

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

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Summer 2008



Illustration by Malena Arner Handeen

The Land Stewardship Project's new *Land & Stewardship Legacies* initiative gives landowners a chance to continue their farm's heritage while ensuring the future of sustainable agriculture (see page 28).

—*Organics & a Hungry Planet*—

—*When a Landlord Goes the Extra Mile*—

—*The Farm Bill—What's Next?*—

—*Thumbing it Through the 2008 Minnesota Legislative Session*—

—*Counting Calories Coyote Style*—



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

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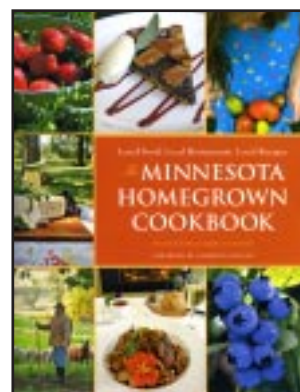
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Farm-centered rural economic development

EDITOR'S NOTE: Unlike many communities, northwest Iowa's Woodbury County is not hanging its economic development hat on chasing smokestacks: using tax breaks and other incentives to recruit firms that are mostly looking for low-wage jobs and which keep very little wealth local. In recent years, the county's energetic Rural Economic Development Director, Rob Marqusee, has spearheaded a number of measures that use family farmers and the food they produce as the keystone of economic development. For example, the county offers tax breaks to farmers who convert to organic production, and it has put in place a policy to purchase locally produced food for government facilities. These and other efforts have made Woodbury County a model of how to use home-grown resources to develop wealth that

stays in the community. Marqusee talked about these efforts during a keynote at the 2008 Minnesota Organic Conference in St. Cloud, Minn. Below are a few excerpts of Marqusee's talk.

To listen to more of the talk, tune in to LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast by going to www.landstewardshipproject.org and clicking on the **Listen to the Latest Podcast** link under **Take Action** (it's episode 47). Also contained on our podcast page is a multi-part series (beginning with episode 51) of shows featuring researcher Ken Meter talking about how local food systems can help keep wealth in rural communities.

To read the *Land Stewardship Letter's* special report on Woodbury County, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/rural_develop_report.pdf.

Where most economic development is focused

There is almost a 100 percent focus now on the development of industrial, commercial and residential development. That is economic development. If you bring in an Olive Garden restaurant and an ethanol plant, they think you're the best economic director the world has ever seen. Farming and small business has not typically been seen as an economic development strategy...those people are

not typically in the radar of economic development strategies.

We need to take control of our economic future. Organic farming is economic development. This is what we're doing here. What we're doing as a community is supporting our farmers and giving them a fair opportunity to serve our citizens and provide food at fair, competitive prices and making a decent living in the process.

On criticism that a 'buy local' policy violates the free market

If you're looking at free market, the Woodbury County policy is far closer to free market than the existing food system, because all we're doing is paying the true value for the food without subsidy. We're paying what that food is actually worth. And if it's worth more, and we pay more, that money stays in the community.

We're not an island

Local foods and production doesn't mean that you can't be part of a national market. In fact, that's encouraged—it's sort of a dual purpose because we believe if local products can be that much better, then the local people should be able to expand their markets beyond the local food chain...A Wisconsin company moved into our region because of our policy. They are building a \$40 million organic soybean processing plant and the construction has already begun. From what? What we did is create a vision for organic agriculture and people were attracted to it.

The next initiative

During the last eight months I've been trying to figure out how to finance new, young farmers. I'm working on this program now that will provide a national model for removing the barriers for young, new farmers. The idea is to provide opportunity for new young farmers to get into farming, to move into these areas and to remake them in the vision that was originally intended: for small family farms and thriving rural communities. □

Increasing the land's holding capacity

The photo at right shows a pond on the Art and Jean Thicke farm near La Crescent, in southeast Minnesota. Last August, the farm received 15 inches of rain in one night, part of a widespread storm that devastated many parts of the region. Although this pond filled up, it didn't run over. Why? Art credits the farm's conversion to managed rotational grazing in the 1980s.

Before the sloping fields were converted from corn to grass, a rain of just a few inches would send water spilling over the dam. The pond, which was built in the 1950s, had to be dredged several times during the corn years because of the amount of eroded soil that found its way to the bottom. But these days, the well-managed pastures are able to soak up the water and allow it to infiltrate deep into the soil profile, keeping moisture, soil and nutrients in place.

"It's amazing the capacity this land has when there's life in the soil," says Art Thicke (see page 7 for more on the Thicke farm).

To listen to a podcast featuring Thicke talking about his farm, see www.landstewardshipproject.org and click the **Listen to the Latest Podcast** link under **Take Action** (it's episode 50). (LSP photo)



Letters

Nitrogen, corn & the Dead Zone

In the Spring 2008 issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, the *Myth Buster* on page 6 states that we are supposed to believe that over a 50-year period, continuous corn yields are reduced by 20 percent. I went to the article cited which is about nitrogen and carbon sequestration and found nothing about yields. Continuous U.S. corn yields have gone up many fold in the last 50 years from my experience.

Farmers are not that stupid to use a product excessively if it produces a loss. Would you? All inputs in growing a crop are very expensive, especially today. It makes no sense to use more than is practical. I fail to even see the purpose in studying something that is known to be excessive. If this article was about carbon, continuous corn is probably the least harmful to the soil since large amounts of carbon are kept on the fields through corn stalks.

Soybeans have very little residue and corn and switchgrass grown for biomass would remove even more. The farm program forces farmers to grow corn and soybeans, and should be eliminated for this reason.

Nitrogen has also been blamed for creating the Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Phosphorus is the main controlling cause, according to an Environmental Protection Agency report, and nitrogen produced by algae is enough to make up for any reduction from runoff.

Everyone needs to work together to solve our problems. Pointing the finger and not using sound science and logic will not help. Farmers grow corn because the farm program promotes corn and consumers want cheap food and corn in meat, corn in high fructose corn syrup and corn to go into ethanol. We grow corn to supply the demand. Reducing the demand for corn is the easiest way to cut corn production.

— Greg Mikkelson
Lake Crystal, Minn.

Leave the gate open

I keep hearing criticism of the Land Stewardship Project's new logo—in particular, "Who left the gate open?" But I think that interpretation misses the point.

A logo is a visual, at-a-glance representation of an organization's work. LSP's new logo looks modern, which I think represents the farmer-members who utilize new technologies as well as time-tested methods.

And as for the open gate that "you," the viewer, are walking into: it's saying, "Here's an organization whose members share a philosophy that is welcoming. Come on in." If a logo is a sort of meta-

phor, what message would a closed gate have sent?

— Andria Williams
Belleville, Ill

An open future

The new Land Stewardship Project logo illustrates to me an open door to a future with new opportunities, available to all those who choose to walk through the open gate. The old logo was good, but the new logo is certainly better and reflective of an optimistic future. I think whoever designed it is something of a mastermind.

— Brad Trom
Grand View Farm
Blooming Prairie, Minn.

What's on your mind?



Got an opinion? Comments? Criticisms? Of course you do.

We like to print letters, commentaries, essays, poems, photos and illustrations related to issues we cover. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Commentaries and letters published in the *Land Stewardship Letter* do not necessarily represent the views of the Land Stewardship Project.

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A big pile of table scraps

27%...

...That's the estimated percentage of U.S. food that is available for consumption but is tossed. That's a pound of food daily for every American.

12%...

...The annual percentage of the total U.S. waste stream that is made up of food.

98%...

...The percentage of that food waste (30 million tons each year) that ends up in landfills. Ironically, 62 percent of yard waste is recycled via composting.

5%...

... That's the percentage of tossed food that would need to be recovered to feed four million people daily; a 25 percent recovery rate would feed 20 million people each day.

These numbers are from a May 18 *New York Times* article called, "One Country's Table Scraps, Another Country's Meal" (www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/weekinreview/18martin.html)

Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

→ Myth:

Sustainable farming methods cannot feed the world.

→ Fact:

As food riots in places like Haiti and Egypt reminded us this spring, there are many hungry people in the world. Supporters of industrialized agriculture have argued for years that the only way to feed billions of mouths is by raising crops and livestock in large-scale specialized systems reliant on petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides. Diversified agricultural systems—organic in particular—are a luxury the world can ill afford at a time when the population has surpassed six billion people, say scientists like Nobel Prize-winning plant breeder Norman Borlaug. John Emsley, a chemist at Cambridge University, has called organic farming “the greatest catastrophe that the human race could face,” according to *World Watch* magazine.

The assumptions behind such sharp criticism is that organic crop production, for example, simply cannot produce high yields because it relies on natural sources of fertility such as animal manure. But a lot of false and outdated information serves as the basis for such arguments. For example, it’s often stated as fact that if the U.S. switched to organic farming, this country would produce only about one-fourth of what it produces today. That’s based on a USDA study showing that all the manure in the U.S. could only meet one-quarter of the country’s crop fertility needs. But that study ignores the fact that organic farmers depend heavily on other sources of fertility besides manure: rotations with nitrogen-fixing legumes and plowing down crops to provide “green manure,” for example.

Assumptions about organic farming’s inherently low yields are also biased by the fact that during the first few years of transition from a chemical-intensive system, yields do often drop as the soil adjusts to pesticide and fertilizer withdrawal and develops its own natural systems once again.

In recent years, sophisticated research has shown that once that transition is complete, organic systems compare quite favorably with conventional systems in terms of yield. For example, the Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trial (WICST) project recently concluded 13 years of research comparing conventional and organic crop yields in the southern part of that state. According to the results, which were published in the *Agronomy Journal* earlier this year, in good years (more later on what constitutes a good year) organic systems produced corn and soybeans 90 percent to 98 percent as well as conventional systems. An analyses of similar field trial studies done during the past several years in Iowa, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Michigan shows that on average in good years organic and low-chemical corn yields were 98 percent to 114 percent of conventional corn yields; soybean yields under sustainable systems averaged 94 percent to 111 percent of their conventional counterparts.

