP’s work on local and regional food systems to contact me at 612-722-6377. □

See page 3 for a related commentary.

Submitting commentaries & letters

The *Land Stewardship Letter* welcomes unsolicited commentaries as well as letters-to-the-editor related to issues we cover. We reserve the right to edit for content, length and clarity and to decide not to publish. Work published in the **Commentary** section of the *Land Stewardship Letter* does not necessarily represent the views of the Land Stewardship Project.

Commentaries and letters-to-the-editor submitted to the *Land Stewardship Letter* will be reviewed by the Land Stewardship Project’s executive director and the directors of the organization’s various programs



before they are considered for publication. These people are: George Boody, Executive Director; Mark Schultz, Associate Director/Policy Director/ Director of Programs; Amy Bacigalupo, Farm Beginnings Director; and Terry VanDerPol, Community Based Food and Economic Development Director.

To submit a letter or a commentary, or for more information, contact: Brian DeVore, 821 East 35th Street, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407; phone: 612-722-6377; fax: 612-722-6474; e-mail: bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.

A sustainable local food system based on community, trust & sharing

By Atina Diffley

Ofentimes in life our own worst enemy is ourselves. This was one of my first thoughts when I read Daniel Miller's submitted commentary, "Springing out from the 'belly of the beast'" in the Spring 2010 *Land Stewardship Letter*. I am saddened by the tear in the fabric caused by the Land Stewardship Project's publishing of the commentary. It separates, confuses and damages the alternative food system team that is our community.

Daniel Miller didn't tell us directly about himself in his commentary, so I turned to the Internet to learn who he is. It didn't take long to deepen my compassion for him. I read that he is a first-year farmer, just starting out. I remember how overwhelmed I felt when I was just starting—learning how to farm and create a market—and how I looked to experienced farmers for guidance.

For those of you who do not know me, I will give a brief history. My partner, Martin Diffley, started the certified organic farm Gardens of Eagan in 1973. I joined him in 1985, and we sold the business to the Wedge Co-op in 2008. I have been actively involved in the local and organic food community as a migrant laborer, co-op produce manager, organic farmer, educator and activist since 1979. While I no longer own and operate a farm or sell into the local organic market, I continue to focus my life's energy toward positive change in our agricultural systems—this is my community and my life's work.

To state, as the commentary did, that Harmony Valley, Featherstone and the Wedge-owned Gardens of Eagan are glaring examples of California mega-production creates an attitude of distrust and is counterproductive to the common goals we all have been working toward. It is also, very simply, baseless.

To state these farms are monocultures lacking diversity? Blatant untruth. I am staggered by the diversity of Harmony Valley and Featherstone. To make a statement that only family members and interns should work on farms? Is there something inherently wrong with employees? Many of the employees on these farms have gone on to start their own successful farms because they had

the opportunity to earn and learn. And many people want to work in agriculture, but don't want the risks of ownership. What is the basis for the belief that there is only one right scale and one right model for a healthy farm?

One of the unique and valuable characteristics of the organic farming community has been a willingness to share information amongst each other. Other local, organic farms are our allies and partners, not threats



One of the unique and valuable characteristics of the organic farming community has been a willingness to share information amongst each other. The farms named in the commentary have all been leaders in supporting and educating new farmers and organic consumers. They practice this sharing with the full knowledge that educating farmers will increase competition in the marketplace.



and enemies. We are a community. The farms named in the commentary have all been leaders in supporting and educating new farmers and organic consumers. They practice this sharing with the full knowledge that educating farmers will increase competition in the marketplace. If you have been sheltered inside the "organic bubble," you may not realize how rare this is. Try approaching a conventional vendor at a farmers' market with a production question—see what happens.

Harmony Valley, Gardens of Eagan and the Wedge have their roots in the 1970s, starting at a time when the University of Minnesota and its Extension program said organic was "impossible" and "nuts." Local was a negative word. There were no organic standards—these early pioneers had to write them. There was no SARE, LSP, MISA, ATTRA or MOSES Organic Farming Conference providing information. And there was no organic market—these early pioneers had to be change makers and educators.

As pioneers, they developed systems that present-day farmers are now benefiting from. These early farmers and co-ops educated the public, conducted research, experimented and were credible models. And they did it with tenacity and commitment, keeping their farms going with off-farm jobs, working endless hours until they developed a sufficient market to sustain their farms.

Many of the customers who now support small Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and farmers' market growers had their first exposure to local and organic food through these farms. They are a valuable resource to us all. It was a whole lot harder to get started back when there was no organic market, and organic farmers were seen as crazy, nuts and dirty. Now, farmers are local food heroes. Growers with a basic understanding of communication skills can carve a niche for themselves in the marketplace.

The new ownership structure of Gardens of Eagan further increases the educational capacity of the farm. With the support of farmer Linda Halley's experience and guidance, new farmers trained at Gardens of Eagan's Organic Field School have the opportunity to gain experience and practical skills running a viable farm. This drastically increases their success rate when they are ready to take on the risks of starting their own operation. Any and all profits made by the farm are donated to educational non-profit work to further the development of the local and organic food system. The Wedge's willingness to take on the risks and complications of operating a farm for the purpose of educating farmers and the public has only increased my already immense respect for the huge contributions this co-op has made to organic food and farmers.

Competition and associated feelings are part of any market. There are healthy ways to enter a market and there are healthy ways to compete. I truly believe there is room for many more farmers—that is one of the reasons I teach LSP's Farm Beginnings classes. That doesn't mean beginning or any other farmers can expect to simply waltz into a co-op and be the first in line to sell. They need to develop their product line and market just like every other farm. And the co-op market is only one of many markets to be developed.

Learning what your farm uniquely does best is a first step in developing its personality—the strengths and weaknesses, the unique combination of land, climate, people, market and scale that synergistically shape the operation's character. This will dictate

Trust & Sharing, see page 5...

the best crops and markets for success. There is no one-size-fits-all. Each farm has to develop its strength and place.

There are many ways to enter a market. It is almost never successful to gain a foothold by attacking the existing farms, especially when those farms have developed the market. These knock-down attempts usually lead to rejection by the loyal customer base these farms have developed by providing a consistent product with quality and service.

If instead entering farmers find a niche and offer high quality service, they should be able to, with a bit of zest and hard work, educate the customer base and develop the supportive relationships that sustain a viable farm. The beauty is that there are over five million people in Minnesota—and every one of them eats.

The “Springing out from the ‘belly of the beast’” commentary isn’t causing huge financial harm to the farms it criticizes. They are respected, deeply-rooted contributors to the community. The commentary, however,

hurts other beginning farmers who are looking for their place in a viable market. It also threatens our overall team effort, our willingness to support each other through a culture of safety and openness.

This movement is about health—farm, human and environmental. Healthy anger clears the air instead of clouding it. It contains compassion and empathy, while increasing intimacy and understanding—and no one gets hurt. I put forth to all of you a request and a challenge that dialogue be based on health—that we remember this when we are angry and frustrated. Anger fueled by blame isn’t going to change our agricultural systems.

People are hungry for what we have to offer; there has never been a better time to be a local organic farmer. We are on the cusp of great change. But one of the greatest threats to our food movement is separation amongst the members. This is a tremendously huge job we have to do—we can’t do it confused and fragmented. We have come a very long way since the challenges of the 1970s, but what we have ahead to do is mammoth, and time is running out. I leave

you with a song to sing in your fields or your homes...may they overflow with bounty.

*Come on, come on
Let's work together
You know together we will stand
Divided we'll fall
Come on now people
Let's get on the ball
And work together
Ahhh, come on now...
Ahhh, come on ... let's work together
— sung by Canned Heat &
Dwight Yoakam*

Pick your musician and genre, but please—sing this song. □

Atina Diffley, along with her partner Martin, owns and operates Organic Farming Works (www.organicfarmingworks.com) in Farmington, Minn. She can be contacted at atina@organicfarmingworks.com.

My health care needs a KISS

By Craig Brooks

KeeP It Simple Stupid (KISS). I believe we can create a simpler, less expensive system that will give us affordable, quality health care. I’m not sure that was achieved at the federal level with all the special interests lobbying and funneling millions into campaign coffers.

States can and should do much better on health care and can help lead the nation to real reform that works better for people. The closer to home, the easier to follow and the more responsive the elected officials are to the citizens. Let’s work for more effective change at the state level.

Some ideas for where to focus:

→ Work to make sure that states can opt up on the Federal Health Care Bill passed by Congress and signed by the President. The federal bill didn’t effectively address real cost containment. We need states to lead and demonstrate how they can develop a plan that is more effective and efficient compared to the excessively high-cost corporate health care system that now exists.

→ Stop connecting our jobs to how our medical bills are paid. That is not good for me, my employer or our ability as a nation to compete in this new world economy.

→ Change the payment system to stop forcing doctors, hospitals and pharmacists to process hundreds of different billing forms and rules. One bill will be better for me and will save a lot of money for the providers.

→ Put hospitals on a budget. Make them all nonprofit. Reimburse them for an approved budget and determine what services they provide based on need in their community. Adding expensive equipment for the sake of competitive marketing has driven up costs. Not having all those people processing complex, detailed billings will save money for the hospitals.

→ Stop all the time and money spent on screening people for whether or not they can be covered for payment toward their medical bills. This is true for employers, insurance companies and the government

programs. People who need medical care are being denied that care due to some issue about their condition, their job or their finances.

We need one plan, with one payer, and all of us in one pool together. It makes sense. We do it for Medicare, why not for all of us? Yeah, it’s government, but we do some things better as a group than we do on our own, such as roads, public safety and clean water. Our governors, state legislators and public employees are under one plan — I can’t think why they should have a plan better than any of us.

These are just some of the ideas for how to KISS our health care. We will all be stronger and healthier with a decent health care system. □

Craig Brooks is a member of the Land Stewardship Project’s Health Care Task Force. For more information on LSP’s work on rural health care issues, contact Paul Sobocinski at 507-342-2323 or sobopaul@redred.com.

Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

→ Myth: Roundup is not a long-term environmental threat.

→ Fact:

Much of the basis for society's (and government's) acceptance of Roundup Ready GMO technology centers around the belief that the herbicide glyphosate (a linchpin in the Roundup Ready system) is safer for the environment than many of the pre-emergent herbicides it was supposed to replace. This is based on the idea that its greater volatility makes it less likely to hang around long enough to create environmental and human health problems. So, goes the argument, applying more glyphosate is less of a threat than applying less atrazine, for example.

But there are signs the herbicide glyphosate is threatening the soil's long-term ability to create a healthy growing medium for crops. That's not just a regrettable side effect that puts a bit of a tarnish on a silver bullet—it's a potential bombshell that changes everything farmers (and environmentalists) have been led to believe about this ubiquitous herbicide.

Don Huber, a Purdue University emeritus professor of plant pathology, has recently been making minor waves within the world of no-till/minimal till agriculture by highlighting glyphosate's ability to make the growing environment for plants an unhealthy one. In a summary paper of the latest research in this area, Huber documents how glyphosate has significantly changed nutrient availability and plant efficiency. Some of these changes are brought about by glyphosate's direct toxicity, while others are caused indirectly through changes in soil organisms.

It seems one of the indirect effects of glyphosate is that it ties up or "chelates" the micronutrients necessary for healthy plants. For example, it can consistently inhibit plant enzymes responsible for disease resistance. It does this to plants engineered to resist being killed outright by glyphosate, as well as their non-GMO counterparts.

Huber's 13-page paper has this chilling

conclusion: "The introduction of such an intense mineral chelator as glyphosate into the food chain through accumulation in feed, forage, and food, and root exudation into ground water, could pose significant health concerns for animals and humans and needs further evaluation."

Huber's warnings are being taken seriously by a sector of the farming community that benefits greatly from Roundup Ready technology: no-till and minimum-till farmers. In an effort to reduce tillage-based weed control as much as possible, these types of crop producers have adopted glyphosate-resistant plant technology in droves.

But in an article tellingly called "Are We Shooting Ourselves In the Foot With a Silver Bullet?", the March 2010 issue of *No-Till Farmer* magazine quotes Huber and other researchers who are quite concerned that Roundup Ready is becoming a detriment to crop farming. It turns out farmers and crop consultants are reporting more incidents of entire fields showing signs of disease and stress in general. Crops may not die outright, but will do things like mature earlier, turning yellow and losing the bright green coloring that shows they are still adding to their final yield.

"For the last 2 to 3 years, corn plants have been losing color about 7 to 10 days earlier each year," Iowa crop consultant Bon Streit told *No-Till Farmer*. "In 2009, we often saw corn yellowing up by August 1 even where nitrogen deficiencies weren't the problem."

Up until now, such signs of stress were automatically blamed on weather or some other "outside" culprit. But Huber and others are now saying no-till and minimum-till farmers need to look at their own spray tanks as a source of problems.

Perhaps the most troubling point that Huber makes is that contrary to conventional wisdom, glyphosate is not a temporary presence in the environment. It can actually stick around in the soil for long periods of time.

"We see a buildup of glyphosate in the soil in part from glyphosate-tolerant crops

and weeds," Huber told *No Till Farmer*. "When we add phosphate fertilizers for corn, soybeans or wheat, for example, the phosphorus reacts to release the glyphosate back into the soil, where it's available for uptake by plants."

And that build-up, along with the negative results of that build-up, gets worse over the years. One German study found that wheat planted in soil where glyphosate had been used for a decade yielded 46 percent less than wheat planted where glyphosate had been used for only a year. And since no-tillers disturb the soil less, they are at greater risk of seeing the herbicide accumulate to levels where crops will be negatively affected.

As Huber's paper makes clear, we need research on the long-term effects of GMOs now more than ever. And we're upping the ante by the minute. Consider this: the USDA is now considering whether to approve use of Roundup Ready alfalfa in this country. A perennial crop that can be sprayed with glyphosate? If that isn't a recipe for overuse, nothing is.

→ More information:

- To read Don Huber's summary paper on glyphosate, see www.geertsonseed-farms.com/pdfs/agchemicalandcropnutrientinteractions.pdf.

- The article, "Are We Shooting Ourselves In the Foot With a Silver Bullet?", is in the March 2010 issue of *No-Till Farmer*: www.no-tillfarmer.com.