“Clearly, field research has answered the question, ‘Can biologically diverse, low-input cropping systems be as productive as conventional systems?’ with a qualified yes and has refuted the most dire warnings against wide-adoption of low-input cropping systems,” concluded the WICST paper.

Now for that “qualified yes” the WICST scientists mentioned. Numerous research projects confirm what organic farmers already know: organic systems can be particularly vulnerable to wet conditions early in the season. Since organic systems cannot utilize herbicides, they must rely on mechanical weed control such as rotary hoeing to control weeds. If excessive wet weather at the wrong times of the year makes it difficult to get weed-killing steel out in the field, yields suffer. Field trails show that when weather conditions prevent good mechanical weed control, corn and soybean yields average about 74 percent of their conventional counterparts. During about a third of the years studied, weed problems significantly knocked yields back for sustainably-raised crops.

However, research at land grant universities, on farms and in places like the Rodale Institute is helping farmers deal

with weed problems in organic systems more consistently. For example, Rodale has developed a system that uses cover crops and a roller to create a weed-suppressing, soil-saving mulch in organic systems. Field trials as well as on-farm use shows the system can help organic row-crops match and even exceed yields of their conventional counterparts.

Another important point to keep in mind is that purveyors of the “organics will starve us” myth often lay the scenario out in stark, all-or-nothing terms. One popular polemic goes something like this: which two billion people will be chosen to die when pesticides are banned tomorrow? Scientists who study organic farming systems say in reality the sustainable agriculture of the future may in some cases be a mix of systems: a farmer may use rotations, cover crops and steel to control weeds during the two-thirds of the time that weather conditions allow, for example. Otherwise, they can use spot spraying of herbicides to deal with weeds that take advantage of inclement weather.

Blending organic and conventional systems can pay off. For example, multi-year research by the University of Minnesota shows that one typical four-year organic rotation—corn, soybeans, alfalfa and oats—can produce 3 percent to 6 percent higher yields for conventional farmers who are sticking with at least some chemicals for the time being.

→ More information

- The WICST’s *Agronomy Journal* article is at <http://agron.scijournals.org/cgi/reprint/100/2/253>.

- *World Watch* magazine’s article, “Can Organic Farming Feed Us All?” is at www.worldwatch.org/node/3918.



Myth Busters on the Internet

The *Land Stewardship Letter*’s popular *Myth Buster* series is available on our website. You can download pdf versions at www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-myth.html. For information on obtaining paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-729-6294 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.



LAND
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LSP News

Peterson receives SFA Emeritus Award

Former Land Stewardship Project Board member **Ken Peterson** has been given the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota's 2008 Sustainable Farmer Emeritus Award.

Peterson, who raises and direct-markets beef near Tamarack in northeast Minnesota, helped launch the SFA's Northeast Chapter—now known as the Lake Superior SFA.

Peterson was one of the first University of Minnesota Extension educators to promote sustainable farming systems.

Peterson helped bring Holistic Management training to that part of the state, and he was instrumental in organizing the first Lake Superior Harvest Festival. The Harvest Festival, which will celebrate its 15th Anniversary this fall, introduces thousands of people annually to the region's farmers and the food they produce.

Besides LSP, Peterson has served on the Board of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, among other groups. □

LSP conducts well water testing

Some 70 rural wells in southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin and northeast Iowa were tested for agrichemicals earlier this summer during a special Land Stewardship Project monitoring initiative.

Interest in well water testing has been spurred by the growing number of scientific studies that suggest some common ag chemicals can affect amphibian and human health, even at low levels of detection (see the Summer and Fall 2007 issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter*). In June, the Southeast Minnesota Water Resources Board reported that up to 30 percent of private wells in the region have nitrate levels exceeding federal standards. Nitrates in well water come from, among other sources, fertilizer runoff from crop fields.

In cooperation with Davy Laboratories of La Crosse, Wis., a certified water testing lab, LSP provided testing kits to citizens in the region in hopes of producing a one-time snapshot of water quality. Davy Laboratories provided a reduced rate for this project. A basic pesticide test was offered, as well as a nitrate test for an additional fee.

Results of the testing will be available later this year. For general questions about the well testing, contact LSP's Doug Nopar or dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org, or Johanna Rupprecht at rupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org. They can both be reached at 507-523-3366. □

help coordinate LSP's well water testing project (see previous story), and assist with other research and organizing projects in the office. □



Intern Johanna Rupprecht collects a water sample for LSP's special well testing program. (LSP photo)

Rupprecht serves LSP internship

Johanna Rupprecht is working as an intern in the Land Stewardship Project's Lewiston office this summer. Rupprecht is a graduate of Lewiston-Altura High School where she was a National Merit Scholarship Finalist. She just completed her junior year as an English major at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn. Rupprecht is planning on attending graduate school in library science after graduation in 2009.

During her internship, Rupprecht will



Land Stewardship Project members Patrick and Sharlene Daninger hosted an open house at their dairy farm near Forest Lake, Minn., on June 1. Their operation, Autumnwood Farm (www.autumnwoodfarmllc.com), recently began processing milk on-farm and selling it locally under the Autumnwood Farm label. The Daningers use managed rotational grazing to produce milk and the family has been farming at the same location north of the Twin Cities since 1902. Autumnwood is a St. Croix River Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local partner. For more information on Buy Fresh Buy Local, see page 23. (LSP photo)

Farm Beginnings field days

A key component of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings® program is the series of on-farm educational events held during the spring, summer and fall.

These workshops and field days give Farm Beginnings participants a chance to see firsthand some of the farming systems they learn about during fall and winter class sessions. This year's on-farm education events are featuring pasture-based beef and dairy systems, alternative pork production, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) produce farming, on-farm processing, soil management and direct marketing.

Applications for the 2008-2009 session of Farm Beginnings are now being accepted. For more information, see pages 18-23. □



LEFT and ABOVE: Art Thicke led a pasture walk during a Farm Beginnings field day in May. Art, along with his wife Jean, have produced milk using managed rotational grazing since 1985. They farm on extremely steep land (see page 3) near La Crescent, in southeast Minnesota, and their operation has become a model for protecting soil and water quality, while providing habitat for grassland songbirds. They recently took on Chad and Melissa Crowley as farming partners. (LSP photos)



ABOVE and LEFT: Farm Beginnings participants braved snow showers and cold winds in late April during a field day on the Roger and Michelle Benrud farm near Goodhue, Minn.

The Benruds, who graduated from the first Farm Beginnings class 11 years ago, produce milk on pasture with a 90-cow herd and market it through PastureLand, an award-winning cheese and butter cooperative consisting of six southeast Minnesota grass-based farming operations. PastureLand is certified by the National Organic Program of the USDA as well as Food Alliance Midwest. (LSP photos)



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Community Food & Farm Fest 2008



The Zweber family talked about their farming operation with an attendee of the Community Food and Farm Festival. Zweber Farm, located near Elko, Minn., produces beef, chicken, pork and pumpkins. (LSP photo)

The 2008 Community Food and Farm Festival was held May 3-4 at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. Almost two dozen farmers and other exhibitors met with consumers to talk about locally-produced sustainable food. They learned about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and buying food directly through various other means, as well as what products are within driving distance of the Twin Cities metro area.

The Food and Fest is a joint effort of the Land Stewardship Project and the Minnesota Food Association. As in years past, the Festival was held in conjunction with the Living Green Expo (www.livinggreenexpo.org), a two-day event that provides information, ideas, resources, products and motivation to live more sustainably.

For a listing of Community Food and Farm Fest exhibitors, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/cfff/cfff.html. For information on LSP's *Stewardship Food Directory*, which lists LSP member-farmers and retailers who offer locally produced food, see page 24. □

Gary Brever of Ploughshare Farm talks to a consumer about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) during the Food and Farm Festival. Ploughshare is a CSA operation located near Parkers Prairie, Minn. (LSP photo)



LSP blog

The Land Stewardship Project is writing a weekly food and sustainable agriculture web-based blog for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership. To read the blog, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org and click on the **Read This Week's LSP Blog** link under **Take Action**. □

LSP podcast

The Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* audio magazine features interviews and field reports related to LSP's work.

To listen in, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org, and click on the **Listen to the Latest Podcast** link under **Take Action**. For a step-by-step guide on how to subscribe to the free *Ear to the Ground* service, visit www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html. □

LSP fact sheets

The Land Stewardship Project's long-running series of fact sheets has been updated and are now available on our website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-factsheets.html. The fact sheets cover a wide spectrum of topics, and more will be added in the future. □

Plugging into the prairie

Can our thirst for energy create an economic justification for returning perennial plants to the landscape?

By Brian DeVore

When Ron Bowen planted his first prairie for a landowner over three decades ago, the client's main motivation was pretty clear. "The main question was, 'Is it pretty?'" It was an ornamental prairie," recalls Bowen, the founder and owner of Minnesota-based Prairie Restorations, Inc. But Bowen knew the benefits of

Second in a series.

prairie ecosystems were more than skin deep. They provide wildlife habitat, build soil, help keep contaminants out of water, fix nitrogen and, as it's become clear in recent years, trap carbon. If people were willing to get a prairie system established on their land because it gussied up the landscape, so be it. All the hidden benefits would come along for the ride.

But an ecosystem's good looks can only take it so far in a world where competing interests for land are increasing sharply. To evolve beyond an odd planting here and there to a major part of the landscape, it has to earn its own way economically. That's why Bowen and other prairie enthusiasts are pleased to see in recent years a keen interest in "functional restoration"—establishment of prairies to provide numerous services to society, including things like stabilization of lakeshores or hunting habitat for pheasants. And they are even more excited by the latest task prairies are being asked to perform: serve as a source of biomass energy.

In its seemingly endless search for new sources of energy, the world is now seriously considering the potential of utilizing plants and plant products. So far, that interest has manifested itself almost exclusively in the form of ethanol—mostly from distilling corn kernels into a fuel additive for gasoline. But as concerns over the environmental and food supply impacts of raising so much corn for fuel have emerged, energy experts, environmentalists and rural communities have increasingly looked at actual plant parts as sources of energy. In the Upper Midwest, some of that interest has

centered on the plants found in prairie lands.

The viability of tapping into prairies as an energy source received a significant boost in 2006 from a University of Minnesota study published in the journal *Science*. The 10-year study found that mixes of 16 native prairie plant species yielded on average 238 percent more biomass than land planted to a single species. An added bonus was that the greater diversity increased carbon sequestration, provided more stable annual yields and significantly reduced the need for pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers such as nitrogen, which can be supplied to the prairie via legume species. The study stopped at 16 species and research is being done to see if even more diversity can be as productive.

Green Fuels- Green Farming



Studies like this are good news for fans of a system that prior to European settlement formed the largest ecosystem in North America—it stretched from Canada to Mexico and from the Rockies to Indiana. At one time a third of Minnesota and 80 percent of Iowa was covered by prairie. Today, well less than 1 percent of those native prairies have escaped the plow and bulldozer. We've also lost the ecological services that came with the deep-rooted grasses, forbs and legumes found in prairies, and the results have been predictable: increased erosion, less wildlife, more released carbon and more polluted water.

Prairie power

Prairie hay can be used to generate energy in many ways: burned to generate

electricity, burned or gasified for heat or gasified and chemically combined to make ethanol. There is also a lot of buzz over the possibility of breaking down the cellulose in plants and fermenting the resulting sugars into ethanol. Cellulose is the most abundant naturally occurring organic molecule on the planet; harnessing it as a source of commercially viable energy would be nothing short of revolutionary.

Getting energy from legumes, forbs and grasses on a regular basis could provide an economic incentive to restore millions of acres of prairie to the landscape. But major questions remain as to how viable it will be to restore, raise and harvest millions of acres of prairie plants for energy. And how can it be done without making prairies just another industrialized source of commodities? After all, energy generation, like any industrial process, has mostly relied on a narrowly focused drive to maximize production from a single resource. Healthy prairie systems, on the other hand, rely on diversity. So the question remains: can a complex polyculture serve the needs of a system based on a simplified monoculture? Can we meld the two, or will yet again single-minded monoculture overwhelm multifunctional diversity?

First, the seed

Firms like Prairie Restorations have proven that thriving perennial grassland systems can be returned to the landscape. But Bowen and other prairie experts caution that to ratchet up prairie production to meet the needs of even one major power plant won't happen overnight, and could take as long as a decade.

"To get to the point where we are producing electricity for the grid just in Minnesota, it is probably going to take a couple of million acres, some projections go up to five million acres," says Bowen. "Right now, I would guess the industry produces enough seed to plant 50,000 acres in Minnesota."

Daryl Smith, Director of the Tallgrass Prairie Center in Iowa, estimates it would take 100,000 acres of prairie just to generate electricity for Cedar Falls, Iowa, a city of around 37,000. Less than 28,000 acres of prairie grow in the entire state of Iowa today.

"There's been a lot of questions about if biomass kicks in will there be enough seed available? In particular, local seed,"

Green Fuels, see page 10...

Bowen says.

Seed corn, which has been domesticated to within an inch of its life, can be produced in South America during winters in the Northern Hemisphere. But if native prairies are to remain native prairies, it's important that prairie plant seed match the local ecology. For instance, taking big bluestem grass that originated in Missouri and planting it in Minnesota may result in a prairie plot that's not as cold hardy. There are also concerns that non-local prairie seed will produce a different ecosystem, and simply not be the prairie nature intended.

Bowen and Smith say it's important to match seed to the local ecotype, but that the definition of what constitutes "local" may have to be loosened a bit if we are to increase prairie plantings significantly. One definition of what is "local seed" is something that originated within a 50-mile radius.

"This creates a huge challenge," says Bowen. "The smaller that circle gets, the more I say wait a minute, that's not practical. I've expanded that circle to a couple hundred miles when I obtain seed for plantings."

"I don't think you want to mix Utah seed with Iowa seed or Minnesota seed," Smith adds. "But purists are sometimes too narrowly focused. I think it's more important to match habitat type than geographic type."

Some compromises on how diverse restored prairies for biomass production are may be needed as well. The original native prairies that have never been plowed count the different species of grasses, legumes and forbs in the hundreds. Today, a more affordable restoration project consists of between a dozen and 20 species.

"We may need to accept a less than perfect prairie if we're going to get the growth we need for biomass," says Jim Falk, a farmer and seed dealer in western Minnesota. "Why wouldn't 15 species work as a start? If they get into a big argument about this, we will get nowhere."

One concern is that if some sort of compromise is not reached over issues such as local seed and diversity of prairies, the biomass industry will bypass diverse prairies and source their material from monocultures of say, switchgrass. A study out of Nebraska created a stir within the agriculture community earlier this year when it reported that switchgrass monocultures managed for high

yield (fertilizer applications, for example) produced 93 percent more biomass than diverse prairies receiving low inputs. A monoculture of high-yielding switchgrass may provide year-round cover to soil formerly left bare by row crops, but it will lack many of the other ecological services native prairies produce.

A waiting game

Even if the definition of "local seed" is expanded and less than perfect prairies are acceptable, a lot of seed must be produced and many acres planted and nurtured before these ecosystems can begin feeding the biomass industry.

Prairie seed propagation can be a



painstaking process. First, it must be collected from remnant native prairies—some no larger than a suburban backyard. Then each species must be raised as a monoculture in carefully managed plots. Once the cultivated plants produce seed, they can be made part of prairie mixes and planted. Establishing a prairie doesn't simply consist of tossing seed on bare ground. Whatever is growing on the land must be killed, generally with herbicides. If the land was planted to row crops such as corn, it's actually easier because of the absence of perennial weeds. If it's former pastureland or other perennial system, it can be tougher. Once the prairie seed is planted, usually with a no-till drill, weeds must be mowed. By the third year, a viable prairie can be established.

By the time prairies are established from the seedstock, it could be another three to seven years before there's enough prairie biomass available to supply several processing plants.

"You're talking about a 10-year window before you get anything," says Bowen.

That's a huge investment in time and

resources for an endeavor that may or may not have a processing/market system in place by the time the product is ready. Falk, who has 100 acres of native prairie that's never been plowed on his own farm, says seed dealers like himself would "jump on board" to supply a prairie plant biomass industry. But before taking such steps, the seed industry needs an assurance that some sort of viable market will be there. "If that commitment isn't there, it's going to be awful tough to take that gamble," says Falk.

It will also be a fair roll of the dice on the part of the farmers who would establish prairies on former crop acres. For one thing, it can cost anywhere from \$300 to \$400 per acre to get prairie established on old crop ground, depending on how diverse the seed mix is. The price can be as high as \$600 if it's in old pasture. Per-acre prices can range past the \$1,000 mark for very diverse mixes.

Getting little or no economic return from land for three years while prairie plants get established is next to impossible for most farmers to pull off. And when one considers that same land could be growing corn or soybeans, which are pulling down record prices these days, the draw of prairie hay gets even weaker.

But Bowen points out that once that prairie is established, it doesn't have to be re-planted each spring, and if managed properly, next to no inputs such as fertilizer are required.

"Getting a prairie established is expensive, but then you're done. Once it's planted, it's planted," he says.

Also, some shortcuts have been learned over the years in terms of getting prairies established. "It's not quite as much of an art as it once was," says Smith. "One thing we've learned is to mow the weeds that first year down to four or five inches so the sun-hungry prairie plants can get a good start. It used to be the recommendation was to mow at 10 inches, and weeds would shade out the prairie plants."

Bowen says one way to get some economic value off of land while transitioning it to prairie is to sow prairie seed and plant corn over it as a cover crop. The corn can be harvested in the fall and by next spring the prairie has gotten off to a good start.

Hauling hay

Another issue farmers have to deal with is harvesting and getting that

product to the processing plant. As anyone who has made hay can attest to, the bulky nature of forage makes it a very inefficient product to handle. One estimate is that in Minnesota, it doesn't make economic sense to haul biomass more than 50 miles from field to processing plant.

Several biomass processing plants have been proposed in the Midwest, and some are even creating energy from plant material on an experimental basis. But the bottom line is corn can be sold at the local elevator on any given day; prairie hay cannot. And if and when biomass processing plants get established, it will take some time before they are as ubiquitous and handy as the elevator in town.

"With bioenergy you need large volumes of hay and so we have all the problems associated with transporting hay," says Jason Hill, a research associate in the University of Minnesota's Department of Applied Economics. Hill has studied the economics of using diverse prairie ecosystems as sources of biofuels.

Eric Woodford, who operates a custom baling business in Minnesota's Redwood and Renville counties, has worked on biomass feasibility projects in recent years. He says utilizing plant material for energy could be a huge market for custom balers such as himself. But it has to be a localized market in order for it to work, especially with today's rising fuel costs.

"The collection costs can be quite steep," he says. "Usually the limiting factor is how much feedstock can be collected in a certain radius. With fuel prices going up, it could become not feasible."