Myth Busters on the Internet

The *Land Stewardship Letter's* popular *Myth Buster* series is available on our website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-myth.html. For paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.

LSP blog

The Land Stewardship Project writes weekly on food and sustainable agriculture issues for the Minnesota Environmental

Partnership's *Loon Commons* 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>. □



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LSP News

LSP members discuss how to build a sustainable food & farming system

Nicole Walker (*right photo*) was one of the Land Stewardship Project members who gathered near the southeast Minnesota community of Lewiston June 29 to discuss their ideas for creating an agriculture in the area that supports family farms and promotes healthy soil, air and water.

Also featured at the event was a panel discussion involving young farmers (*bottom photo*) who represented enterprises ranging from vegetable truck gardening to beef and dairy production. The beginning farmers discussed some of the challenges they face as they launch their businesses, including financing, access to land, balancing work and family, and getting the older generation to accept that there are opportunities for young people in production agriculture.

“A farm that is equally environmentally sensitive and productive is my goal,” said LSP Farm Beginnings graduate Luke Tessum (*holding microphone*), who is launching a grass-based beef operation and is being mentored by fellow Farm Beginnings graduate Brad Hodgson. “One neighbor said, ‘Grass is bad, it’s not the future.’ My dad said, ‘You’re just going to have to prove it to him that grass works.’ So that’s what I’m going to do.”



LSP’s Mark Schultz wrapped up the evening by discussing the importance of organizing in developing a positive future for rural communities.

“LSP is about promoting innovations—whether it be grass-based dairy and beef production or Community Supported Agriculture or organics,” said Schultz, who, along with being LSP’s Policy Director is the Director of Programs/Associate Director.

“We need to look to our own schools, our own grocery stores, our own refrigerators, for ways to build a sustainable local food system.”

But promoting alternatives to industrial agriculture isn’t enough. People in rural communities must also become aware of who is controlling the bigger picture on a state and national level, and be willing to make their voices heard.

“From time to time we have to stand up to the worst of what’s going on out there,” he said. “That’s why LSP works on policy.”

Over the years LSP and its members have become known for making positive contributions on such issues as maintaining local control, fighting corporate concentration in agriculture and creating opportunities for beginning farmers.

“Why do we have standing on these issues? Because people like you are organizing,” Schultz said. “We are building leaders in the community, and being a leader doesn’t always mean being an elected official. There are many ways each of us can be a leader in the community.” (*LSP photos*) □





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LSP News

in Saint Paul, Minn. She participated in an international exchange program at a kibbutz in Israel and has worked as a Hebrew School teaching assistant as well as at an organic gardening operation in Israel.

The focus of her

work at LSP was helping the Membership Program organize the July 22 cookout/celebration (*see page 10*). She also worked on other membership outreach efforts.

Lewis will be a senior at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Wash., this fall. She is majoring in environmental politics, with a minor in education, and is currently doing

research for a book a Whitman professor is writing about the cultural politics of bread in America.

Lewis has worked on farms in Minnesota,

Wisconsin and Oregon, and managed the student organic garden at Whitman.

While at LSP, Lewis did research for the Policy Program on factory farms and the property tax exemptions they qualify for in Minnesota (*see page 12*).

Smith will graduate from the University of Minnesota in December with a bachelor's degree in agricultural education and a minor in soil science. She also has degrees in liberal arts from Minneapolis Community and Technical College and advertising/communications from St. Cloud Technical College.

Smith is employed at Seward Co-op in Minneapolis and has worked as a landscape crew supervisor, veterinary assistant, graphic consultant and farm educator.

While at LSP, Smith worked with the Community Based Food and Economic Development Program on creating awareness around the importance of land permanency for community gardens. □



Rebecca Hornstein



Robin Lewis



Julia Ahlers Ness



Megan Smith

Louise Arbuckle leaves LSP after 12 years

After a dozen years as its Twin Cities office manager/administrative and accounting assistant, **Louise Arbuckle** has left the Land Stewardship Project to return to school.

Prior to joining LSP's staff in 1998, Arbuckle studied dental technology at Northeast Metro Technical College and personal development through Dale Carnegie.

During the past several years Arbuckle has helped coordinate the administration of LSP's various programs and offices. She was instrumental in modernizing the organization's computer system as well as other technological tools, and coordinated the publication of such key resources as the *CSA Farm Directory*. Arbuckle also fielded thousands of calls over the years from people looking for information on LSP as well as sustainable agriculture and family farming in general.

Arbuckle, who lives in Roseville, Minn., is studying to be a medical assistant at Minneapolis Business College. □



Louise Arbuckle

assistant at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and in produce and research/development at the Wedge Community Co-op. Most recently Riemann helped manage the Fair Trade program for bananas at Equal Exchange.

In his new position, Riemann is providing administrative, clerical and accounting support to the manager of administration and finance. He also manages the Minneapolis office, and gives general administrative support to LSP programs.

He can be contacted at joer@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377. □

Ness joins LSP

Julie Ahlers Ness has joined the Land Stewardship Project's staff as the coordinator of the Chippewa 10% Project.

Ahlers Ness has a bachelor's degree in academic theology from the College of Saint Benedict in Saint Joseph, Minn., and a master's degree in theology from the United Theological Seminar of the Twin Cities. Ahlers Ness worked for LSP from 1998 to 2001, when she was a contract writer and editor for the Monitoring Project.

She has also worked for the Center for Rural Affairs, National Catholic Rural Life Conference and Saint Mary's Press. She recently launched the Center for Healing Partnerships.

Ahlers Ness is based out of LSP's office in Montevideo, Minn. She can be contacted at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org. For more on the Chippewa 10% Project, see page 26. □

LSP internships

Rebecca Hornstein, Robin Lewis and **Megan Smith** served internships with the Land Stewardship Project this summer.

Hornstein grew up in South Minneapolis and is a student at Macalester College

Riemann joins staff

Joe Riemann has joined the Land Stewardship Project's staff as its new Twin Cities office manager/administrative and accounting assistant.

Riemann has degrees in political science and sociology from the University of Minnesota, and worked as an LSP communications intern in 2005-2006. He has also worked as a research assistant at the Center for Homicide Research, an associate instructor at the U of M, a rural communities



Joe Riemann

DeLaVergne joins *Buy Fresh Buy Local* staff

Ann DeLaVergne has begun work as a Land Stewardship Project organizer in the Community Based Food and Economic Development Program.

DeLaVergne, of Stillwater, Minn., has a vast background in new program, business and concept development. She is the founder and CEO of ecoEnvelopes, which provides reusable envelopes and packing to save businesses and organizations money and reduce waste. She has also worked as the marketing and membership manager at River Market Community Co-op in Stillwater, as the owner/operator of Big Tomato Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farm, and as a creative director and photographer for Hazelden Publishing. DeLaVergne is also the co-creator of Summer Tuesday, a community event that features a market, concert and movie on six summer Tuesday evenings in Stillwater.



Ann DeLaVergne

She has a bachelor's degree in fine arts from the University of South Dakota, and a master's degree in fine arts from the Cranbrook Academy of Art.

DeLaVergne is helping the St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapter, sponsored by LSP, to provide services to the Washington County (Minn.) Department of Public Health and Environment in the implementation of their Statewide Health Improvement (SHIP) grant. Her focus will be on increasing community access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

She can be contacted at annd@landstewardshipproject.org or 651-329-0125. □

Guenthner & Palmer conclude service on LSP board

Dan Guenthner and **Helen Palmer** have concluded their service on the Land Stewardship Project's Board of Directors.

Guenthner joined the Board in 2001 and served two terms. He was a founding member of LSP's *Land & Stewardship Legacies*



Dan Guenthner

committee, which is working to develop an initiative that benefits beginning farmers, rural communities, landowners and LSP (see page 31).

Guenthner, along with his wife Margaret Pennings, operates Common Harvest Farm, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation along the bluffs of the St. Croix River Valley south of Osceola, Wis. **Guenthner** and **Pennings** have played a key role in getting CSA farming established in the region, and have hosted Farm Beginnings field days as well as mentored graduates of the program. They give many presentations throughout the year on the importance of connecting food consumption/purchasing habits with good land stewardship. **Guenthner** is the author of *To Till and Keep It: New Models for Congregational Involvement with the Land*.

Palmer joined the Board in 2006 and served one term. During her tenure, she served on the board development committee.

Palmer is the past president of the League of Women Voters Minnesota, a nonpartisan, grassroots organization with 42 local chapters across the state. The League studies public policy issues relating to environmental concerns, public education, affordable housing and childcare. It educates the public on these issues through special reports and advocates for reforms when necessary. □

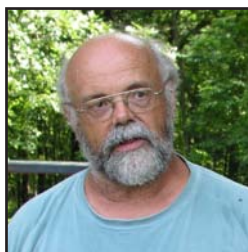


Helen Palmer

Specht & Hawkins join LSP Board

Dan Specht and **Tex Hawkins** have joined the Land Stewardship Project's Board of Directors.

Specht raises crops and livestock near the northeast Iowa community of McGregor. He has long been involved in efforts locally and nationally to advance research and policy related to sustainable agriculture. **Specht** is a member of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee and has made several trips to Washington, D.C., to lobby on behalf of farm policy that benefits sustainable family farms and the environment. He and his farm have also been featured in numerous media stories on sustainable farming. **Specht** is active in the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition



Dan Specht

and Practical Farmers of Iowa, as well as other organizations.

Hawkins is a watershed biologist with the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, and is based in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office in Winona, Minn. He has long worked with farmers in the region who are interested in improving wildlife habitat, and during the 1990s was a key member of the Monitoring Team, an initiative led by LSP which resulted in numerous scientific, agricultural and policy breakthroughs related to sustainable farming. **Hawkins** was one of the contributors to *The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems*, a 2002 book co-edited by LSP's Dana Jackson. □



Tex Hawkins

Benefit dinner for LSP Aug. 31

Brasa Premium Rotisserie Restaurant in Saint Paul, Minn., is hosting a benefit dinner for the Land Stewardship Project on Tuesday, Aug. 31, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Come and enjoy a three-course meal prepared by LSP member Alex Roberts, the 2010 winner of the James Beard Foundation award for Best Chef in the Midwest. Proceeds from the event will support LSP's work to build a food and farming system that cares for people and the land.

Seating is limited and tickets are \$30. Tickets can be purchased at www.landstewardshipproject.org or by contacting LSP's Mike McMahon at mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.

Membership ???

Do you have questions about your Land Stewardship Project membership? Contact Mike McMahon (mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org) or Abigail Liesch (aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org) at 612-722-6377. Memberships can be renewed over the telephone, with the envelope included with this newsletter, or by visiting www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-joinus.html.

For more on ways to support LSP as a member, see our **Membership Update** on page 31. □



LAND
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LSP News

LSP on Facebook

LSP has expanded its presence on the Internet by launching a Facebook page. Go to www.landstewardshipproject.org and click on the **Facebook** link under **LSP on the Web** for the latest on what we're up to.

Become a "Fan" and share the link with your friends and family. ☐

Twin Cities summer cookout

Local food, live music, a silent auction and presentations about beginning farmers and community gardens were featured at the Land Stewardship Project's 9th annual Twin Cities-area cookout/potluck July 22.

Over 200 LSP members and friends participated in the event, which took place in the back yard of LSP's Twin Cities office in South Minneapolis.

A live performance by the Brass Messengers (www.brassmessengers.com) was featured during the event, along with a silent auction consisting of items donated by local businesses and made by LSP members.

In an effort to make this year's cookout a

"zero waste event," LSP partnered with Eureka Recycling (www.eurekarecycling.org), a local nonprofit organization that works with restaurants, event organizers and local governments to reduce waste as much as possible through recycling, composting and education programs. Despite the record turnout for July's event, Eureka was able to help LSP reduce the amount of waste produced for the evening to only five pounds. (*LSP photos*) ☐

Get current with

LIVE  WIRE

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* to get monthly e-mail updates and news from the Land Stewardship Project. To subscribe, call Abigail Liesch at 612-722-6377 or e-mail aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org, and put in the subject line, "Subscribe *LIVE-WIRE*." ☐



Thank you.

Thank you for your actions. **Thank you** for your hope. **Thank you** for your diligence. **Thank you** for your stewardship. **Thank you** for your generosity. **Thank you** for your labor. **Thank you** for your ingenuity. **Thank you** for your assertiveness. **Thank you** for your resilience. **Thank you** for your spirit. **Thank you** for your time. **Thank you** for your energy. **Thank you** for your loyalty. **Thank you** for your sacrifice. **Thank you** for your courage. **Thank you** for your foresight. **Thank you** for your talents. **Thank you** for your optimism. **Thank you** for your unity. **Thank you** for your steadfastness. **Thank you** for your creativity. **Thank you** for your enthusiasm. **Thank you** for your commitment.

Thank you for your membership.

Last fiscal year the Land Stewardship Project had the highest membership renewal rate in the history of the organization. We are grateful for everyone who renewed their membership, became a monthly pledger, rejoined LSP or became members for the first time.



LAND
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A hidden handout for factory farms

While property taxes skyrocket for most Minnesotans, factory farms are benefiting from a little-known state law that makes their multi-million gallon manure pits exempt from property taxation

By Robin Lewis

One January day in 2006, the operators of a large hog facility in southern Minnesota decided to take advantage of a mid-winter thaw to transport liquid manure out to a field. The large “honey wagon” used to haul the manure traveled back and forth all afternoon, digging deep ruts in a gravel township road. That night, the temperature plummeted, freezing the ruts in place and making the road almost impassible.

“It was a mess,” says one local farmer who lives on the road. “They absolutely ruined two miles of that road. The township and the county didn’t know what to do. They couldn’t do anything with the maintainer because the tracks were frozen and the trucks at the local gravel quarry were mothballed for the winter.”

The road was eventually fixed, but when township officials started looking into writing out a bill for the road damage, it wasn’t clear who the responsible party was: the owner of the hogs, the farmer raising the animals on contract, or the manure hauler who had been hired by the farmer.

In the end, township residents, through their property taxes, ended up footing the bill for fixing the road.