Researchers have studied more efficient ways of transporting forage to processing plants. It turns out large rectangular bales, as opposed to round bales, increase transportation efficiencies significantly. Even better, says Hill, is increasing the density of the material through cubing or pelleting. Portable pellet mills are on the market today and Hill says they could be transported from farm-to-farm to process the prairie hay, much like threshing machines did a century ago. There is even talk of using a process called pyrolysis to heat the biomass in a portable microwave-type apparatus, creating a liquid substance that would be easier to handle. Farmers in a community could pool resources and buy or lease such equipment.

"There is almost inherently a need for cooperative work in this area," says Hill.

How much cutting can it take?

One other key issue to address is how often prairie lands can be harvested for biomass without being depleted. Sure, bison harvested prairie plants for centuries. But they also returned nutrients to the soil via their manure, and in some cases didn't come back to the same spot to graze for a couple of years.

If an entire prairie plot is cut every year, there's the possibility that nutrients will be so depleted that fertilizer will need to be added to the land. That adds to the expense the farmer has already taken on of establishing the prairie, and negates one of the environmental pluses of such a system: fewer chemicals.

"In our particular instance, I do not think it would work," says Brad Hodgson, who, along with his wife Leslea, raises beef cattle on grass in southeast Minnesota. The Hodgsons attended two focus groups last year on prairie plant-based biofuels. "If you take all that matter off and burn it, you're losing all that nutrient content and you become reliant on inputs again. You're right back in the situation of mining off minerals again."

Prairie experts concede they're not sure what will happen if prairies are harvested every year. Another concern is harvest timing: is it better to harvest in the fall, or wait until the following April when wildlife no longer need the prairie plants for winter shelter and feed?

The Tallgrass Prairie Center's Smith says harvest frequency and timing are two of the areas his researchers are examining in a project launched this spring. The Center planted 100 acres of prairie on former corn ground and is hoping to replicate as closely as possible what a real farm would face when undertaking such an enterprise, all the way to transporting it to a stoker furnace in Cedar Falls, 20 miles away.

One area Smith and his colleagues are investigating is how to get multiple uses out of prairie plots, something farmers have shown a lot of interest in. He says one strategy could be to harvest a prairie plot for biomass one year, and graze it the next, or harvest/graze part of the plot each year in a rotational pattern (wildlife experts recommend cutting/grazing in alternating blocks, rather than strips to provide more safe habitat for animals). Established prairies could also produce other sources of income through fee hunting or carbon credits.

Egging it on

In the end, prairie-based biofuel production faces the ultimate "chicken or the egg" quandary. Economists have another term for it: "the coordination problem."

Getting a new industry started from scratch won't be solved by simply building a bunch of processing plants, or, for that matter, establishing millions of acres of prairie. A bioenergy company doesn't want to take the risk of building a biomass plant without the assurance of a consistent supply. And in turn, seed producers, farmers and even custom balers and haulers can't afford to invest in this new venture without a consistent market. Corn ethanol didn't have a coordination problem to this extent—corn was already being raised for livestock and other uses when ethanol came along. The ethanol industry simply soaked up the excess corn at first, and then later, when farmers saw there was money to be made raising extra product, provided the incentive for more to be raised.

"We have all these systems that need to shift and they need to shift together," says Nick Jordan, a University of Minnesota crop/weed ecologist who is researching perennial plants and biofuels.

That's why if society decides an energy system based on perennial polycultures is worth getting off the ground, it needs to prime the pump in a coordinated fashion.

In Minnesota such an opportunity was missed during the last Legislative session, when lawmakers failed to pass funding for an initiative called Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)-Clean Energy (see page 12). This program would help farmers establish diverse native prairies for biomass production. RIM-Clean Energy would pay farmers a percentage of the market rate for biomass during the contract period. Just as importantly, it would make payments to farmers in areas where biomass energy facilities are already being proposed. Payments would also be targeted at watersheds where getting more perennial plants on the land would provide the most environmental bang for the buck.

On the bright side, RIM-Clean Energy still exists as a program, and could get off the ground in the future if the Legislature and Governor decide to fund it.

"The Legislature really missed a key opportunity to send a signal to the market and the public in general that energy production based on perennial systems is important," says Falk, the seed dealer. "Given how long it takes just to propagate prairie seed, we can't afford to miss many more opportunities like this." □

2008 Minnesota legislative wrap-up

EDITOR'S NOTE: The 2008 Minnesota Legislative session adjourned on May 18. Land Stewardship Project members made a difference during the session promoting policies that help family farmers and stewardship of our land. And as always, LSP was vigilant on the issue of local democracy and township rights and defeated attempts to weaken these powers. Below is an overview of LSP's key work during the session.

Livestock Improvement Grant

A family-sized livestock operation can accomplish a lot with \$4,000—renovate several acres of pasture or retrofit a milking parlor, for example. But a proposal before the 2008 Minnesota Legislature would have originally required farmers to spend \$40,000 before they could qualify for a program that would provide grants for



improvement of livestock operations. The grant would be equal to 10 percent of the value of the improvements made, with a cap of \$500,000. Thus, a farmer spending \$40,000 on improvements would be eligible for a \$4,000 grant.

Such a high threshold, says LSP Policy Program organizer and livestock farmer Paul Sobocinski, would have put this program out of reach for many family farmers in Minnesota. Plus, since the program is first-come, first-served, the \$40,000 threshold would have drained the program's \$1 million budget, quickly limiting the program to 250 producers at a maximum.

"Having a high threshold puts small- and medium-sized farms, including those that are organic and sustainable, at a competitive disadvantage to large-scale livestock operations," says Sobocinski.

That's why LSP worked at the Legislature to lower the Livestock Improvement Grant Program's qualifying expenditure amount from \$40,000 to \$4,000. In addition, LSP was successful in making pasture improvements such as fencing, water lines and animal lane construction eligible for the grant program. On the House side, Rep. Aaron Peterson and Rep. Bud Heidgerken were instrumental in working with LSP to make these changes. On the Senate side, Sen. Gary Kubly, Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes and Sen. Dan Skogen were leaders in making this program more family farmer friendly.

Work on the Livestock Improvement Grant Program is an example of how LSP farmer-members were able to provide information to legislators that showed the benefits sustainable production systems can provide at relatively low cost. For example, University of Minnesota dairy scientist Dennis Johnson drafted a letter detailing how far just a few thousand dollars would go on a livestock grazing operation, while grass farmers Dave and Florence Minar presented information on how investment in sustainable farming systems can help the local community. Both Johnson and the Minars are members of LSP's State Policy Committee.

This work is in keeping with LSP's State Policy Platform position: "State incentives should give equal treatment to family farmers, including those who are using sustainable and organic systems. Tax credits, grant programs and payment incentives for farmers should give equitable treatment to family farmers and sustainable farming practices....The state must be careful to ensure that incentives are not tilted towards the largest producers, thus creating an uneven playing field."

Bioenergy

Unfortunately, decision makers at the Minnesota Capitol weren't as responsive to public needs when it came to creating an infrastructure of sustainable biofuels production. Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)-Clean Energy, is an initiative that would pay farmers to grow native perennials such as prairie grass for bioenergy. Moving biofuel production beyond row crops such as corn and soybeans is essential to addressing soil erosion, lowering carbon emissions and increasing net energy efficiency.

RIM-Clean Energy, which was supported by LSP, along with 46 other



conservation, wildlife and environmental groups, was authorized by the 2007 Minnesota Legislature. The mechanics of RIM-Clean Energy, which included a tiered system that tied increased plant diversity to higher payment amounts, were developed by this coalition during the summer of 2007. However, RIM-Clean Energy needed funding in 2008 to get it off the ground. LSP and the other groups sought \$46 million in bonding funds, which would provide for approximately 13,000 acres of native perennials on farmland.

Sen. Ellen Anderson, Chair of the Minnesota Senate's Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee, was an ardent supporter of the proposal. Early in the session, her committee recommended \$25 million in bonding. Unfortunately, Gov. Tim Pawlenty recommended only \$3.3 million, and the House of Representatives provided no funding. In the end, RIM-Clean Energy received no money.

However, biofuels from row crops got a boost when the Legislature passed and Gov. Pawlenty later signed into law a mandate that the amount of biofuels included in diesel fuel increase from 2 percent to 20 percent by 2015. Soybeans are the primary source of biodiesel.

LSP State Policy organizer Bobby King says the decision on the part of the Legislature and the Governor to increase the biodiesel mandate while zeroing out RIM-Clean Energy was particularly troubling given that biofuel demand is already increasing the planting of row crops on highly erodible land.

"We didn't take any real steps to move beyond row crops as sources of biofuel," he says. "In fact, we passed a biodiesel mandate that will increase the focus on row crops even more. You've got to create incentives for the kind of agriculture you want. We could have had RIM-Clean Energy on the ground this year and perennial crops being planted for bioenergy, but without incentives this will not happen."

Local Control

During the 2008 session, LSP worked with other groups such as the Minnesota Association of Townships and the Minnesota Farmers Union to ward off attempts to weaken local control in the state. One proposal pushed by development interests would have weakened the power of local governments to enact

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interim ordinances when unanticipated development projects such as factory farms, housing subdivisions or big box stores like Wal-Mart are proposed in a community. Interim ordinances allow local governments to put a temporary hold on proposed development while a community

takes stock and assesses what planning and zoning is needed to protect the area's quality of life. The proposed bill would have changed the law so that merely submitting a completed application for a permit exempted the proposal from being stopped by the interim ordinance.

King says such changes would have severely limited the rights of local citizens when they are caught off-guard by unanticipated and potentially harmful development.