Unfortunately, this township’s experience isn’t unusual. While factory farms impose great environmental and economic stress on local townships with their multi-million gallon liquid manure storage systems, as the case above demonstrates, local units of government often have to foot the bill for this damage.

Perhaps the bitterest irony is that because factory farms like the one cited above can receive a property tax exemption on their manure storage facilities, they don’t even pay their fair share of taxes to help support the local government services that respond to and repair the resulting damage.

The southern Minnesota farmer’s story about his township road and others like it

prompted the Land Stewardship Project to investigate the property tax exemption that manure pits, lagoons and basins receive. In its investigation, LSP used state level data from the Department of Revenue and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). At the county level, data was used from Jackson, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle and Brown counties because these counties kept the best records on who claims the manure

payers are Subsidizing Factory Farms.

Any manure storage facility—including those on small- and medium-sized hog and dairy farms—is eligible for the exemption as long as the farmer knows about and asks for it. But the benefit to small and medium livestock farms with manure storage facilities is relatively small. For example, a manure facility in Lac Qui Parle County valued at \$35,000 was estimated to represent an additional annual property tax of only \$78.

On the other hand, large-scale hog operations with multi-million gallon manure facilities avoid property taxes that range in the hundreds to thousands of dollars since their facilities are much larger and more expensive. For example, a large factory hog farm in Lac Qui Parle County avoided an estimated \$1,722 in annual property taxes. These exemptions add up for mega-livestock firms that own large operations in numerous counties.

LSP focused its analysis on large-scale hog operations of 900 animal units and above.

According to MPCA data, hog operations of 900 animal units and above account for 15 percent of all hog farms with manure storage facilities, but make up 39 percent of the total animal units. At 1,000 animal units, a federal Clean Water Act permit is required and this number is often used as a threshold when analyzing large hog operations. For this analysis, LSP chose 900 animal units since many large operations build in the 900-999 range specifically to avoid the additional federal permitting requirements.

Looking at the numbers

In Lac Qui Parle County, one 4,800 animal hog operation’s pit is worth \$233,500, qualifying it for an estimated annual tax exemption of \$1,722. A 3,840 animal hog operation in the same county had a manure pit worth \$161,600, qualifying it for a \$1,300 annual tax exemption.



This photo shows one of the three massive manure basins on the site of Excel Dairy, which has been declared a public health threat. Such facilities receive tax exemptions in Minnesota. (photo by Minnesota Pollution Control Agency)

pit exemption and on the value of the manure pits taking the exemption.

Overall, the data was out-of-date or spotty. Counties are not required to report the value of the manure storage facilities claiming the exemption, making it difficult to quantify the exact cost of the exemption to taxpayers. In addition, counties are required to report to the state who claims the exemption only once every six years. (Despite this requirement, in 2004 only 14 of Minnesota’s 87 counties reported anything about exempt manure facilities to the Department of Revenue.)

Without more accurate reporting requirements, it is impossible to know exactly how much this subsidy is costing property taxpayers. This effectively keeps the subsidy hidden from the public. However, through analyzing the available data, LSP was able to estimate just how much this exemption may be costing local property taxpayers and has detailed this in a special report: *The Money Pit: How Minnesota Property Tax-*

Handout, see page 13...

Minnesota-based Christensen Family Farms is one of the largest hog producers in the country. MPCA data shows that Christensen owns 51 operations in the state, with 46 over 500 animal units and 35 over 900 animal units. The total market value of the 46 manure pits is estimated between \$4,399,519 and \$9,165,420. That means the firm's annual savings on property taxes could total in the tens of thousands of dollars. (Because local tax rates vary from county-to-county, it is not possible to give a more exact estimate.)

Schwartz Farms, also among the nation's largest pork producers, owns 21 large factory operations in the state. With Schwartz's manure pits valued at between \$2,062,854 and \$4,689,730, this firm's property tax savings is also likely significant.

LSP estimates that if all the hog confinements of 900+ animal units are claiming the manure pit property tax exemption, then between \$71,486,625 and \$165,788,238 worth of property is exempt from property taxation in Minnesota each year. Keep in mind this is only the estimate of the exempt value of large manure pits for hog operations. If dairy lagoons were to be included, this number would be much larger.

History of exemption

Each local government determines a levy to provide funding for crucial local services such as law enforcement, public schools, and, as the southern Minnesota farmer's story at the beginning of this article highlights, road maintenance. Because the levy is a fixed amount, when some property is exempt from taxation the properties that are left have to shoulder a greater burden when it comes to covering the cost of basic local services. In effect, neighbors of factory farms are subsidizing these operations through higher property taxes.

Lots of property receives deserved exemptions: public school buildings, hospitals and public charities, for example. But why are manure storage facilities on that list of exempt properties?

It turns out there is a long, if little known, history behind this exemption. In 1967, the Minnesota Legislature declared that all "real and personal property used solely and exclusively for the abatement and control of air or water pollution" was exempt from property taxation. This provision was not created for factory farms since at the time large-scale livestock operations were pretty much nonexistent. However, factory farms began

applying for it and were granted the exemption on a case-by-case basis by a process that included applying to the MPCA.

In 1993, the Legislature gave manure pits blanket inclusion in the property tax exemption statutes with this provision: "Manure pits and appurtenances, which may include slatted floors and pipes, installed or operated with a permit, order, or certificate of compliance issued by the MPCA are exempt."

For decades, the state of Minnesota has allowed this preferential property tax treat-

ment to continue because it views manure storage areas as elective pollution control devices that manage and contain waste produced by confined animals. The reality is that such facilities, especially very large ones on factory farms, are a necessary cost of doing business, not a voluntary pollution control structure. In fact, multi-million gallon manure lagoons on factory farms concentrate so much raw, liquid manure in one place that they cause air and water pollution, not prevent it.

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Minnesota animal unit categories

Animal	Total animal-units	Animal-unit conversion factor	Total number of animals (Animal-units/conversion factor)
Piglet (55 lbs. and under)	900	.05	18,000
Hog (55-300 lbs.)	900	.3	3,000
Swine (300 + lbs.)	900	.4	2,250

***Animal-units are used by regulators to categorize the size of animal feedlots and are based roughly on how much manure an animal produces.**

ment to continue because it views manure storage areas as elective pollution control devices that manage and contain waste produced by confined animals. The reality is that such facilities, especially very large ones on factory farms, are a necessary cost of doing business, not a voluntary pollution control structure. In fact, multi-million gallon manure lagoons on factory farms concentrate so much raw, liquid manure in one place that they cause air and water pollution, not prevent it.

Factory farms & communities

The argument for eliminating this exemption goes beyond manure pits being a cost of doing business. According to numerous studies done over the years, large confinement operations can create air and water pollution nightmares, lower property values, reduce quality of life for surrounding residents, hinder economic growth and damage rural roads. One analysis from Illinois State University on the impact of factory farms in rural Illinois concluded that "large hog farms tend to hinder economic growth in rural communities" rather than "contribute to the vitality of local economies," as factory farming's boosters have argued.

A paper published in the Feb. 2007 issue of the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* concluded that CAFOs are such a proven threat to the environmental, economic and human health of rural communities that a more stringent process for issuing permits should be put in place. The paper's

information, when added together its three basins cover over 10 acres. In other words, these storage facilities have a large marketable value and their exemption is likely substantial.

Excel Dairy had 500 pollution and public health violations in 2008 and was the first feedlot in the country declared a public health hazard. Hydrogen sulfide emitted from its manure basins registered 140 times the level the state says can safely occur twice in one year. Excel Dairy caused personal and environmental health nightmares, and yet it qualifies for an exemption on the very facilities that created this horrendous situation. While the state views manure storage facilities as the *solution* to pollution, the Excel Dairy situation proves they are all too often the *source* of the problem.

For all the negatives these facilities impose on rural communities, the Minnesota Legislature rewards factory farms with tax exemptions, in effect forcing the very residents who are harmed by their practices to subsidize them. □

Robin Lewis served an internship with LSP's Policy Program this summer (see page 8).

Special report

For a copy of LSP's special report, *The Money Pit: How Minnesota Property Taxpayers are Subsidizing Factory Farms*, see www.landstewardshipproject.org or call 612-722-6377.

LSP supports strengthening livestock rules

Federal government proposes better enforcement of Packers & Stockyards Act

By Adam Warthesen

On June 21, the USDA released a proposed rule to strengthen the ability of the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration to ensure protections for farmers against unfair, fraudulent or retaliatory practices and abuses by corporate meatpackers in the marketing of livestock. The public has until Nov. 22 to comment on this proposed rule.

Providing better enforcement criteria through the existing Packers and Stockyards Act has long been sought after by the Land Stewardship Project and allied farm groups who advocated for the inclusion of a rule-making directive in the 2008 Farm Bill. We are encouraged to see a proposed rule being released for comments by farmers and other members of the public.

Consolidation and vertical integration within the livestock industry has created a playing field ripe for abuse in which corporate meatpackers and large integrators manipulate markets, stifle competition and limit the options of a broad range of both independent and contract livestock producers.

One thing is clear — farmers are increasingly working harder for less than their fair share, while corporate packers continue to consolidate both profits and control. One telling fact: according to the USDA's Economic Research Service, the share of the consumer dollar received by America's cattle and hog producers has dropped consistently and substantially over the past 25 years as corporate control over our food and agriculture system has accelerated.

For the rank and file farmer, the pro-

posed rule heads in the right direction, but should be seen as a start, not a finish. While not a cure-all for the ills of anticompetitive behavior and undue corporate influence in livestock markets, the new rule, when implemented, can address some of the egregious practices of meatpackers that farmers face.

Not surprisingly, the American Meat Institute (AMI) — the lobbying consortium for the nation's biggest meatpackers — has come out blasting the rule. AMI members such as Cargill, Tyson, JBS and others are

tize their allegiance with packers rather than everyday working farmers.

While a fuller analysis is being conducted, LSP believes that the rule is a good step forward but much more is needed. Our livestock-producing members are hopeful the series of USDA/Department of Justice workshops taking place across the country to solicit input on competition issues in agriculture will embolden Congress and the Obama Administration to take additional measures to create fair and competitive markets for farmers and consumers.

In terms of the new rule, of particular significance is USDA's firm assertion that farmers do not have to show competitive injury to the entire marketplace for an action to constitute a violation of the Packers and Stockyards Act. This is contrary to some recent court decisions, which have ruled that a farmer must essentially show harm to competition in general as well as injury to himself or herself in order to prove a violation of the Act.

In addition to our ongoing analysis of the proposed rule, LSP is reaching out to thousands of livestock farmers during the comment period, which ends Nov. 22 (*see sidebars*). We will be gathering input, encouraging involvement, and not only discussing the new rule but also what other actions should be taken in farm country to ensure fair and competitive markets.

If you have additional questions, please contact me at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Adam Warthesen is an LSP organizer who focuses on federal policy issues.

Commenting on rule

USDA is accepting public comments until Nov. 22 on proposed rules for strengthening the Packers and Stockyards Act. For details on how to make a comment via e-mail or regular mail, see www.gipsa.usda.gov or contact LSP's Adam Warthesen at adamw@landstewardshipproject.org; 612-722-6377.

causing harm to America's farmers and rural communities by providing undue preference and unfair advantages to preferred operators, which oftentimes include their own production operations.

Clearly, AMI and corporate meatpackers will fight the proposed rule and indeed any federal action that might hamper their ability to squeeze farmers and manipulate livestock procurement and pricing. Just as predictably, the leadership of commodity groups such as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the National Pork Producers Council are following the corporate meatpackers' lead, voicing worn-out arguments as they priori-

LSP participating in livestock field hearing Aug. 27 in Colorado

The Land Stewardship Project's Policy program has been working on several fronts this summer to provide livestock farmers stronger protections in a climate of increasing consolidation and vertical integration.

On Aug. 17, LSP members and staff met with Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson in Redwood Falls, Minn., to discuss how to rein in corporate control in the livestock industries. Also participating in the meeting were Lynn Hayes of Farmers' Legal Action Group and Bill Bullard,

head of R-CALF USA. The Aug. 17 meeting featured a discussion on how to provide input on the USDA's proposed rules related to competition in the livestock market before the Nov. 22 comment deadline.

LSP members and staff are also attending a Department of Justice/USDA workshop Aug. 27 in Fort Collins, Colo., on livestock concentration issues. This is one of several such workshops being held across the country, and it represents the first time two cabinet members—U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom

Vilsack and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder—have taken input directly from farmers on livestock concentration issues.

LSP has also been reaching out to livestock farmers across the region to help them get their voices heard on this important issue. Organizers have been doing that through letters, phone calls and commentaries in regional ag publications.

For more information, contact LSP's Adam Warthesen at adamw@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.

Farm Beginnings

2010-2011 Minnesota Farm Beginnings deadline Sept. 1

Classes to be held in southeast & south central MN

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course is now accepting applications for its 2010-2011 session. The deadline for registration is Sept. 1.

Classes will begin this fall and be held in the southeast Minnesota community of Winona, and in Saint Joseph, which is in the south central part of the state.

In 2010, LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its 13th year of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is tailor-made 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, business plan creation, alternative 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 2011, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

The fee is \$1,500 per farming partnership (flexible payment plan and partial scholar-

ships available), and early-bird registrants are eligible to attend on-farm education events this summer and fall. Interest-free livestock loans are also available.

During the past dozen years, over 400 people have graduated from the Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings program, and 60 percent of them are actively farming, according to class data. 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, North Dakota and the Duluth-Superior area. New Farm Beginnings courses have recently been launched in South Dakota and the Hudson Valley of New York (*see below*).