"The problem is often the first time a township hears about one of these developments is when its proposers apply for a permit, so such a change in the law would put local residents at a huge disadvantage," says King.

LSP state policy committee member

U of M supports organic & sustainable ag programs

The University of Minnesota approved a plan in April that will create new resources and programs for sustainable and organic agriculture. This is the result of an overall increase in funding for agricultural research and outreach that the University received from the 2007 Minnesota Legislature (see the Summer 2007 issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*).

The Land Stewardship Project worked to secure funding for this work from the Minnesota Legislature and provided input to the University on how to effectively allocate it, meeting this winter with Beverly Durgan, Dean of University of Minnesota Extension, and Allen Levine, Dean of the U of M's College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences.

"This is an important investment in a quickly growing segment of agriculture that needs more research and outreach from the University," says Florence Minar, an organic dairy farmer in New Prague and member of the LSP's State Policy Committee. "Organic and

Alan Perish of Browerville in Todd County traveled to the Capitol to testify in opposition to the bill. Perish has been a township officer for over 20 years. Rep. Ken Tschumper, Vice-Chair of the Local Government Committee, worked with Committee Chair Rep. Debra Hilstrom to ensure that the bill was tabled and Rep. Hilstrom instructed the bill's backers to work with the townships and LSP to find a compromise that addresses concerns about weakening local control. Rep. Larry Hosch, the bill's author, also expressed strong interest in addressing concerns.

Sen. Steve Dille revived his efforts to pass a bill from 2007 that would undermine township rights. As introduced, Senate File 1402 attempted to press local units of government into adopting the "State's Livestock Production Policy." The bill also dictated to counties and townships how they must go about preserving farmland and open spaces.

"The Livestock Production Policy was created by Senator Dille in 2004 to promote more livestock, not more family farms," says Sobocinski. "Preserving farmland and open space is critical for rural Minnesota, but detailed requirements imposed by the state are not the appropriate way to address a complicated problem that varies from one area of the

state to the next."

Under pressure from LSP, the Minnesota Association of Townships, the Association of Minnesota Counties and the Minnesota Farmers Union, the bill was amended to take out any reference to the "State Livestock Policy," as well as any language that undermined township and county rights. The bill did create a task force to look at the issue of preserving farmland. LSP will be watching to see that the task force's recommendations don't negatively affect local control.

"We need to address the issue of preserving farmland, along with the issue of access to farmland, especially for beginning farmers, so this task force could provide some good ideas," says Sobocinski. "LSP is willing to work with Senator Dille and other key legislators on this issue, but protecting farmland and open spaces does not mean weakening local control." □

For more information on LSP's state policy work, e-mail Bobby King at bking@landstewardshipproject.org, or Paul Sobocinski at sobopaul@redred.com. More information is also available by calling LSP's Policy and Organizing Program at 612-722-6377.

sustainable agriculture production systems are attracting new farmers and new students to study agriculture, while helping existing farmers stay in business."

Many of Minnesota's small- and medium-sized crop and livestock operations are searching for markets that fit their systems in order to remain profitable. Sustainable and organic production offers that potential. However, there are challenges to profitable sustainable and organic production that the University can be a leader in addressing.

"The University is committed to meeting the needs of all of agriculture and that includes sustainable and organic farming," says Durgan. "There are growing opportunities in sustainable and organic agriculture, and we want to help Minnesota be a leader in realizing this potential."

According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, "organic farming has been one of the fastest growing segments of U.S. agriculture for over a decade." Minnesota is a leader in organic production. Economic Research Service data

shows that in 2005, Minnesota was fourth in the nation in organic cropland and fifth in the number of organic farms.

"Organic food and agriculture is growing quickly and the University wants to provide the science needed to support that growth," says Levine.

The new resources for sustainable and organic agriculture includes:

- Establishing a faculty position at the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences focused on organic and sustainable food systems.
- Making the alternative livestock coordinator position at the University an ongoing position within University of Minnesota Extension. This position has helped provide critical assistance and information to farmers raising livestock.

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→ Establishing a faculty position at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton devoted primarily to organic crops.

→ Providing funding for two or more graduate assistantships for organic research and extension.

→ Establishing an organic dairy herd at the West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris.

In addition, Deans Levine and Durgan are exploring the creation of an Organic Advisory Task Force comprised of organic farmers, University faculty engaged in organic research and outreach, and members of the organic business community.

Rep. David Bly of Northfield, a leader at the Legislature in passing the funding increase for sustainable and organic

agriculture, was pleased with the University's announcement.

"This is a good start on meeting the growing needs of organic and sustainable farmers," says Bly. "Consumers are demanding this food, paying a premium for it, and farmers are profiting. That's a model we want to promote." □

For more information on LSP's proposal for increasing support of organic and sustainable agriculture at the U of M, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/07/newsr_070809.htm. More information is also available by contacting LSP Policy organizer Bobby King at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

The public's right to know

By Doug Nopar

Throughout the organization's history, Land Stewardship Project members have engaged in the local county-level decision-making process to help protect what they hold dear: care of the land, clean water and air, the viability of the small- to mid-sized family farm, and the social and economic health of the rural community. Southeast Minnesota's Winona County has been central in these efforts. LSP opened its southeast Minnesota office in Lewiston, 12 miles west of Winona, in 1985. Early in our history, members spent three years advocating for and winning a soil erosion ordinance at the county level. The ordinance was designed to curb excessive erosion on the county's hilly agricultural land, all of which drains, eventually, to the Mississippi River.

From 1996 to 1998, LSP members worked to get the county to establish a feedlot ordinance to help stop the establishment of factory farms. That ordinance has been one of the strongest local ordinances in the Midwest. It includes public hearings on any feedlot proposal over 300 animal units and an animal unit cap that has prevented facilities over 1,500 animal units from even being considered.

The restrictions sought by LSP members, many of whom are active livestock producers, were intended to protect both the environment and the family farm. Armed with crop subsidies, cost-share assistance for manure pits and lagoons, and volume-based premiums from processors, factory farms have

already had a clear economic advantage for quite awhile, and their continued expansion puts small- and mid-sized farms at a competitive disadvantage. Additionally, factory farms' propensity to buy feed, machinery and other inputs outside of the local community puts a significant drain on the local rural economy.

Now in 2008, Winona County is undertaking a review of its land use ordinance. When county staff and their hired consultants proposed this past winter to circumvent public input and county board of commissioners decisions on feedlots ranging in size from 300 to 700 animal units, LSP members became alarmed. These citizens immediately got organized and began to speak out. They wrote letters, attended public meetings, organized a news conference and contacted their county board members.

Members were able to show the public the folly of the staff/consultants' plan and to show that it was an attempt to skirt democracy and replace the role of the county planning commission and county board of commissioners with an internal staff technical review team. LSP member Barb Nelson lives just outside of Lewiston. In 2005, her drinking water and that of two other neighbors was detrimentally affected due to a dairy manure spill on the ridge above her home. Her primary concern with the consultants' proposal was the loss of democratic process. "We're losing our democracy here with this proposal, and we know that when you give that up, it's hard to get it back," she says.

LSP member Kaye Huelskamp has lived in Warren Township outside of

Lewiston since 1979. Her home is a half-mile from a 2,100-hog confinement facility that was constructed in 2005. Air quality for neighboring farms and homes has been compromised ever since the facility became operational. Her concern about the consultants' proposal was that it would allow a livestock facility with as many as 2,300 finishing hogs (up to 300 pounds) or 14,000 nursery pigs (up to 55 pounds) to be established within 1,000 feet of neighbors without a vote by the county board. Her message was clear: "Don't eliminate the input of our county commissioners and silence the voice of their constituents."

LSP member Darline Freeman is from the St. Charles area, where several factory hog farms have been established in the last 10 years. "We elected our commissioners to help protect the environment, protect the water and the air," she adds. "We've got to keep that kind of accountability."

Greg Erickson is a Lewiston dairy farmer that milks 100 cows and is also an LSP member. A member of the Winona County planning commission, he has been a strong critic of factory farms. He says, "Ultimately, the public needs a platform to voice their concerns, and we need a vote [on these facilities] by the commissioners."

The steady drumbeat of these kinds of comments quickly began to have an impact in the community. On March 4, the *Winona Daily News* editorial board wrote: "Putting any government process out of the public spotlight might expedite government, but it also takes away a

Winona County, see page 15...

critical function of the public: the right to know what's happening as the county conducts business on the public's behalf. And it eliminates the right to go on the public record with objections. We hope the idea . . . is nixed by the county board as soon as possible." Soon, by unanimous consent, the county board agreed to keep public hearings and county board votes on facilities over 300 animals units. While final votes on the land use ordinance are not expected until later this summer, LSP members' active involvement in these Winona County proceedings showed the importance of nipping a bad idea in the bud. □

Doug Nopar is an LSP Policy Program organizer based in southeast Minnesota. He can be reached at 507-523-3366 or dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org.

Show your support for local democracy

You can display your support for township democracy with the Land Stewardship Project's new bumper sticker. It features the words, "Grassroots Democracy & Local Control: Stand Up For MN Townships" in eye-catching red, white and blue. For information on getting a bumper sticker, contact LSP's Policy Program at 612-722-6377. □

Township manual

When a Factory Farm Comes to Town: Protecting Your Township From Unwanted Development is a Land Stewardship Project publication designed to help townships begin the process of creating zoning ordinances that reflect their local values and land use needs.

It's available at no charge at www.landstewardshipproject.org/PDF/township_manual06.pdf. Paper copies can be purchased for \$8 (that price includes the 6.5 percent Minnesota state sales tax) by calling LSP's Policy Program at 612-722-6377. □

The effects of strong permitting

The number of dairy farms in Minnesota continues to decline at an alarming rate. Interestingly, recent statistics from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture show that southeast Minnesota counties with strong permitting requirements for larger scale livestock facility expansion have lost fewer dairy farms than neighboring counties with more lax requirements.