Check www.farmbeginnings.org for more information and application materials. More information is also available by contacting LSP's Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or lpse@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Farm Beginnings programs in other states

In recent years, the Land Stewardship Project has licensed Farm Beginnings programs in numerous states. These programs are taking applications for upcoming classes. Below is the contact information for these various initiatives:

◆ Illinois

Central Illinois Farm Beginnings
Cathe Capel
The Land Connection
1227 Dodge Avenue, Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60202
Phone: 847-570-0701
E-mail: cahte@thelandconnection.org
Website: www.thelandconnection.org

◆ Stateline Farm Beginnings

Sheri Doyel/ Tracey Hall
Angelic Organics Learning Center
1547 Rockton Rd., Caledonia IL, 61011
Phone: 815-389-8455
E-mail: tom@learnrowconnect.org
E-mail: sheri@learnrowconnect.org
E-mail: tracey@learnrowconnect.org
E-mail: craft@learnrowconnect.org
Website: www.learnrowconnect.org

◆ Southern Illinois

Food Works
Dayna Conner
PO Box 3855, Carbondale, IL 62902
Phone: 618-319-0542
E-mail: dayna@eatsouthernillinois.org

◆ Lake Superior Region- NW Wisconsin/NE Minnesota

Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association
2995 Hwy. 3
Two Harbors, MN 55616
Phone: 218-834-0846
E-mail: cree@lakesuperiorfarming.org
Website: www.lakesuperiorfarming.org

◆ Nebraska

Gary Lesoing
Nemaha County Extension
Nebraska SARE Coordinator
1842 N. Street
Courthouse
Auburn, NE 68305-2395
Phone: 402-274-4755
E-mail: glesoing2@unl.edu

William Powers
Executive Director
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
414 County Road 15
Ceresco, NE 68017
Phone: 402-525-7794
E-mail: healthyfarms@gmail.com

◆ New York

Rachel Schneider
Hawthorne Valley Farm
327 Route 21C
Ghent (Harlemville), NY 12075
518-672-7500 ext. 105
E-mail: rachel@hawthornevalleyfarm.org
Website: www.hawthornevalleyfarm.org

◆ North Dakota

Karri Stroh
FAR^{MS}
301 5th Ave. SE, Medina, ND 58467
Phone: 701-486-3569
Fax: 701-486-3580
E-mail: info@farms.org
E-mail: kstroh@farms.org
Website: www.farms.org

◆ South Dakota

Dakota Rural Action
Frank James/ Heidi Kolbeck-Urlacher
PO Box 549, Brookings, SD 57006
Phone: 605-697-5204
Fax: 605-697-6230
E-mail: heidiku@dakotarural.org
E-mail: fejames@dakotarural.org
Website: www.dakotarural.org

Farm Beginnings

FB grazing field day

A Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings workshop and field day on grazing was held May 22 in River Falls, Wis. A morning workshop on grazing basics was held at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. In the afternoon, workshop participants had a chance to see firsthand some of the principles discussed that morning at Four Winds Farm, a grass-based livestock operation.

Grazing consultant Howard Moechnig, along with Four Winds co-owner Juliet Tomkins (*pictured*), led discussions on paddock location/size, watering options, lanes and general concepts and indicators for developing and monitoring a grazing operation.

For more on Farm Beginnings on-farm educational events, see the **Stewardship Calendar** on page 32, or visit www.farmbeginnings.org. More information is also available by calling 507-523-3366 or 320-269-2105. (*photo by Nick Olson*) □



Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer seeking 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 created a *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse* to connect established farmers/landowners and beginning farmers. We have user-friendly forms to fill out for people who want to be listed in the *Clearinghouse*. For details, e-mail LSP's Parker Forsell at parker@landstewardshipproject.org or call 507-523-3366; or you can visit www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/resources.html#land. Here are the latest listings:

Farmland Avail.: W MN

Ralph Hanson has for sale 52 acres of land in western Minnesota's Swift County. The land consists of 17 acres tillable, 15 forested and 15 pastured. Sixteen acres of tillable land is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The CRP land has been spot-sprayed for weed control, but otherwise the farm has not been sprayed in 10 years. There is a five-acre pond and a small cattail marsh enrolled in a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service easement. The farm also has 660 feet of lake shore on Camp Lake. There is a house and several outbuildings, including a machine shed, barn, garage, chicken coop and silo. The asking price is \$299,000. Contact: Ralph Hanson, 320-842-3201; hansonralph@hotmail.com; 1140 65th St. NE, Benson, MN 56215.

Farmland Needed: S MN

Grant Rollins is seeking 40 to 160 acres of tillable land to rent or buy in southern Minnesota's Waseca or Blue Earth counties. He does not require a house and conventionally farmed land is okay. Contact: Grant Rollins, 507-317-4193.

Greenhouse Needed: Twin Cities

Karen Swanberg is seeking to rent 1,000 square feet or more of space in a four-season greenhouse in the Twin Cities area. The

Minneapolis area would be best, but she would consider a location within an hour of the Twin Cities Metro. She wants to use the greenhouse space for year-round production and requires water and electricity. Contact: Karen Swanberg, swanberg@gmail.com.

Farmland Avail.: W WI

Nancy Frank has available for sale 39 acres of land in Dunn County, Wis. The parcel consists of nine tilled acres, nine pastured and 20 forested. The land has not been sprayed in 12 years and the pastures are fenced, with seven automatic waterers and three hydrants (the well was drilled three years ago). The homestead includes a three-bedroom house (roof and siding are five years and three years old, respectively), a detached double garage, two large pole buildings (one with a concrete floor for a machine shop), one heated outbuilding, one storage barn and one 24 x 12 shade shelter. The asking price is \$148,000. Contact: Nancy Frank, 715-455-1144; oppty@mac.com; or Diane Noble, 715-556-0444; dianere@wwt.net.

Farm Avail.: Twin Cities

Mary Ciagne has available for rent five acres of land near the community of East Bethel in Anoka County, Minn. The land consists of both tillable and pastured acres, and has not been sprayed in 10 years; the plot is fenced and there is a pole building. The

rental fee is negotiable. A three-bedroom, two-bathroom house is available for \$1,400 per month if the current renters don't stay after August. Contact: Mary Ciagne, 612-481-4701; tentsouk1@hotmail.com.

Organic Farm Avail.: NW MN

Karen Haverinen has a certified organic dairy farm for rent. The farm itself is 80 acres, and there's another 34 acres of pasture and 20 acres of hay ground owned by neighbors under Haverinen's certification (MOSA). The farm has a new double swing nine parlor with a covered holding pen that's only been used for 10 months. It also has drive-by cement feed bunks, a 90 x 40 hay shed that can be used for bedded pack housing, some round bale feeders, a 20 x 20 shop, and a few small outbuildings. The perimeter fences are in good shape, with five-strand barbed wire surrounding the entire 80 acres, as well as the adjoining 34 acres. There are some interior fences and water lines strung out. The farm also has a two-bedroom, two-bathroom house available. The property will be available for at least two years, and most likely three, and Haverinen wants it to be kept organic. Contact: Karen Haverinen, 218-639-3633.

Clearinghouse, see page 17...

Farmland Needed: MN or WI

Evan Dvorsak is seeking land to rent or buy on contract for a small (40+ acres) grass-based dairy cow operation in Minnesota or Wisconsin. He would prefer that it be certified organic or have not been sprayed in several years, but conventionally-farmed land is okay. Dvorsak requires a house and would prefer that the land be off of main roads. Fencing, a good well and good quality buildings (including a dairy barn) are a plus. Contact: Evan Dvorsak, 608-632-4480 or dvor0048@umn.edu.

Farmland Avail.: W MN

Jessi Wood has for sale a 5.7 acre farm/homestead in western Minnesota's Lac Qui Parle County, near the community of Madison. The property includes perennial flowers, asparagus and a grove, as well as a very nice chicken coop, a barn and a garage. Wood has been raising pastured hogs and poultry on the property. The three-bedroom house is in very good shape with recent additions such as blown insulation, a natural slate bathroom and new windows. Pictures of the property are available on request. The asking price is \$75,000. Contact: Jessi Wood, HumbleRoots Heritage, 2430 290th St., Madison, MN 56256; phone: 320-752-4276; e-mail: humblerootsheritage@gmail.com; or blogspot: <http://humblerootsheritage.blogspot.com>.

Farmland Avail.: SE MN

Heidi and Philip Dybing have available 80 acres of land near the southeast Minnesota communities of Lanesboro and Canton. The Dyblings are looking for farmers they could mentor towards eventually taking over the operation, and are open to various financial arrangements for rental or purchase. Forty-eight acres is tillable, 17 pastured and 15 forested. The land has not been sprayed in 19 years. There is a barn, large machine shed, two chicken coops, small granary, hog house, two garages, one enclosed garage/machine shed and a house, all in excellent condition. Currently the farm is set up for beef production and all the land is in haying or grazing with seven established paddocks. The entire perimeter is fenced except for part of the woodland. There is a large vegetable garden and lots of fruit trees and raspberry bushes. The land would be available beginning in 2011. Contact: Heidi or Philip Dybing, 507-743-8511; pdybing@acegroup.cc.

Seeking Farmer: SE MN

Beverly Benter is seeking someone who would be interested in an arrangement where they would farm one to five acres of her land near Rollingstone, in southeast Minnesota's Winona County. The land currently consists of a pasture, garden and creek. The front of a horse barn is zoned retail and there is an 8 x 10 greenhouse, as well as a garden shed and ample parking. The land is located near a biking and walking trail and is zoned for limited camping. The farm would be good for various enterprises, including production of perennial flowers or outdoor recreational activities. Housing arrangements are available. Benter is open to various arrangements, including having the land rented with the possibility of it being purchased in the future. Contact: Beverly Benter, 19503 Hwy. 248, Rollingstone, MN 55969; 507-689-4370; bevbenter@aol.com.

Seeking Farmer: SW MN

Joel McKinney is seeking someone to form a partnership with on his 20-acre farm near the southwest Minnesota community of Walnut Grove. The farm consists of tillable land, rolling grazing land, a garden spot and several acres of woods, which include black walnut and American plum trees. Marquette wine grapes are currently being raised on 3/4 acre of land. There is a four-bedroom house available and one of the neighboring farms is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation that delivers to the Twin Cities. Contact: Joel McKinney, 507-859-2421; joel@blackhawk-studios.org.

• Farmland Avail.: Twin Cities

Christine Kimber has eight acres of land for sale in Minnesota's Dakota County near the Twin Cities. The property consists of three acres tillable and three acres pastured, and it has a desirable southern exposure; there are no buildings on the site. This property is owned by fourth generation family farmers interested in fostering development of a sustainable agriculture community. The owners are seeking a buyer interested in local sustainable farming practices such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), organic farming and/or renewable energy production. There is the possibility of buying additional land if needed. The asking price is \$129,000. Contact: Christine Kimber, 612-724-7945; christine.kimber@gmail.com; or Eric Ruud, 651-460-6674; 612-245-4382; topnotchproperties@frontiernet.net.

• Farmland Avail.: St Paul

Christine Trost has for sale one-third of an acre near downtown (306 Irvine Ave.) Saint Paul, Minn. This urban farmstead has fertile soil

with a base of clay. It has not been sprayed in 20 years and perennials currently growing on it include grapes, raspberries, asparagus, rhubarb, gooseberries, native service berries and horseradish. The property consists of a 1922 story-and-a-half bungalow with a walk-out basement. The basement has south-facing windows in a large room that overlook a large yard and would provide a good place for starting seedlings. The basement also has a large canning kitchen and there is a two-car garage built in 1993. The asking price is \$279,000. Contact: Nancy Maas, 651-227-9144; www.nancykmaas.com/home.asp; or ChristineTrost@medavenue@aol.com.

• Farmland Avail.: SW WI

Katie Sherman and John Strand have 23 acres for sale in southwest Wisconsin's Richland County. The property consists of eight acres of pasture/meadow/tillable, 12 wooded acres (climax maple forest) and two acres of wetland with a small spring-fed stream. Additionally, there are three caves/rock outcroppings on this site. Currently the property has electricity, a driveway and a shed. The asking price is \$79,000. Contact: Katie Sherman, 612-824-1140 or katie.sherman@gmail.com.

• Farmland Needed: Cen. MN

Joan Olson is seeking a farm/land to buy for a diversified vegetable operation in the proximity of the central Minnesota communities of Saint Cloud, Hutchinson or Litchfield. Ideally the site would consist of 10+ tillable acres, some wooded acres and a building site. A house and outbuildings would be preferable but not required. Contact: Joan Olson, 320-269-1057 or prairiedrifterfarm@gmail.com.

• Seeking Farmer: SE MN

Joe and Bonnie Austin are seeking someone who would work with them on their livestock grazing operation in southeast Minnesota's Fillmore County. They would make available 10 acres tillable and 20 acres pastured land rent-free in exchange for help on the farm. Their land has not been sprayed in 25 years, and a barn would be available. This is an opportunity to learn about raising cattle and sheep on pasture, as well as about cropping and direct marketing to families, through retailers and via the mail. This could be a good opportunity for someone starting a small farm business. Contact: Joe or Bonnie Austin, 507-352-4441 or jobon@hmtel.com.

Farm Beginnings

Adrian & Leah Murtha

Breaking the barnyard silence

Communication on a dairy farm is never easy— with weather, markets and other fickle factors setting the tempo, there's often little room for lengthy discussions on strategy, methods or future plans beyond the next chore time. Add into the mix that many farmers choose the profession specifically because they like the independence and self-sufficiency that comes with making decisions on their own, and the silence on the Back 40 can be downright deafening. And when you're someone like Adrian Murtha, who is naturally shy about voicing concerns anyway, lack of communication can be a real barrier to making a go of it on a dairy operation owned by one's in-laws.

"I don't like communicating, because I'm afraid it will sound like complaining," says Murtha, 31. "But you have to communicate, otherwise you are walking around the farm looking at each other saying, 'What's wrong with him? I know something's wrong.'"

The "him" in this case is Hans Kroll, Murtha's farther-in-law. In 2003, Murtha married Leah, Hans and Lynn's daughter. In 2005, Adrian joined the Krolls' certified organic dairy operation near the west central Minnesota community of Long Prairie as an employee. Murtha, who grew up farming, found working the land a nice change of pace from his previous job as a welder for a billboard company. But it became clear about a year ago that working hard on the land couldn't completely replace planning and communication. The organic dairy market had hit a bit of a slump and the Murthas were trying to figure out if their agricultural future lay on the Kroll farm or somewhere else.

"I said, we need to talk," Adrian recalls saying to Hans one hot summer day while they were chopping haylage. "That's when Hans suggested Farm Beginnings."