Houston County	# of dairy farms in 2003: 120 # of dairy farms in 2007: 114	% decrease: 5%	Conditional use permit required for over 300 animal units
Winona County	# of dairy farms in 2003: 256 # of dairy farms in 2007: 226	% decrease: 13%	Conditional use permit required for over 300 animal units
Wabasha County	# of dairy farms in 2003: 210 # of dairy farms in 2007: 175	% decrease: 20%	No conditional use permits required
Olmsted County	# of dairy farms in 2003: 131 # of dairy farms in 2007: 108	% decrease: 21%	Conditional use permits required for over 1,000 animal units
Fillmore County	# of dairy farms in 2003: 180 # of dairy farms in 2007: 145	% decrease: 24%	Conditional use permits required for over 500 animal units

Sources: Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 2003 & 2007 Livestock County Estimates; feedlot regulations for Wabasha, Winona, Houston, Fillmore and Olmsted counties

Help needed to fight illegally permitted Mower County factory farm

In the autumn edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter* we reported on how the Mower County feedlot officer issued himself a county permit for a 4,800-sow hog factory, obtained the state permits, and then in essence sold the permit for \$292,000 to interests connected to Holden Farms, Inc. Holden Farms, of Northfield, Minn., is one of the largest operators of factory farms in the country.

To date the only official action taken is that in negotiations with the county the Mower County feedlot officer has agreed to an early retirement. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), which oversees feedlot permitting in the state, has been engaged in an ongoing investigation but has yet to take any action. Frustrated with the MPCA's lack of action, neighbors have written MPCA Commissioner Brad Moore outlining actions the MPCA should take to address the situation. A copy of the letter can be found at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/mpca_mower_letter.pdf. We are asking LSP members to read it and then contact Commissioner Moore and urge him to take action on this letter.

He can be contacted at:

Brad Moore, Commissioner, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55155-4194. You can also e-mail him at brad.moore@pca.state.mn.us.

Contribute to legal fund

Neighbors to the Mower County factory farm have challenged the issuance of the county feedlot permit in court. The Minnesota Attorney General and Environmental Quality Board both weighed in on the side of the citizens. Despite this, a District Court judge ruled against the neighbors. The citizens are appealing the ruling. The Attorney General has joined the appeal by requesting to file a friend of the court brief on the side of the citizens. This prolonged legal fight has cost thousands of dollars and neighbors are struggling to raise funds. You can help by making a donation to the legal fund.

Checks should be made out to "Mower County Citizens for Positive Change" and mailed to: LSP, 2919 East 42nd St., Minneapolis, MN 55419.

LSP advances building blocks in the 2008 Farm Bill

By Mark Schultz & Adam Warthesen

Earlier this year, the 2008 Farm Bill became law when Congress voted to override President Bush's veto. While we remain convinced that more far-reaching and fundamental reform is needed, especially with regard to current commodity policy and the concentration of corporate control in our food and agriculture system, this Farm Bill is an improvement over the law it replaced. Key gains were made that will assist farmers who are working to improve stewardship of the land, help beginning farmers get started successfully and support the further development of local and regional food systems (see sidebar on page 17). In each of these gains, two things are true:

- 1) They are building blocks, in policy and in practice, for more fundamental reform towards a more sustainable food and agriculture system.
- 2) LSP as an organization played an instrumental role in winning them.

LSP members made a difference

Thousands of people took action during this Farm Bill debate through LSP. Members made calls, sent letters, talked to journalists, came to meetings, participated in fly-ins or met directly with members of Congress. And while LSP worked closely with allies in the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, in particular, our engagement in federal policy work was effective, in-depth, timely, and unrelenting because of our members' participation.

Outlined here are a half-dozen highlights of LSP's role in securing sustainable agriculture and family farm gains in the Farm Bill:

I. January 25-26, 2007: LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee retreat. Previous to this retreat, LSP had conducted education-to-action organizing meetings with members, issued and tabulated farmer surveys, consulted with allied organizations and met face-to-face

with members. This work built an LSP platform of Farm Bill reforms. During the January 2007 retreat, LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee drew on that platform and prioritized three major LSP areas of concentration for the 2008 Farm Bill: 1) beginning farmer initiatives; 2) the Conservation Security Program; and 3) policies to support the development of local and regional food systems.

The retreat was marked by in-depth discussion and debate, and resulted in an effective, strategic plan. Since that time, 90 percent of LSP's federal policy work has focused on advancing these three priorities. Committee members who played key roles throughout the Farm Bill campaign include: Bill Gorman, Goodhue, Minn.; Dan Specht, McGregor, Iowa; Jeff Klinge, Farmersburg, Iowa;

Farm Bill report card, fact sheet, statement

For more on LSP's analysis of the 2008 Farm Bill, including a Farm Bill Report Card, Statement on Congressional Passage and a new fact sheet that outlines the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_federal_policy.html.

Patty Wright, Prairie Farm, Wis.; Matt Urch, Viroqua, Wis.; Greg and Kayla Koether, McGregor; and Paul Sobocinski, Wabasso, Minn.

II. February 19, 2007: LSP meets with House Agriculture Committee member Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN). Over 45 LSP members packed LSP's Lewiston office for our first in-district meeting with Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN). Six different leaders presented on LSP's Farm Bill priorities. The meeting helped our organization to build a relationship with Walz. Subsequently, the Representative helped champion key beginning farmer and working lands conservation measures in the House version of the Farm Bill.

III. March 6-8, 2007: 17 LSP farmers and leaders participated in the

"Roots to Reform" fly-in to Washington. In LSP's biggest ever fly-in effort, 17 of our members from four states participated in the 70-farmer fly-in organized by the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. During the fly-in, LSP farmers and other leaders held 20 meetings with different Congressional offices. LSP members met face-to-face in key meetings with House Agriculture Chair Collin Peterson (D-MN) and Senate Agriculture Chair Tom Harkin (D-IA), who was the strongest proponent of the Conservation Stewardship Program.

IV. March 28, 2007: LSP testifies in Washington before the U.S. House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy and Research. On invitation from the House Agriculture Committee, LSP's Farm Beginnings® program director Karen Stettler testified on the reforms needed to help beginning farmers overcome barriers to getting started and succeeding in farming. We then contacted the media, and got major coverage regionally and nationally for beginning farmer issues. The testimony and the coverage helped establish beginning farmer issues as a key component for the Farm Bill to address. Later that spring, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act was introduced in both bodies of Congress. The act, which was the basis of many of the beginning farmer gains in the new bill, was authored by Harkin and Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-SD). Key co-sponsors included Walz and Betty McCollum (D-MN) in the House, as well as Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) in the Senate.

V. June 22, 2007: LSP holds key meeting with House Agriculture Chair Peterson. In late June, the U.S. House Agriculture Committee was completing its version of the Farm Bill. In a key meeting with LSP's Mark Schultz and Adam Warthesen, Congressman Peterson committed to securing \$15 million per year in mandatory funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP). This proved to be a critical juncture, given that the Senate Farm Bill released in October included no funding for BFRDP. In the end, Peterson held true to his word and \$75 million was dedicated to BFRDP in the 2008 Farm Bill.

LSP played a vital role in helping secure this support in the Farm Bill and

Farm Bill, see page 17...

now it's likely that in 2009, \$18 million will be available to organizations and networks that provide education and assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers. In the same meeting, Congressman Peterson agreed to support mandatory funding for the Value-Added Producer Grants initiative (also zeroed out in the Senate bill). He also agreed to place lower payment limits on Environmental Quality Incentives Program grants.

VI. May 22, 2008: Congress passes the 2008 Farm Bill with veto-proof margins. After an in-depth discussion by LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee,

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How a program is implemented and used can have just as much to do with its overall success as actual passage.

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LSP supported passage of the 2008 Farm Bill. While not nearly enough was done to curb many of the problems such as the unfairness of the commodity title, reverting to the 2002 Farm Bill (the most likely scenario) would have been a major step backwards for sustainable agriculture, care of the land, hungry people and family farmers.

In key districts LSP worked to encourage a yes vote for passage in an attempt to successfully override a Presidential veto. For example, Rep. David Obey (D-WI) opposed the 2002 Farm Bill. LSP members in the district contacted his office to urge a yes vote and provide the rationale for why they supported the bill. Federal Farm Policy Committee member Patty Wright, who farms in Obey's district, heard back directly from congressional staff that those calls and perspectives from constituents were important factors in the Congressman's decision to support the bill.

Passing policy isn't enough

While it's exciting to see that the 2008 Farm Bill contains some gains for family farmers and sustainable agriculture, words on a page aren't enough. How a program is implemented and used can

have just as much to do with its overall success as actual passage. So, just as LSP has worked hard to attain gains in the 2008 Farm Bill, we will put the same kind of effort into making sure these funds and policies really do help the people and communities they're meant to help.

LSP has begun that work on BFRDP. In our "Quick First Step" strategy, we're already working with community-based beginning farmer programs across the country to make sure BFRDP is fully implemented. We are also working to make sure it supports the training, education and mentoring of the next generation of America's family farmers in a way that optimizes their potential to farm success-

fully and to become a critical part of local and regional food systems.

But again it's going to take member support, engagement and insight to make a difference as we continue to work for stewardship of the land and a better food and agriculture system. If you'd like to help out, contact LSP's Policy and Organizing Program. □

Mark Schultz is LSP's Policy and Organizing Program Director. He is also the Director of Programs and Associate Director. Adam Warthesen is an LSP Policy Program organizer. They can both be reached at 612-722-6377.