So twice a month during the fall and winter of 2009-2010 the Murthas attended Farm Beginnings classes in the Minnesota community of Saint Joseph. For over a dozen years, the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program has been train-

ing 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. The classes are taught by established farmers and other ag professionals representing a range of enterprises: from grass-based livestock production and organic cropping to vegetables and specialty products. Farm Beginnings participants also have the opportunity to attend on-farm events where they see firsthand the use of innovative management techniques.

A sustainable size

The Murthas say what they found particularly helpful about Farm Beginnings was



Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

the business planning segment. They also enrolled in the Minnesota Farm Business Management Association program, an initiative that helps farmers with basic financial management.

"We know the lifestyle and how much work it's going to be," says Leah. "But we needed help with the business planning part of it, getting things on paper."

But Farm Beginnings wasn't all numbers and bookkeeping. The Murthas also learned a little more about what

type of lifestyle they would prefer on the land. Through their interactions with other Farm Beginnings participants as well as class presenters, the young couple saw that one doesn't necessarily have to get big and take on huge amounts of debt in order to make it farming. The couple wanted to stay small, but knew that came with a catch if they were to be financially secure. They found by crunching the numbers that with 30 cows organi-

cally one can make it. "Thirty cows conventionally—no way," says Adrian.

The organic route

The Krolls came to a similar conclusion several years ago. Hans' great-great grandfather settled the original farm, which is 240 acres (they also own an additional 145 acres nearby). Hans came back to the operation in 1976, and in 1988 he and Lynn bought it on contract for deed from Hans' parents (his father John, 83, still lives on the farm). Long Prairie is in the heart of Minnesota's dairy belt, and many farms have expanded significantly over the years in an attempt to remain viable as margins become increasingly tight. Expansion with no end in sight didn't appeal to the Krolls. The farm has been certified organic since 2003.

"Organics was kind of an economic decision really," says Hans. "I wanted to farm in a way that the farm would pay for itself. It was kind of a spiritual decision too. I had been pushing the cows. I was walking across the yard one day and I thought to myself, 'What am I pushing for?'"

The organic price premium the Krolls receive helps them make a viable living with their small, 36-cow herd. They've also kept expenses down by relying on low-cost production techniques like managed rotational grazing. In addition, they recently built a swing-six milking parlor for \$16,500 utilizing a local welder and some of their own labor. Not only was the parlor relatively cheap to build, but it also added efficiencies to the operation—it takes about 45 minutes for Hans and Adrian to milk the cows.

But when the organic market hit a plateau last year, the Krolls wondered if the farm could support two families long into the future—or at least long enough to allow them to retire and have their daughter and son-in-law take over. That day may be some time off: Hans and Lynn are only in their mid-50s and show no signs of slowing down.

"It will be a few years before I'm ready to retire and so if something comes up that looks better, sooner, then they might want to pursue it," says Hans.

"Mom and dad didn't want us to feel tied to the farm if other opportunities came up," says Leah, 29.

Hans, who had presented on a Farm Beginnings panel and hosted a Farm Beginnings field day on low-cost dairy parlors, had been impressed with the course's ability to get wannabe farmers thinking about different options on the land—even options that might not include organic dairy farming.

But for now, Leah and Adrian see their

• • •
"I don't like communicating, because I'm afraid it will sound like complaining."
• • •

Fresh Faces, see page 19...

opportunities on the home farm. After taking the Farm Beginnings class, they decided they were in no hurry to strike out on their own, especially if it entailed taking on large amounts of debt. The couple is currently living in Long Prairie in a house they are remodeling, and a typical day consists of the whole Murtha family loading up the van and “commuting” to the farm. “We are kind of comfortable where we are at,” says Adrian.

One tentative option is that the Murthas will take over the dairy herd in stages. The farm is in the middle of a four-year contract with Horizon, the organic dairy firm, providing some financial stability for the immediate future.

As the young couple takes on more responsibility for the dairy operation, the Krolls may focus increasingly on an enterprise that’s grown significantly in recent years: maple syruping. They produce 400 to 500 gallons of syrup annually from the extensive stands of maple trees that grow amongst their pastures and fields, and can’t keep up with demand, which comes mostly from bulk return customers. They’ve recently purchased a reverse osmosis machine to take water out of the syrup so they can cook more sap in a shorter time.

“It’s three weeks of intense work but it definitely makes money for the time put in,” says Lynn of syruping.

“If the maple syruping income was more, I’d feel comfortable transitioning out of the dairy side,” says Hans.

They also have an extensive garden, and are considering marketing some organic garlic.

In the meantime, both families are working on that communication thing.

“It is tough being a hired hand and a family member,” Adrian says while sitting at the kitchen table with the Krolls and Leah on a recent rainy summer day. The animated sounds of children being home schooled could be heard in an adjoining room—the Krolls have seven children, ages 11-31, and the Murthas have four kids, ages seven months to six years. As they talk, the Murthas’ two youngest take turns sitting on their parents’ and grandparents’ laps.

It’s clear that the family has become more comfortable with open discussions and the airing of grievances, and efforts are made to make sure everyone is heard. These discussions are fueled by directness, with a good dose of self-deprecating humor thrown in.

“Sometimes you have to have a sit-down-say-what-you-have-to-say kind of meeting,” says Hans. “It was lack of communication



Intergenerational business: Adrian and Leah Murtha are farming with Hans and Lynn Kroll. “Sometimes you have to have a sit-down-say-what-you-have-to-say kind of meeting,” says Hans. (LSP photo)

that made me want to get out of the partnership with my dad. I’m not a very good manager. There are days I might change my mind three times, which might be frustrating to work with.”

At this, Adrian laughs and nods his head: “Yeah, it’s like you feel lucky to get through the day without his mind changing.”

The two families have taken concrete, day-to-day steps to make it easier for Adrian to be an employee and a family member. One of the sticking points before was that the young farmer had no structured time off, and Hans concedes that when that problem

was first brought up, his reaction was, “I had to work every day when I was with my dad, so why shouldn’t he?” But that was then, this is now. Adrian now gets every-other-weekend off from milking chores.

The two families have also had to deal with the fact that an important part of what makes farming fun is trying out new ideas.

“There’s a lot of things I’d like to try, but I can’t because Hans is still trying things,” says Adrian.

However, they’ve found ways to give newer ideas a trial run. For example, Adrian recently observed other organic dairy producers housing cows outside during the winter on a bedding pack, rather than inside a barn. The cows seemed healthier and it was another way to lower housing costs. He broached the idea on the Kroll farm and they tried it—albeit with some trepidation.

“It was interesting to watch he and his dad’s reaction when we pushed the cows out of the barn and onto the bedding pack,” recalls Adrian of Hans’ and John’s acceptance of the new idea. “As it started snowing, they got more and more nervous.”

But the experiment was a success—the cows are healthier and less stressed out and the farmers have since erected a low-cost hoop house over the bedding back to provide more shelter.

As the Krolls and Murthas wrap up their rainy day roundtable discussion and prepare to head outside, Lynn brings up a question that will no doubt be bandied about for some time to come: “One thing is when you buy the farm, what about labor?”

The young couple discusses the possibility of hiring young neighbors or others in the neighborhood. Finally, with a twinkle in her eye Leah looks at her parents

and brings up another option: “Maybe we’ll hire you guys.” □

See page 28 for more on research related to low-cost dairy farming options.

More FB profiles

To read more *Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming* profiles of Farm Beginnings graduates, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html.

Farm Beginnings

Access to land: the next step

LSP's Farm Beginnings Program launches the Community Engagement & Impact initiative

By Karen Stettler

For almost 14 years, the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program has been successfully training beginning farmers, developing farmer networks and creating loan opportunities to give people the tools needed to start farming. Regardless of these efforts, there are major barriers to starting farming that require changing the underlying conditions in our food and agriculture system. For example, all the training in the world won't have any impact on the success of beginning farmers if they cannot get access to land (*see sidebar below*).

It is within this context that LSP is launching the Community Engagement and Impact initiative. As its name suggests, this new initiative is aimed at engaging LSP members and other people and institutions in the broader community to work together to remove the barriers to farmers getting started successfully. These barriers also get in the way of developing a more sustainable food and farming system.

Our goal is to help a broad spectrum of farmers, including new farmers that we may

never meet but whose hopes and plans to farm become real because of the societal impact we create.

As a starting point, the initiative will focus on the critical issue of beginning farmers securing long-term access to land. Decisions being made in the next five to 15 years by farming and non-farming landowners and

• • •
Barriers to land access for beginning farmers are also barriers to a more sustainable food and farming system.
• • •

agribusiness corporations and financial institutions will determine the future accessibility of millions of farmland acres. This will directly affect the next generation of farmers.

Unless this issue is addressed in a significant way, LSP believes the pattern of farmland ownership in the U.S. will be in direct conflict with a just and democratic food and farming system that builds healthy landscapes and communities while provid-

ing local, nutritious food.

We plan to explore many avenues to effectively address the bottleneck land access has become and to modify current conditions to favorably support the food and agriculture system we seek. Some of these avenues include: cultural and attitudinal changes, community support, engagement of local religious congregations, public and institutional policies and network building.

We believe that this kind of change will be made by working farmer-to-farmer, widow-to-younger women, absentee landowner-to-new homesteader, parents-to-children. It will also happen by improving the policies, practices and activities of lending institutions, educational institutions, media and farm organizations, and local, state or federal government.

Our vision is that within five years the Community Engagement and Impact initiative will have helped beginning farmers secure long-term access to land and assisted retiring and non-farming landowners in the transitioning of their land. The vision that we are working toward is one where farmers and rural community members talk about, advocate for and create change that supports access to land for more family farmers.

When people in local coffee shops and community meetings are mentioning the new farm families they are helping to get started and the positive impacts these families are having on the community, we will know positive change is happening. We will also know steps in the right direction are being taken when there are public policies—like, for example, tax incentives for exiting

Land, see page 21...

Survey: lack of access to land #1 barrier

Land Stewardship Project members have been engaged in building the foundation of the Community Engagement and Impact initiative through individual interviews and a survey. A 2010 internal survey* focusing on land access was conducted by Farm Beginnings intern Matt Friauf. Some initial findings include:

- Prospective farmers indicated that accessing land was the largest obstacle they faced getting started farming.
- 53 percent of prospective farmers were looking for 10-49 acres to farm and none were looking for more than 200 acres.
- Landowners find renters and buyers for their land primarily through word-of-mouth via family, neighbors and friends (67 percent).
- Prospective farmers are not a part of the word-of-mouth networks landowners indicate they are using to find farmers.
- 90 percent of landowners said their land would "likely" or "very likely" continue as farmland.
- 85 percent of landowners have "no plans to sell their land."
- 55 percent of the rental agreements currently used on land were one to three year, short-term leases.
- 80 percent of the landowners have interest in row cropping, compared with 5.9 percent of prospective farmers.

* Eighty-one (39 percent) of those sent the initial survey completed it. The survey attempted to examine and define three different groups of farmers by determining their relation to land. **Group One** owned land and rented out land to others but did not rent land for their own use. **Group Two** both owned and rented land for their own use. **Group Three** was looking for but currently had no access to land. For **Groups One** and **Two**, a paper survey was sent to 39 selected established farmers, out of which 16 completed the survey. For **Group Three** the e-mail survey was sent to 183 Farm Beginnings graduates, out of which 65 completed the survey.

farmers who help new farmers—that support beginning operators getting started.

Ultimately, Farm Beginnings graduates and other beginning farmers should be able to develop a farm business plan, gain the skills and experience needed for their farm-

ing operations, develop support networks of other farmers and resource people, and secure access to the land they need.

If you belong to an organization or congregation that would like to have a speaker in to talk with a group of people, or if you have suggestions, questions, or comments about the Community Engagement and Impact initiative and our focus on the issue of

access to land for beginning farmers, please contact me. ☐

Karen Stettler, former director of LSP's Farm Beginnings Program, is currently coordinating the Community Engagement and Impact initiative. She can be reached at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

FB CSA vegetable tour

A Farm Beginnings field day on starting and scaling up a low-cost vegetable operation was held July 13 at Loon Organics, an operation owned and operated by Laura Frerichs and Adam Cullip near the central Minnesota community of Hutchinson (right and bottom photos).

Loon Organics (www.loonorganics.com) is a 40-acre certified organic vegetable operation marketing through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), the Mill City Farmers' Market and several wholesale accounts. Loon Organics recently received funding through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program to erect a low-cost hoop structure for season extension.

The July 13 field day focused on starting up a low-cost vegetable operation and the process of scaling up to a mid-sized operation, including machinery, labor and other issues that need to be addressed to do this successfully. For more information on Farm Beginnings on-farm educational events, see the **Stewardship Calendar** on page 32, or visit www.farmbeginnings.org. More information is also available by calling 507-523-3366 or 320-269-2105. (photos by Nick Olson & Joan Olson) ☐

Bowl for Farm Beginnings Nov. 14 in Minneapolis

Join the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program Nov. 14 at Bryant Lake Bowl in Minneapolis for an evening (5 p.m. to 8 p.m.) of bowling, music, art and fun as we knock down pins to raise money for the continued training of beginning farmers. This event will feature local artists and musicians from within LSP's farmer network.

Watch LSP's *LIVE-WIRE* e-letter for details. More information is also available by contacting LSP's Amy Bacigalupo or Nick Olson at 320-269-2105; or Parker Forsell at 507-523-3366.



Community Based Food Systems

Southside Star Garden's first season

By Sarah Claassen

This is the first season for the Southside Star Community Garden, and gardeners are tending 38 plots, growing a variety of vegetables, herbs, flowers and fruits. In addition to growing good food, the gardeners are building strong neighborhood relationships through monthly potlucks and twice-weekly donations to food shelves at Sabathani Community Center and Calvary Lutheran Church.

Southside Star has transformed a previously vacant lot, and created an important greenspace and food-producing place along a major public transit route which is slated for high-density development. Gardens are important parts of livable communities and are complimentary to conventional forms of development.

Garden leaders, working with Land Stewardship Project organizers since December 2008, have successfully navigated many barriers to establishing this community garden. They won access to the land, owned by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and access to City of Minneapolis water. Leaders did this by demonstrating to public officials the value that this garden creates in their neighborhood.

As was described in the Winter 2010 issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, working with Standish Ericsson residents to organize this community garden has been a big part of LSP's urban food systems organizing during the past year. Through this project, LSP has gained a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges that face urban agriculture, and experienced the power of neighborhood leaders organizing a community effort. □

Sarah Claassen is an LSP organizer working on urban food systems in the Twin Cities. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or sarahc@landstewardshipproject.org.

Food handling fact sheets

The Land Stewardship Project has updated a series of three fact sheets that provide guidelines on legally and safely selling food into local Minnesota markets. They're available in pdf format on our website:

- **Sale of Shell Eggs to Grocery Stores in Minnesota** (www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/EggGuidelines12-09.pdf).
- **Sale of Meat & Poultry to Grocery Stores & Restaurants in Minnesota** (www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/MeatPoultryGuidelines12-09.pdf).
- **Providing Safe, Locally-Grown Produce to Commercial Food Establishments & The General Public in Minnesota** (www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/ProduceGuidelines12-09.pdf).

For paper copies, contact LSP's Tom Taylor at ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org or 320-269-2105. □



Community garden petition



Land Stewardship Project volunteer Dale Hadler and intern Rebecca Hornstein recently collected signatures for a community garden petition at Seward Cop in Minneapolis. The Harrison Neighborhood Association (HNA) of north Minneapolis created this petition to call for significant changes in the Minneapolis Community Garden Pilot Program. The current process is unwieldy and burdensome and the costs are a barrier to many residents who want to garden, particularly people who have lower incomes. LSP supported HNA's petition by collecting over 500 signatures during the summer. (LSP photo)

Good fare at the fair

By Dana Jackson

Attend a county fair anywhere these days and expect concession stand food to be well-traveled, highly-processed, frozen and then deep-fried or microwaved before it is served—even though county fairs began as showcases where prizes were awarded to the best livestock, field crops and produce grown locally. Today, even though visitors can see fresh and preserved local foods in exhibit halls, they can't eat them.

The 4-H'ers in Washington County, Minn., decided to break this pattern and serve healthier food, local as much as possible, at their county fair 4-H food stand this summer. With help from a Minnesota 4-H Foundation grant, they hired local caterer Kathleen Schubert to be the food stand manager. She designed a new menu that featured dishes made from scratch, and more vegetables and salads. During the fair, she and 4-H volunteers used a gas grill outside Hooley Hall to cook the ground beef from Thousand Hills Cattle Company for "sliders" (small hamburgers), the lamb brats, chicken breasts, and highly popular individual pizzas with fresh vegetables.

Customers may have been surprised that the 4-H food stand did not sell soda pop. Fruit smoothies and slushies made from 100 percent fruit juice, and chocolate milk, processed in a 4-H family's on-farm creamery near Forest Lake, were popular, healthier substitutes. Dessert was on the menu too, with strawberries in the strawberry shortcake and the apple pie coming from Pine Tree Orchard near White Bear Lake, Minn.

The Land Stewardship Project's St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* (BFBL) chapter became involved last fall when I wrote a letter of support for the grant proposal that Pam Johnson submitted to the 4-H Foundation to fund transformation of the food stand. I saw this project as an opportunity to address one of the BFBL goals, "to increase the consumption of local, healthful food." As soon as the grant was approved, we began to work with the River Market Community Co-op to help Schubert obtain vegetables, fruits and meats from local and

regional producers.

BFBL increased its efforts on behalf of the 4-H healthy food stand after LSP signed a contract in May to provide services to the Washington County Department of Public Health and the Environment to implement a Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) grant. In 2008, the Minnesota Legislature passed a health reform law to help counties address the disease risk factors associated with tobacco use and obesity. The Washington County SHIP leadership team chose to use its funds in work with schools, worksites, health care and communities on seven areas of focus, with an overall goal to

make the healthy choice an easy choice. LSP is addressing one of these areas: community-based efforts to increase access to nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables.

To help with these efforts, LSP hired Ann DeLaVergne as a healthy food systems organizer to work with *Buy Fresh Buy Local* and the SHIP team in Washington County. Her first assignment was to assist the Washington County 4-H Federation in transforming their Hooley Hall Food Stand at the county fair (Aug. 4-8) into a demonstration site where healthful foods were available and the healthy choice was an easy choice. During July, Ann and I helped the 4-H volunteers and the caterer with planning, promotion, signage, logistics, equipment and supplies. The SHIP staff provided several kinds of technical assistance as well as grant funds to support the 4-H food stand.

SHIP work continues this fall when LSP's Ann DeLaVergne will recruit and organize nutrition action committees in three areas of Washington County. She will meet with these committees over the winter and



Kathleen Schubert, owner of the Peace and Chow catering business, helped coordinate the serving of fresh, local food at the Washington County Fair 4-H food stand this year. (photo by Ann DeLaVergne)

spring to select and carry out community-specific interventions to increase access to nutritious foods. A chosen intervention might be the establishment of mini-farmers' markets in communities where distance and lack of transportation to regular farmers' markets limit access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Another might be helping residents find land for a community garden or win local government approval for use of land as a garden site. Each committee will choose activities to address the particular needs of its community.

LSP members in Washington County are especially invited to join a community nutrition action committee. For more information, contact DeLaVergne at annnd@landstewardshipproject.org or 651-329-0125. □

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

'Buying Direct' LSP fact sheet

The Land Stewardship Project has updated its fact sheet on how eaters can begin getting more of their food directly from local farmers. A pdf version of "Buying Directly

From a Farmer" is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/factsheets/19_buying_directly_from_farmer_2009.pdf. For a paper copy, contact LSP's offices in

the Minnesota communities of Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377). □

It's not just food

By Terry VanDerPol

Discussions around the challenges people face in getting access to good food, including fresh vegetables, fruits and meat, tend to conjure images of concrete and asphalt, an intense urban environment with densely-occupied buildings marching right up to the sidewalk. Full service grocery stores have tended to flee these areas for more lucrative spots in the suburbs or exurbs, leaving in their wake a food environment dominated by fast food and convenience stores, a nutritional nightmare with a disparate negative impact on poor communities and communities of color.

Awareness is beginning to build of a very different gap in the food system that has people starving for access. Sparsely-populated rural areas face similar challenges that are sometimes hidden from us until we take a closer look. That's what the Land Stewardship Project's Community Based Food and Economic Development Program is doing in western Minnesota. The emerging picture is one of challenge and opportunity for community based food systems.

Big Stone County lies in the western part of Minnesota. It is 528 square miles of farmland and prairie at the headwaters of the Minnesota River. Its western boundary with South Dakota is a 26-mile stretch of the river, 1 to 1 miles wide, also known as Big Stone Lake. According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, like rural, urban and suburban counties across the country, obesity is a problem in the Big Stone area—the rate of adult obesity there is 26.8 percent. Among low-income preschoolers, 13 percent are obese.

There are only two full service grocery stores in the entire county, and this creates two major problems. One is the relatively higher availability of highly-processed foods that are easy to transport and store relative to more nutritious, fresh food. The second is the flow of food dollars out of the county. According to a survey we did of Big Stone County residents last summer, the average distance from a grocery store is nearly nine miles, most people reported leaving the county regularly to purchase groceries and nearly 55 percent were dissatisfied with the

food they and their families had available in their communities.

Many prefer to name individual responsibility for poor food choices as the cause of obesity and other nutrition related conditions. We like to believe, with our deeply held individualistic values and illusions, that choices like the food we eat are purely a matter of individual will. While personal choice plays a role, it's probably not a particularly useful approach to actually solving the problem. Until we understand the impact our food environment has on the choices we make, we will not get a handle on the economic, human and community costs of poor nutrition. Advertisers and marketers



Bergen Standahl, owner of a grocery store in the western Minnesota town of Milan, has proven that buying food from local farmers such as beef producer Bev Struxness is economically viable, as well as popular with customers. (photo by Terry VanDerPol)

know this.

Our food environment is like the water the fish live in. It's not in our nature to see it or to ask questions about it. We get our food from our immediate environment and what is immediately and easily available has a strong impact on the choices we make. Mari Gallagher is a nationally recognized researcher on food deserts and the health impacts of low access to healthy foods. Her work shows that nutrition and nutrition-related health outcomes improve if we increase the availability of healthy food and decrease the availability of highly-processed food-like substances.

A food environment in which a dollar can buy 1,200 calories worth of potato chips or 250 calories worth of fresh vegetables miti-

gates against individual healthy choices.

The local grocery store plays a critical role in the food environment of a community, and rural grocery stores are in a tight squeeze. It's a bedeviling paradox that in the middle of some of the richest farmland in the world, populated by people with a long agrarian history, so many can be suffering from food insecurity and nutrition-related disease. But it's a simple fact that in a food and farming system that has shifted from sourcing energy primarily from the sun to a system so reliant on subsidized fossil fuel, highly-processed food that tends to be dense in calories and light in nutrition is cheaper because so much of the cost of food is tied up in the energy needed for storage and transportation.

According to a recent study, a typical grocery store shopping basket in small rural stores in Iowa only cost 5.5 percent more than that same basket of groceries at the big box stores near population centers. However, a closer look reveals a troubling fact: the fresh fruits, veggies and meat in that rural basket cost 40 percent to 50 percent more. The small town grocer is paying the same fees as larger stores just to have the truck stop at her store, a cost that has to be borne by far fewer customers than the super center down the road. Smaller orders do not secure high quality and discounts, and as supply chains grow more nimble and fuel prices increase, delivery might not be available to the rural grocer at all. That any survive is a testament to the managerial skills of many rural grocers.

This set of challenges also represents a tremendous opportunity for farmers who want to grow good food for regional consumption. Farmers' markets, community gardens and home production are all important parts of the solution. But we also must develop the infrastructure to distribute food laterally to our neighbors in the small towns and villages as we move products from our farms to regional food markets. Rural people's nutrition and wellness, as well as individual and community well being, is joined at the hip with real rural economic development that focuses on helping us figure out how to do that. The USDA's "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" initiative is a good start. Leveling the playing field at the policy level wouldn't hurt, either. □

Terry VanDerPol is the director of LSP's Community Based Food and Economic Development Program. She can be reached at 320-269-2105 or tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org.

Building community with local food

Rural residents work together to bring some green to a food desert

By Tom Taylor

The phrase “food desert” often brings to mind low-income urban neighborhoods—communities where the only place to find food is at the corner convenience stores. Choices are limited, very processed and contain large amounts of fat, salt and sugar. And the availability of fresh, healthy food is either nonexistent or very limited.

A growing segment of rural America shares many similarities with these urban neighborhoods. Because of the distance between towns and the rising cost of fuel, often putting full service groceries out of reach, an increasing number of people are turning to convenience stores/gas stations to feed themselves and their families—*if* their communities even have such businesses.

While the Big Stone Lake area in western Minnesota and eastern South Dakota is not unaffected by these modern food system challenges, there are some promising things happening that point to a brighter, more sustainable and healthier food system future for all. These are just some of the encouraging examples in the Big Stone Lake region that should be held up, supported and replicated.

Feeding more than the birds in Twin Brooks & Big Stone City

In Twin Brooks, S. Dak., the original Birdfeeder Café is a place to get a great, healthy meal prepared with fresh, locally produced food. Opened by Carole Kilde in 2003 at the urging of her 12-year-old grandson Andrew, Twin Brooks Birdfeeder has grown from a store that sold homemade breads and cookies, pop and candy, with a ramshackle lawn that was “good for nothing except for a big ‘ol birdfeeder,” to a destination for people that come for the delicious and healthy meals made from scratch with locally grown food. Open from May 1 to Dec. 15, the Twin Brooks Birdfeeder seats just 25 people, so reservations are strongly encouraged for lunches and required for din-

ner. Lunch is served Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; suppers are available daily with reservations.

Kilde says basing her menu on local, seasonal food makes cooking fun.

“We have so much fun with the fresh herbs, vegetables and meats,” she says. “And the fresh greens, you just can’t beat them. And when the season’s over, it’s over.”

The Twin Brooks Birdfeeder also produces jams, preserves and pie fillings that

The draw of a farmers’ market

What can more than quadruple the population of a small South Dakota town in a matter of hours? The pursuit of fresh, locally grown food and the building of community.

In 2006, the Twin Brooks Farmers’ Market was launched on the five lots that surround the Birdfeeder. This rain-or-shine farmers’ market has grown on some days to include some 20 vendors that sell fresh, locally-produced vegetables, fruit, beef, pork, lamb, chicken, honey, artisan cheeses and eggs. There are also vendors with cut flowers and crafts that include hand-tooled saddles and leather, braided and loom rugs, photography, jewelry, and even lefse prepared on-site.

It was organized by lamb producer and market gardener Colleen Quade with the help of a South Dakota Specialty Crops Block Grant. Colleen is quick to point out the success of The Twin Brooks Farmers’ Market would not be possible without the help and participation of all the farmer-vendors.

“We are a group that works together because that’s the way it is going to successfully happen,” says Quade.

Open every Thursday afternoon/evening, the Twin Brooks Farmer’s Market also has a unique feature—a local foods dinner. Local and sustainably-raised meats are served, along with fresh vegetables provided by the vendors that are at the market. It is not uncommon for the Twin Brooks Farmers’ Market to draw a large crowd—a crowd of over 200 people once attended the dinner.

The Twin Brooks and Big Stone City Birdfeeders, along with the Twin Brooks Farmers’ Market, are all supplying what people want and need: fresh, healthy and locally produced food, while supporting the local economy—and all with a good healthy dose of community involvement. □

Tom Taylor is an organizer with the Land Stewardship Project’s Community Based Food and Economic Development Program. For more information on LSP’s work on local foods in the Big Stone Lake region, contact Taylor at 320-269-2105 or ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org.



Since its opening next to the Birdfeeder Café in 2006, the Twin Brooks Farmers’ Market has grown to the point where on some days it includes some 20 vendors. (photo by Tom Taylor)

are sold at the cafe.

A second Birdfeeder opened in February 2009 in Big Stone City, S. Dak., just across the border from Ortonville, Minn. Seating 50 people, the Big Stone City Birdfeeder, like the Twin Brooks Birdfeeder, makes fresh and healthy local food a cornerstone of the menu. Operated by Carol’s daughter Kris Mueller, the commitment to serving fresh local foods and supporting local farmers is paramount. During the summer the Big Stone City Birdfeeder’s menu selections are dependent on what is available at area farmers’ markets.