A quick look at gains in the Farm Bill

Here's a brief summary of the gains secured in the 2008 Farm Bill due to the work of the Land Stewardship Project:

→ **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP).** Congress passed, with \$75 million in funding, strong policy to help new farmers and ranchers launch their enterprises successfully. BFRDP will support community-based organizations in providing beginning farmer training, mentoring, education and assistance. LSP played a pivotal role, working in particular with House Agriculture Chair Collin Peterson (D-MN) and Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN), in winning this victory. BFRDP is key in that for the first time we have the opportunity to use public funds to work through community-based organizations to provide training, education, community support and mentoring to the next generation of America's farmers.

→ **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).** What used to be called the Conservation Security Program, CSP was strengthened and received \$4.67 billion over the next five years and \$12 billion over the next 10 years to help farmers practice effective conservation on working farmland. CSP will be available to farmers nationwide through annual state sign-ups with a goal of enrolling 13 million acres annually (since 2004 just 16 million acres have been enrolled in CSP).

As LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee member Bill Gorman says, "CSP is the basis for what future American farm policy should look like." As a program that rewards farmers for conservation outcomes, CSP provides an alternative to the commodity subsidy title and actually provides the public with results such as clean water, more abundant wildlife and less erosion.

→ **Local Food Initiatives.** Congress invested substantially in policies to support the development of local and regional food systems. For example, \$50 million was dedicated to the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program, an effort that supports local procurement of food as well as marketing relationships between farmers and consumers.

Also, \$15 million was dedicated to the Value Added Producer Grants Program (VAPG), which provides support to farmers and others who are working to increase the value of products raised on the farm. LSP was a key actor in not only securing funding for the VAPG program but also in new language to support "mid-tier" value chain proposals. These investments by Congress, while still not enough, are a good use of public resources towards a sustainable food system.

Other advancements

While the above bullet points represent gains LSP was integrally involved in, we also assisted in advancing stronger organics provisions and funding, the lifting of the prohibition on interstate shipment of meat from state-inspected small processing plants, a requirement that USDA establish criteria for what constitutes an "undue or unreasonable preference or advantage" violation of the Packers and Stockyards Act, good language on Country of Origin Labeling, and a new program area for classical plant and animal breeding within the National Research Initiative.

Farming the frost-line

Farm Beginnings is going to the edge of the North Woods, and some graduates have already blazed the way

Springtime in the North Country: when a person's fancy turns to fishing without drilling a hole through ice thick enough to crush a continent. But on this sunny day in late May, Karola and Rick Dalen have other forms of food procurement on their mind. They cross their driveway to an old dairy barn, turn the corner and walk into a greenhouse. The plastic-sheeted structure is attached to the barn's south side in an attempt to capture precious solar radiation just a few miles from Lake Superior's North Shore. Flats of vegetable seedlings are thriving in the warmth.

Beyond the barn are plots of vegetables, laid out on land with a slight roll to it. This is the fourth year the Dalens have raised vegetables for a living in the Duluth-Superior area, and they can hardly keep up with the demand. They operate Northern Harvest Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. Like other CSA farms, the operation sells shares to consumers before the season begins. In return, the shareholders get a weekly delivery of produce during the growing season.

A mile east of where their farm sits near the town of Wrenshall, another organic vegetable operation is thriving. A few miles west is an organic fruit operation. And scattered here and there in the area are farmers raising livestock on grass for direct sale to consumers. In fact, over three-dozen farms that produce food for local markets are listed in the Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association's 2008 *Local Farm Products*

Directory (see page 23). And they're all doing a brisk business.

"We've seen farmers almost hide from customers because they were being harassed by the high demand," says Karola. "There is definitely the consumer demand for local food."

Beginning farmers needed

And by default that means there's a



Karola and Rick Dalen started a CSA operation in northeast Minnesota after taking Farm Beginnings. They say working on an established CSA farm in the area helped them launch their enterprise. "If we didn't have that mentorship experience, I don't know how we would have made it," says Karola. (LSP photo)

demand for more beginning farmers willing to raise that food. That's why the Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association is launching a Farm Beginnings® program in the region this fall. Lake Superior Farm Beginnings is the latest version of the Land Stewardship Project's popular farmer development initiative.

During the past 11 years, LSP's Farm Beginnings has provided seminars, skills sessions and on-farm educational

programs to wannabe farmers from throughout the Midwest. As of 2008, over 300 people have completed LSP's Farm Beginnings course in the southeast Minnesota and western Minnesota areas, and 60 percent of the graduates are farming, making it one of the most successful beginning farmer initiatives in the country. In recent years, LSP has provided licenses for Farm Beginnings pilot programs in Nebraska, North Dakota and Illinois.

Now it's Lake Superior's turn to develop the next generation of farmers. As with other Farm Beginnings initiatives, at the core of the Lake Superior program will be a series of classroom sessions led by established farmers and other agricultural professionals. Cree Bradley, who is facilitating the new program, says the time is right for a beginning farmer initiative in the region,

which covers roughly 16 counties in northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin.

That may come as a surprise to people who associate the area with timber, shipping and recreation, which indeed are the biggest drivers of the economy. But Bradley says an informal food assessment of the region done in 2002 confirmed what the Dalens and other farmers have been experiencing firsthand: there is a huge demand for local food. The assessment, which consisted of interviews with farmers, consumers

and food businesses, found that farmers and food buyers were a bit like ships passing in the night.

"In every interview, the farmers said we need markets," recalls Bradley. "And in every interview with businesses the common thread was, 'We want to support these farmers—where are they?' We

Farm Beginnings, see page 19...



Tzeitel and Charlie Kersey, shown here with their daughter Alida, began their farming career on the outskirts of the Twin Cities. “There are advantages and disadvantages to every area,” says Charlie. (LSP photo)

...Farm Beginnings, from page 18

backed off of that and said, ‘Wow, we have much more demand than supply here.’ ”

Other signs of the demand are the Harvest Festival held in Duluth each September, which features local farmers and attracted around 9,000 people last year. Duluth’s St. Lukes Hospital has begun buying local foods, and Northland College in Ashland, Wis.—a 90-minute drive from Duluth, is committed to using local foods in its cafeteria.

But it also might surprise many that a region which suffers from a growing season fully one month short of southern Minnesota’s would have any kind of farming base to build on. It turns out

there is a significant foundation: literally. For signs of that look no further than the giant 80 x 30 foot “root cellar” sitting on the Dalen farm. Actually an above-ground bunker-like structure with earth bermed up on three sides, it was used as communal storage back in the day when the community of Wrenshall supplied much of Duluth’s cabbages and other vegetables. Just outside the root cellar is an old cabbage planter and a rusty, iron-toothed potato digger.

And the cool season grasses that thrive in the area served as the basis of a dairy industry in the region for many decades. In fact, many farmsteads still have small beef herds that make use of the grass.

“Every barn you see is an old dairy barn,” says Karola.

There are challenges to raising food in

the area. But farmers have adjusted by utilizing greenhouses and hoop structures to extend the season as well as adapting shorter season varieties of vegetables.

Of course, like many places throughout the Midwest, farming has declined in the Lake Superior region in the last several decades. Many farmsteads have become “hobby farms” or are abandoned altogether.

Bradley says besides the newer group of farmers in the area who are raising organic and sustainable products and marketing them locally, there are still conventional farmers who raise traditional crops and livestock. Both groups will serve as important resources for the Lake Superior Farm Beginnings program.

“I think Farm Beginnings is going to help open a dialogue between established farmers and new farmers,” says Bradley, who operates a CSA farm with her husband Jason near Two Harbors, 26 miles north of Duluth along the Lake Superior shore. “It can be a hard community to approach, but I think the seriousness of Farm Beginnings will help open up the community.”

Indeed, the new Farm Beginnings program has already cultivated a good relationship with the University of Minnesota Extension branches in the region, as well as businesses like the Carlton Feed Mill.

Beginning farmer germ

Part of the spark for the latest Farm Beginnings program comes from a small group of graduates who took the course in the southern part of the state and then began farming in the Lake Superior area. In a sense they inoculated the region with the idea that given the right training, networks and passion, someone can launch a farming enterprise from scratch.

The Dalens, both are 28, took the class three years ago after learning about sustainable agriculture as students at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. “In college I learned a lot about the problems with the world but not a lot about solutions, and I thought farming would be a good way to do something about the problems,” says Rick Dalen while taking a break from spring vegetable planting.

Twice a month during the winter of 2004-2005, the Dalens made the six-hour round trip to New Prague, Minn., to take the course. They say the course’s emphasis on Holistic Management and good financial planning really helped them as

Lake Superior Farm Beginnings deadline Aug. 15

Lake Superior Farm Beginnings classes begin Oct. 25, and will run every couple of weeks until March. They will be held at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in Cloquet, Minn. Up to 12 on-farm educational events will be held from April until August.

Applications for the class are due Aug. 15, and space is limited to 20 par-

ticipants. A limited number of scholarships are available and are needs-based.

To get an application or for more information, contact Cree Bradley at 218-834-0846 or cree@lakesuperiorfarming.org. More information is also available at www.lakesuperiorfarming.org.

Farm Beginnings, see page 20...

they got their own operation started.

“It was good to focus on where do you want to go with your life, rather than just

members in the CSA. The operation, which is certified organic, also sells vegetables to Whole Foods Co-op and Chester Creek Cafe, both in Duluth.

As the Dalens leave the greenhouse and inspect their garden plots, Karola

have made it.”

Urban back 40

Another fellow northland farmer, Katie Hanson, says Farm Beginnings exposed her to different ways of raising food, as well as where to produce that food.