“We are so lucky to be located where there is such an abundance of incredibly good, locally-grown food to pick from,” says Mueller.

Kris estimates that she spends about \$75 a week at local farmers’ markets to supply her café from June to October. That’s \$1,500 that stays in the local economy going directly to family farmers in the community.

Profits from perennials

The Chippewa 10% Project will attempt to connect diversified farming, healthy ecosystems, local food & thriving rural economies

By Julia Ahlers Ness

As the executive director of the Chippewa River Watershed Partnership in western Minnesota,

Kylene Olson keeps a close eye on the basin's water quality. The organization does regular monitoring of pollution levels, and compares the data over time. Recent results of some of that monitoring show the need to reduce the runoff making its way into the Chippewa, which is the largest tributary of the Minnesota River—the Minnesota in turn empties into the Mississippi.

"In the lower sub-basins we see lots of nutrients—high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus. And throughout the whole watershed we see high levels of bacteria," says Olson. "In our upper sub-basins where there are more slopes, we're starting to see an increase in sediment settling into the lakes."

It's the same story in many rural watersheds—large and small—that dot the Upper Midwest. It's become clear that basins like the Chippewa need more perennial plant cover—grasses, forages and trees for example—to help keep soil, nutrients and applied farm chemicals from running off the land and into the water. But the Chippewa is a working watershed—almost three quarters of its 1.3 million acres is farmed, and most of that agriculture is based on the production of annual row crops, which only cover the land a few months out of the year.

The good news is that a growing pile of research, including some right in the watershed, shows that farming practices that utilize perennial plant cover on just a small percentage of a watershed's landscape can produce major water quality benefits. Of

course, farmers have to make a living, and in order for them to make water-friendly production practices pay, they need to be rewarded in the marketplace.

It is this recognition that has prompted the Land Stewardship Project and the Chip-

systems in the Chippewa watershed. It's hoped that the "Chippewa 10% Project" will serve as a model for utilizing market-based working lands conservation in other watersheds throughout the region.



Almost three-quarters of the Chippewa River watershed's area is farmed, making agriculture a key ingredient in revamping the basin environmentally and economically. (photo by Julia Ahlers Ness)

pewa River Watershed Partnership to launch an exciting new initiative this summer that is pursuing ways of utilizing markets to promote environmentally friendly farming

10% roll-out event Sept. 30 in Western MN

The Chippewa 10% Project will hold a roll-out event for the public Sept. 30 at the farm of Don and Helen Berheim near Benson, Minn.

The event will feature presentations on how diverse farming systems can help water quality in the watershed while benefiting the local economy and a more vibrant local food system. This event should be of interest to farmers, business owners, natural resource professionals and anyone else interested in connecting land use with watershed health and economic development.

The morning program will be capped off with a free local foods lunch and a demonstration by staff from the University of Minnesota-Morris biomass gasification facility.

For details, contact Julia Ahlers Ness at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

Why 10 percent?

The Chippewa 10% Project's name is derived from the fact that producing positive impacts in a watershed like the Chippewa can happen without re-making the entire region's landscape. Scientific studies and on-the-farm experience suggest that just a 10 percent increase in the amount of land farmed utilizing diverse crop rotations, grasses and other perennial plant systems can be enough

to meaningfully improve the safety of the water, reduce flood potential, restore wildlife habitat and stimulate a thriving local and regional foods economy. This is especially true if we can target fields that are sensitive to problems like erosion.

Introducing more diverse cropping systems, pasture-based livestock production, small grains and forages into the Chippewa River watershed could result in dramatic reductions in water pollution, according to a modeling study done in the watershed a few years ago by the Multiple Benefits of Agriculture Project, which LSP helped lead. Sediment loading, for example, was cut almost in half when farms were diversified, according to the study.

And a preliminary study in Iowa has shown that covering just 10 to 20 percent of a crop field with strips of deep-rooted prairie grasses cut sediment loss by 95 percent.

"This is really based on the idea that a lot of environmental services can be derived

Chippewa 10%, see page 27...

from working farms, rather than always relying on land retirement programs,” says Terry VanDerPol, a west central Minnesota beef farmer who also directs LSP’s Community Based Food and Economic Development Program.

Profits from perennials

The Chippewa 10% Project recognizes that it does little long-term good to promote the conversion to environmentally-friendly production systems if farmers cannot make such systems pay financially.

“Part of the thing we need to remember is farmers aren’t working in a vacuum,” says



Enterprises such as pasture-based livestock production could help make perennial plant systems such as grass economically viable in the Chippewa basin.

(photo by Rolf Hagberg)

John Westra, an associate professor of agricultural economics at Louisiana State University. Westra has done extensive research on the economics of conservation farming systems in Minnesota and is a member of the Chippewa 10% team. “They’re responding to market signals. They’re responding to policy that we have in the United States in terms of the commodity programs, the conservation programs — all of those provide incentives, or disincentives.”

That’s why a major part of the initiative will focus on creating opportunities for farmers to get rewarded in the marketplace for producing more perennials on the land.

For example, producing environmentally-friendly food such as grass-finished beef or pastured pork for local markets could play a major role in improving the watershed. Western Minnesotans currently spend ap-

Want more information?

→ Julia Ahlers Ness, Land Stewardship Project, 320-269-2105; janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

→ Kylene Olson, Chippewa River Watershed Partnership, 320-269-2139, ext. 116; Kylene.olson@charterinternet.com.

→ Website: www.chippewa10.org.

proximately \$334 million buying food each year, and most of it comes from outside the region, meaning a lot of money is leaving our communities on a one-way trip, according to research by economist Ken Meter. Initiatives such as the Upper Minnesota River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapter show there is a burgeoning demand for locally-

Another potential market for perennial crops may include the University of Minnesota-Morris’s new biomass gasification reactor.

First steps

Some of the first steps being taken with this initiative are to identify sub-watersheds where promoting more diverse farming systems would provide the most bang for the buck environmentally and economically. The 10% Project’s research team is using a decade’s worth of watershed data to identify and recommend targeted field locations for perennial vegetative cover restoration that meet environmental goals and increase farm income. (It should be pointed out that future modeling in the Chippewa may show it will require *less* than 10 percent transition of land to achieve water quality goals.)

We are also working with farmers, businesses, institutions, nonprofit organizations, scientists, natural resource professionals and government agencies (the watershed spreads over eight counties) to determine what their goals are for the community, and how together we can build the economic and community support needed for a diversified agricultural system that produces quality local foods, thriving communities, diverse economic opportunities and a healthy ecosystem.

“Instead of just trying to establish a few best management practices here and there, the Chippewa 10% Project is trying to empower the farmers in the community to make the kinds of system-wide changes that pay off for the entire watershed and the local economy,” says Olson. “That’s not something that’s being done in the water quality arena right now.” □

Julia Ahlers Ness is a Land Stewardship Project organizer who is coordinating the Chippewa 10% Project.

Partners in Chippewa 10%

The Land Stewardship Project and Chippewa River Watershed Project are co-leaders of the Chippewa 10% Project. Other partners include the USDA Agricultural Research Service’s Soils Lab in Morris, University of Minnesota-Morris, University of Minnesota West Central Research and Outreach Center and Louisiana State University AgCenter.

Other collaborators include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Funders include the Walton Family Foundation and USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Professor's progress

When a scientist walks into a farmer meeting with an open mind, who knows what can happen?

By Brian DeVore

For the first two decades or so of his career as a dairy scientist, Dennis Johnson followed a trajectory that was controlled by one overarching belief: the more milk a farm produces, the greater the profit. But after seeing high-producing herds suffer economically, Johnson started questioning that assumption. Then he did something a bit unusual for a university scientist: he took his questions to farmers, and listened more than he talked.

That strategy paid off: As he wraps up a University of Minnesota career that spans more than four decades, Johnson leaves an impressive legacy: the establishment of a nationally-recognized organic dairy herd at a research station; initiation of crossbreeding to develop hardy cows for low-input dairying; proving the value of legumes in grazing paddocks and the benefits of pasture renovation; research demonstrating that cows can flourish outdoors on bedded packs during winter; and, perhaps most importantly, renewed hope among farmers that the land grant system can help them seek out and adopt alternatives that are sustainable economically and environmentally.

More milk, more money?

When he arrived at the U of M's West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) in 1968, Johnson, like most dairy scientists, focused on developing and promoting methods that produced increasing amounts of milk. That meant as much as possible replacing the herds' forage based diet with high-energy grains utilizing total mix ration (TMR) technology. Feed would be hauled into confinement facilities housing the cows, and manure would be hauled out. Pastures were replaced with cornfields; large free stall barns and manure lagoons popped up next to milking parlors.

"I concluded there was no future in grazing at the station," Johnson recalls of one of his first decisions at WCROC. "I put cows in the barn and began the U's work on TMR."

But in the 1980s, Johnson started noticing a troubling trend. Small- and medium-sized dairy operators who had expanded their herds and adopted the industrialized CAFO model (often at the advice of experts like Johnson) were not necessarily making more money. In fact, many were going out

of business, despite the fact that they had proven themselves to be excellent managers up until that time.

What was happening? It turns out the price of inputs—feed, land, energy, housing, manure handling facilities—was not keeping pace with the price farmers were receiving for their milk, and for small- and medium-sized operators, at least, higher production didn't automatically equal profitability.

There were 60,000 dairy farmers in Minnesota when Johnson came to WCROC. Today there are 5,000.

"That's tremendous change—not just for farmers but for the communities," he says.

In 1990, Johnson took a trip to New



Scientist Dennis Johnson on grazing's information flow: "Actually it was one-way for many years, with the information coming from the farmers to us." (LSP photo)

Zealand and Australia to see firsthand an alternative system that had the reputation for producing milk at a very low cost: "managed rotational grazing." This technique rotates cows through a series of paddocks during the growing season. (During the winter, cattle on grazing operations are usually fed stored forage.) The system prevents overgrazing while spreading manure in a manner that the grasses and forbs can make use of as they grow. The graziers' investments in equipment, housing and energy are a fraction of their conventional counterparts. The result is on a per-cow basis, a rotational grazing operation can be set up and operated for significantly less cost when compared to a confinement system.

The scientist was impressed with what he saw Down Under, but wasn't convinced managed rotational grazing would work in the harsher climate of the Upper Midwest. And Johnson was finding that in this country it was difficult to get good university

research data on rotational grazing. The U of M dropped research into such systems after the 1950s, once intensive grain feeding came to dominate livestock farming.

Who are you?

In fact, it appeared the only local source of information on managed rotational grazing was a growing group of farmers who were experimenting with the system on their own. They were meeting on each other's farms on a regular basis to compare notes on pasture improvement, paddock design, even animal genetics. And they were doing this outside the land grant research system.

So one day Johnson attended a farmer grazing group meeting facilitated by then Land Stewardship Project organizer Audrey Arner, who raises beef on grass near the western Minnesota community of Montevideo. Johnson tried to blend in at the back of the room, but Arner called him out: "She asked, 'Who are you?' I was fairly coolly received," he says.

For good reason. "For a lot of us in the early 90s who were facing the transition of planting corn and soybeans to planting perennial pastures, we were like jumping off the cliff," recalls Arner. "And we didn't feel supported by the university system."

But with his self-deprecating personality and willingness to ask questions, Johnson began convincing the farmers he truly was there to listen.

"He was so discreet—he offered information only when he was asked for it," recalls Arner. "We weren't used to that from the quote, unquote university experts, who usually came bearing the gifts of knowledge handed down from on high. It was unusual and welcome."

Arner recommended Johnson visit three pioneering Minnesota dairy graziers to get a firsthand look at how the system worked in this country. He took her up on the offer and put hundreds of miles on his car visiting all the farmers during one hectic day.

"I remember him reporting back on that meeting with the farms," recalls Arner. "That's when I thought, 'He's serious.'"

One of the farmers Johnson visited was Dan French, a southeast Minnesota dairy producer who had switched to managed rotational grazing in 1989.

"At first, I was a little nervous about

Professor, see page 29...

him,” recalls French. “I thought he was a typical college guy.”

French had “made every mistake possible” in his conversion to grazing, and had spent a lot of time and money calling farmers and experts in Vermont and as far away as New Zealand and Ireland. “I was on the phone all over the place,” he recalls. “People were helpful, but as far as university people, they were either scared of grazing or didn’t know anything about it.”

But French says that Johnson showed even though he had a Ph.D. in dairy science and had been working in the field for years, he wasn’t done learning. “He was a student—he wanted to learn.”

Johnson came back from that trip more intrigued than ever about the role managed rotational grazing could play in the future of Minnesota dairy farming. He showed up at pasture walks on area grazing farms armed with questions. “I sat down and thought about things for awhile,” he says.

One of the things the farmers made clear was that more needed to be done on pasture improvement. If they hadn’t been plowed up, many pastures had been overgrazed, which led to erosion and a turf dominated by poor quality forage. Johnson found that a pasture seed mix (13 varieties of forbs, grasses and legumes), designed by the late Paul Homme along with Arner and other area graziers, was exceptionally productive. Because of better seed mixes, improved paddock design and rotations that allow good regrowth, in west central Minnesota farmers have been able to extend the grazing season from roughly 145 days to 200 days annually.

“Extending the grazing season that much made it clear this was a viable option here,” says Johnson. By the mid-1990s, a portion of the WCROC dairy herd was getting the majority of its nutrition during the growing season from rotational pastures (the facility has around 300 acres of pasture), and the station was hosting pasture walks of its own. Research at the station showed that when compared to continuously grazed pastures, rotated paddocks produced more high quality forage, and it produced it for a mere \$12 per additional ton. “That’s a really good deal economically,” says Johnson.

Two-way street

This is more than a story about grazing. The way Johnson and the farmers worked together turned on its head the traditional research/extension model of the university expert telling farmers what’s best. Instead, information flowed both ways—eventually.

“Actually it was one-way for many years, with the information coming from the farm-

Give it a listen

To listen to LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast featuring dairy scientist Dennis Johnson, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html. It’s episode 81.

ers to us,” the scientist says with a laugh.

One message Johnson was getting from farmers was that for grazing to be truly economically sustainable in the long term, producers needed to get rewarded in the marketplace for their effort. Managed rotational grazing may be cheaper to implement, but in the case of dairying it also produces significantly less milk per cow when compared to conventional systems.

In 2000 Johnson took another overseas trip, this time to Europe. There he saw how organic milk producers—who relied heavily on grazing by the way—were receiving a price premium from health-conscious consumers. It seemed the logical next step for the WCROC dairy research program was to transition part of the herd to certified organic to see how value could be added to those improved pastures via the organic market.

“It wasn’t an ideological decision,” says Johnson of transitioning the herd to organic. “But if there’s something that can be done to add value to milk in a grazing system, then you should do it, because there is going to be less milk when you graze.”

LSP’s Policy Program worked to convince lawmakers that establishing an organic dairy herd at WCROC was a public good worth supporting (Johnson is now a member of LSP’s Board of Directors). There was a precedent: LSP had already helped get legislative funding for alternative swine research at the station.

In 2007, the Minnesota Legislature, at the prompting of LSP members and staff, among others, designated over \$1 million for research into organics. LSP continued to encourage U of M administrators to move quickly to enhance organic programs at the school and its research stations. That helped WCROC complete the transition of half its 140-cow herd to organic. On June 2 of this year, the first load of the station’s organic milk was picked up by Organic Valley.

There are only two other organic herds at research sites in the country: University of New Hampshire and Chico State in California. WCROC is the only university experiment station with an organic and conventional herd side-by-side, so the research possibilities are exciting. “I think we have national responsibilities now with the organic program — we have to look beyond west central Minnesota,” says Johnson.

And because of recent budget cuts, the only other U of M dairy research herd is at

the main campus in Saint Paul, making any science coming out of the WCROC cows particularly important in the region.

More questions

Johnson retires at the end of August— a few days later he will turn 70. Even in his retirement, he is sending a positive message to farmers and the general public wondering if the U of M will still be doing research that supports sustainable agriculture. In a time of tight budgets, Johnson is being replaced by Brad Heins, who has a freshly minted Ph.D. in animal science and who is committed to alternative dairy systems.

“The fact that they are replacing Dennis and not letting the position fade away is extraordinary,” says Arner.

Lee Johnston, WCROC director of operations, says he was impressed by the number of farmers from the sustainable ag community who showed up for the dairy scientist candidate interviews.

“This fits with the whole university mission of serving production agriculture,” says Johnston of WCROC’s research into grazing and organics. “A member of our advisory committee says, ‘We want you to make mistakes.’ That’s why we call it an experiment.”

On a recent summer morning, Johnson drives through a misty rain on the grounds of WCROC. The dairy scientist passes the milking parlor, horticulture gardens and swine hoop houses before parking at the top of a pasture. He walks downhill through lush forage to check on the grazing organic herd. He talks about all the research questions farmers and scientists need to pursue: developing cow genetics that can do well on pasture, increasing per-acre milk productivity on grass, examining the connection between human health and grass-produced milk, and how locally produced dairy products can benefit Main Street economies.

“There’s no shortage of questions,” he says. “It’s a perfect time for a new person to take it forward.” □

Organic pasture field day Aug. 31 at WCROC

There will be a field day on pasture management in organic dairy production Aug. 31, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., at the West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) in Morris, Minn. This Land Stewardship Project field day is geared toward farmers, natural resource professionals and agriculture educators who want to learn more about pasture management in organic dairy production.

For more information, contact LSP’s Tom Taylor at 320-269-2105 or ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org.



Finding Beauty in a Broken World

By Terry Tempest Williams
2009; 420 pages
Vintage Books
www.coyoteclan.com

Cultivating an Ecological Conscience Essays from a Farmer Philosopher

By Frederick Kirschenmann
2009; 403 pages
University Press of Kentucky
www.kentuckypress.com

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

Twin Cities advocates for sustainability and environmental care had a double treat this past April when Fred Kirschenmann and Terry Tempest Williams spoke at two different venues on subsequent nights in the area. If you missed these special evenings, don't despair: both speakers drew on ideas from books they've recently published. In Kirschenmann's case, *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience: Essays from a Farmer Philosopher*; and in Williams' case, *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*.

Kirschenmann is a farmer, theologian, past director and Distinguished Fellow at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Williams is the Annie Clark Tanner Scholar in Environmental Humanities at the University of Utah and the author of several books.

Even though both speakers/writers discuss environmental and land issues when they write and speak, they take different approaches. For example, Kirschenmann addresses theological questions surrounding issues of food, agriculture and land.

Meanwhile, Williams approaches these issues from the perspective that environmental stewardship is a human responsibility because humanity is part of a greater

ecological community. This idea of community is also a common theme in many of her previous works such as *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Place* and *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert*.

Cultivating an Ecological Conscience draws on Kirschenmann's extensive experiences as a North Dakota organic farmer and theologian. He describes food production as part of a resurrection process, with death providing life a natural and theologically necessary part of creation's existence.

He also describes food production as an "incarnational" process, with God being present in the production of food and proper stewardship of the land.

Kirschenmann expresses concern about the non-renewable resources—oil in particular—that are used in agriculture and food transportation, a use of resources that he sees as unsustainable. He elaborates on these ideas in chapters titled: "Is Sustainability in Our Energy Future?"; "A Journey Toward Sustainability"; "Spirituality and Cooperatives"; and "Revitalizing Rural Communities: How Churches Can Help."

Williams' book uses three examples of how a community approach can help right our relationship with the environment and the land. Her first example is a mosaic artist in Italy who taught her how to create mosaics and consider the idea that each piece in a mosaic has a place—just like each piece in an ecosystem. The second example she cites is prairie dog communities in southern Utah

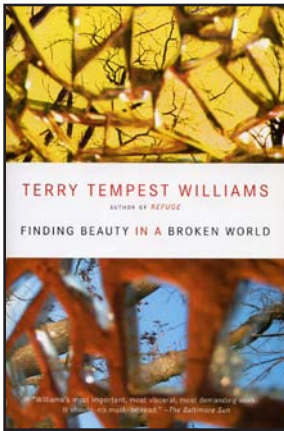
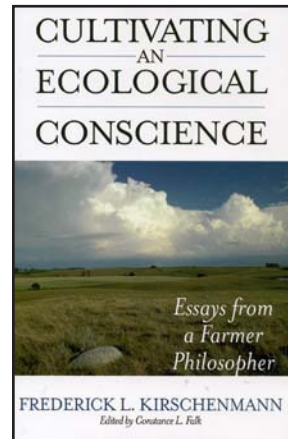
where the members warn each other of danger and work together to complete colony tunnels. Williams also notes that there is an ongoing conflict between the prairie dog community and neighboring human communities, conflict that is often detrimental to the prairie dog community.

The third community she discusses is post-genocide Rwanda, the homeland of her adopted son. She discusses the horror of the genocide against the Tutsi people by their Hutu neighbors in the 1990s. Williams notes that after the genocide, many Rwandans worked together to rebuild their nation and help the healing process. This process often included art projects and frequently involved the assistance of foreign nationals, making Rwanda's recovery a global community project.

Both books are worthwhile reads written with an approachable style that should be easy to follow for anyone interested in agricultural, environmental or social justice issues. □

LSP member and frequent volunteer Dale Hadler has a master's degree in religion and theology from United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities. To listen to LSP Ear to the Ground podcasts featuring Fred Kirschenmann (episodes 12-13), see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=4.

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Opportunities Resources

Listen to the voices of the land

The Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* audio podcast showcases the farmers, consumers, scientists and activists who are working to create a sustainable food and farming system. We now have over 80 episodes. 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 **LSP on the Web**. □

Display your LSP membership with pride

If you have a website and want to display your Land Stewardship Project affiliation, we have two "membership" versions (pictured below: vertical and horizontal) of our logo available.

To request a copy, contact LSP's Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org. □





LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Membership Update

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.

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 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.



LSP is partnering with the Minnesota Real Estate Foundation, which has excellent resources and guidelines for people who are interested in exploring various avenues for donating real estate to charities. The *Land Stewardship Letter* is featuring a "Did you know..." series from the Real Estate Foundation that highlights ways of making charitable real estate gifting a satisfying, sustainable experience. Below is the latest installment in this series.

Did you know...

The Minnesota Real Estate Foundation accepts bequests of real estate from donor's estates. The Foundation will liquidate the property and distribute the net proceeds to the donor's designated charities. This is an ideal application, where the donor wishes multiple charities to benefit from the gift.

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 Vic Ormsby

◆ Lynn Theurer

In memory of Al Kordig

◆ Mary Lou Stursa

In memory of Victor Ray & Leo Rowekamp

◆ Ron Kroese

In memory of Frances Gilsrud

◆ Kerrine & Maynard Thomson

In memory of Phyllis Pladsen

◆ Karen Bartig

For details on donating to LSP in the name of a loved one, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org. More information on donating special gifts to LSP is also available at www.landstewardshipproject.org. □

Support LSP in your workplace

The Land Stewardship Project is a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, which is a coalition of 20 environmental organizations in Minnesota that offer work-place giving as an option in making our communities better places to live. Together member organizations of the Minnesota Environmental Fund work to:

- promote the sustainability of our rural communities and family farms;
- protect Minnesotans from health hazards;
- educate citizens and our youth on conservation efforts;
- preserve wilderness areas, parks, wetlands and wildlife habitat.



MINNESOTA
Environmental Fund


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



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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **AUG. 23—Alfalfa as a cover crop on organic farms**, A-Frame Farm, Madison, Minn.; Contact: Tom Taylor, LSP, 320-269-2105; ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **AUG. 24—Farm Beginnings field day on late season cover crops &**

rotations, Riverbend Farm, Delano, Minn.; Contact: Nick Olson, LSP, 320-269-2105; nicko@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **AUG. 24—Food Preservation Workshop**, Winona, Minn.; Contact: 507-457-6440

→ **AUG. 27—USDA/DOJ workshop on concentration in the livestock industry** (see page 14)

→ **AUG. 29—LSP at the Minnesota State Fair Eco Experience (Healthy Local Food Exhibit)**; Contact: Tom Taylor, LSP, 320-269-2105; ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **AUG. 29—Cover cropping & resting fields**, Marine on St. Croix, Minn.; Contact: 651-433-3676; www.mnfoodassociation.org

→ **AUG. 30—NPSAS Summer Tour of Johnson Organic Farms**, Madison, S. Dak.; Contact: www.npsas.org; 701-883-4304

→ **AUG. 31—Minn. Cooks at Minn. State Fair**, St. Paul; Contact: www.minnesotacooks.net; 651-639-1223; 800-969-3380

→ **AUG. 31—Pasture management in organic dairy production**, WCROC, Morris, Minn. (see page 29)

→ **SEPT. 10-11—Minnesota GrazeFest**, Winona County Fairgrounds, St. Charles, Minn.; Contact: 320-226-6318; www.sfa-mn.org

→ **SEPT. 10-12—Growing Power's Urban & Small Farm Conference**, Milwaukee, Wis.; Contact: 414-527-1546; www.growingpowerfarmconference.org

→ **SEPT. 11—Chef Lucia Watson cooking demo at Winona (Minn.) Farmers' Market**, 10:30 a.m.; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, 507-523-3366; caroline@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **SEPT. 11—LSP "Making the Healthy, Local Food Choice an Easy Choice" tent**, bluegrass festival, Lake Elmo Park, Minn.; Contact: Ann DeLeVergne, LSP, ann@landstewardshipproject.org; 651-329-0125

→ **SEPT. 11—Duluth (Minn.) Harvest Festival & Energy Fair**; Contact: 218-393-3276; <http://lssfa.org>

→ **SEPT. 12—Seed saving basics**, Marine on St. Croix, Minn.; Contact: 651-433-3676; www.mnfoodassociation.org

→ **SEPT. 22—Perennials for Biomass**, U of M SROC, Waseca, Minn.; Contact: Gregg Johnson, 507-837-5617

→ **SEPT. 26—Hoophouse season extension**, Marine on St. Croix, Minn.; Contact: 651-433-3676; www.mnfoodassociation.org

→ **OCT. 15—Draft horse farming field day**, Common Harvest Farm, Osceola, Wis.; Contact: MOSES, 715-778-5775; <http://mosesorganic.org/events.html>

→ **OCT. 24—Singing Hills Goat Dairy tour**,

Bowl for beginning farmers Nov. 14 in Minneapolis

Join LSP's Farm Beginnings program at Bryant Lake Bowl in Minneapolis on Nov. 14 for an evening of bowling, music, art and fun to raise money for beginning farmer training. See page 21.

Nerstrand, Minn.; Contact: Kathy Zeman, kzeman@kmwb.net; 507-664-9446

→ **OCT. 30—LSP Farm Beginnings class starts in St. Joseph, Minn.** (see page 15)

→ **NOV. 6—LSP Farm Beginnings class starts in Winona, Minn.**; (see page 15)

→ **NOV. 22—Comment deadline for proposed changes to Packers & Stockyards Act** (see page 14)

→ **JAN. 4—Minn. Legislature convenes**; Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 612-722-6377; bking@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **JAN. 7-8—PFI Conf.**, Marshalltown, Iowa; Contact: www.practicalfarmers.org; 515-232-5661

→ **JAN. 27-28—Midwest Value Added Conf. featuring Joel Salatin**, Madison, Wis.; Contact: www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.html; 715-834-9672

→ **FEB. 2—NPSAS Winter Conf.**, Fargo, N. Dak.; Contact: www.npsas.org; 701-883-4304

→ **FEB. 19—SFA Conf.**, St. Joseph, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org; 320-226-6318

→ **FEB. 24-25—MOSES Organic Conf.**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.moses-organic.org; 715-778-5775

Profits from perennials Sept. 30

How can farming based on perennial plant systems benefit a watershed environmentally and economically? Find out Sept. 30 in Benson, Minn. See page 26.

Benefit dinner for LSP Aug. 31

Brasa Restaurant and chef Alex Roberts are hosting a benefit dinner for LSP on Aug. 31 in Saint Paul, Minn. See page 9.

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