“It opens your mind to all the things you could do,” she says. “Getting together with all these people who are making a living at it helped. I think that’s what kept me on that path. There’s a lot of pressure not to stay on that path.”

Hanson, 29, took Farm Beginnings in 2005-2006 while she was living in the Twin Cities. In 2004 she worked on Rock Spring Farm, a CSA operation in southeast Minnesota operated by Chris and Kim Blanchard, who are regular presenters on financial management at Farm Beginnings classes.

“I learned a ton working on a farm that planned for profit,” says Hanson.

Hanson fell in love with the north country six years ago while working on the Gunflint Trail as a guide and food service coordinator, but had become concerned about how dependent the region was on imported food. “You think a place like the Boundary Waters is a perfect ecosystem, but it’s really not that sustainable to be dependent on places and systems so far away just to fulfill basic needs—like

food,” Hanson says. She adds that she became convinced that locally produced food was key to creating an environmentally and economically balanced community.

After Farm Beginnings, she returned to the area and started a small, five-member CSA on some land owned by a friend. That went well but Hanson knew that access to land would always be a barrier. She used the brainstorming skills she had picked up in Farm Beginnings to take a creative approach to growing food: the backyard farming concept. Based on an initiative made popular by two women in Portland, Ore., it consists of Hanson selling shares to homeowners in Duluth. In return she and her business partner Francois Medion plant, maintain and harvest gardens in the backyards of the subscribers. The shareholders get fresh produce throughout the growing season.



Farm Beginnings graduate Katie Hanson is dealing with a common bugaboo of beginning farmers—lack of land—by raising food in other people’s backyards. Farm Beginnings “opens your mind to all the things you could do,” she says. (photo by Cree Bradley)

where do you want to go with your business,” says Rick. “The whole Holistic Management puts you in the driver’s seat. You don’t have to do a certain thing because it’s the way it’s been done. It gives you the leverage to problem solve.”

“I’m okay not having a lot of things but I didn’t want to struggle from day-to-day,” says Karola. “The financial planning training in Farm Beginnings has given me a lot of comfort—I learned it’s not a prerequisite that you have to be poor to be a farmer.”

After graduating from Farm Beginnings, the Dalens worked with John and Jane Fisher-Merritt on Food Farm, a CSA/wholesale vegetable operation with a long history in the Wrenshall area. The Fisher-Merritts loaned the Dalens equipment and expertise, and allowed the couple to set up a mini-CSA on Food Farm land. In 2006, they bought 33 acres a mile from Food Farm and made that plot of land the permanent home for Northern Harvest. Today, they have 56

points out a small swell in the land where an orchard is going in. Other plans include growing the CSA to around 100 members. The Dalens did not come from farming backgrounds and they say the Farm Beginnings/Food Farm experience was integral to getting them started on the land. Even the successful purchase of the farm hinged on their recent relationship with the educational program and farm. The original parcel was 70 acres, and the Dalens negotiated with the owner for two to three months before he agreed to sell them the 33 acres. The landowner was hesitant to break up the land holding, but eventually did because it was his family’s farm and he was excited to see that the Dalens were going to keep it in agriculture.

“He definitely put up with us in the negotiations because we were going to keep it as a farm,” says Karola. “That’s why I’m so excited about Farm Beginnings. If we didn’t have that mentorship experience, I don’t know how we would

Their business, called “Boreal Scapes,” has six subscribers in its inaugural season. Hanson is also the program coordinator for the Duluth Community Garden Program and works part-time at a restaurant that serves local food; her husband, Scott, works as a jeweler.

The plots range in size from 100 square feet to 500 square feet, with most being around 300 square feet. It’s a variation on the CSA farming/marketing model, where farmers sell shares in their operations. But Hanson and Medion are taking the concept one step further by producing the food in gardens owned by the shareholders—making the connection between consumer and food even more intimate.

Although her first growing season with the new venture has barely taken root, Hanson has already learned a lot, such as that people want their backyard gardens to look good as well as produce the kinds of vegetables they will eat. That’s why it’s been valuable to combine Hanson’s agronomic experience with Medion’s background in landscaping.

Hanson has also seen that this type of CSA can help people learn how to make their community more self-sufficient in food—something she feels is a necessity in an era of high energy prices.

“What I figured out going through the whole farm planning process in Farm Beginnings is what I really like is working on the small scale, getting my hands on it, the designing aspect of it, and teaching people how to do it themselves. Because that’s the key to long-term sustainability and self-sufficiency,” says Hanson. “Ideally we would work ourselves out of the job.”

Re-launching a CSA farm

Charlie Kersey has seen the benefits of bringing farmers together to discuss innovations. As a Peace Corps volunteer in Panama during the 1990s, he used farmer-to-farmer education to help spread the word about soil conservation.

Kersey, 38 is from Saint Paul and has a degree in cultural anthropology from Macalester College. But he caught the farming bug while in Panama and in 2000-2001 took Farm Beginnings.

“It totally made sense, especially for someone who doesn’t have any background in farming,” says Kersey as he gives a tour of La Finca (Spanish for “The Farm”), the CSA produce operation he and his wife Tzeitel run near Bruno.

Kersey says the best part about Farm Beginnings for him was that it was taught by established farmers dealing with real-world problems.

“That was what was most useful to me—people who were out in the field actually doing it,” recalls Kersey. “One farmer shared a real balance sheet with us.”

The Kerseys decided that for them the CSA model made the most sense, since it allowed them to get started with minimal resources. Also, they like knowing who they’re raising food for.

“Now people say stuff like I really like the way *you’re* farming,” says Charlie. “Just that connection with the people you’re growing food for is a very

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“I learned it’s not a prerequisite that you have to be poor to be a farmer.”

— Karola Dalen

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fulfilling part of the CSA.”

The Kerseys launched their farming career in the Twin Cities suburb of Lake Elmo, where an environmentally-conscious developer named Bob Engstrom had set up a CSA in the midst of a housing development. For four years Charlie and Tzeitel raised vegetables on the edge of the Twin Cities. It was a great way to get started with little financial risk, but they eventually decided they didn’t want to farm in the suburbs.

In 2003 they bought 40 acres near Bruno. The land had been part of a large beef operation, and the Kerseys spent three years getting the soil in condition to raise certified organic vegetables. In 2006 they re-launched their CSA. Today, La Finca sells around 375 shares total: they have 150 subscribers for the summer share, plus they sell pasture-raised

chicken shares and a fall vegetable share.

The Kerseys say it’s been a bit of an adjustment moving their farming operation further north. The shorter growing season can be a problem, plus the soil was more fertile in Lake Elmo. But they say they’ve been able to make adjustments, such as growing shorter season varieties of vegetables and using plant covers. Plus, their customers, most of whom live in the Twin Cities, see benefits such as getting vegetables in the middle of summer that have already played out on farms closer to the metro area.

“You can get beautiful broccoli in July,” says Charlie. “There are advantages and disadvantages to every area.”

On a recent afternoon in May, the Kerseys are experiencing the disadvantages of an unusually cold, wet spring. As he, Tzeitel and their 20-month old daughter Alida check out their fields, Charlie expresses frustration at how far behind everything is.

“Our salad mix took two weeks to germinate this year,” says Charlie, shaking his head. “I’ve never had stuff this far behind. But that’s farming. Once it heats up, stuff will really take off.”

Healthy competition

It’s that kind of practical optimism the Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association is hoping to nurture through Farm Beginnings, according to Bradley.

And if it does take off and starts churning out competition, the Dalens, for one, think their Farm Beginnings training may become even more critical to the long-term success of Northern Harvest. So far, the CSA farmers have not had to practice much marketing in the traditional sense, as free publicity and word-of-mouth has quickly filled up their subscription list each year.

“In 10 years there may be 15 CSAs in the area and we may have to change our marketing strategy,” Karola says with a laugh. □

LSP’s Farm Beginnings deadline Aug. 28

The Land Stewardship Project’s Minnesota-area Farm Beginnings program is accepting applications for its 2008-2009 class sessions, which will be held in the communities of Goodhue (south-east Minnesota) and Paynesville (St. Cloud, Minn., area).

The deadline for registration is Aug. 28; new course information is up on our website at www.farmbeginnings.org.

org. You can also get more information by contacting LSP’s Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or lsps@landstewardshipproject.org.

In recent years, Farm Beginnings courses have been launched in Illinois, Nebraska and North Dakota. Check the Farm Beginnings web page for details on those courses.

Farm Beginnings

Jon & Mindy Kaiser

A confidence builder

Hakon and Karen Torjesen are at that point in their lives where they'd like to do less of the daily management required to run a farm. He just turned 80 and she's in her early 70s, and they are quite active with a nonprofit organization that provides training to pediatric doctors overseas. All four of their adult children have their own careers. So a few years ago they went looking for a younger person to farm some of their 260 acres. One easy option was to simply rent it out to a large crop operation — their land lies in a part of southeast Minnesota's Goodhue County where prime corn and soybean acres are going for record high cash rents. But the couple didn't want to turn over their land's care to just anyone — it's been certified organic since 2002 and they wanted it to remain that way. And there was an added wrinkle: the Torjesens have raised corn, soybeans and oats on the land, but since becoming organic it's bothered them that there wasn't livestock on the property to cycle organic matter back into the soil (livestock had not been on the farm since the Torjesens bought it in 1991).

"It closes the loop to have livestock," says Hakon. "It makes the farm complete."

It turns out the Torjesens' search for a more sustainable way to be organic has provided a key opportunity for Jon and Mindy Kaiser. The Kaisers are beginning farmers who are hitting agriculture's version of the glass ceiling in the form of lack of access to land (see page 28). How the Torjesens and the Kaisers are working together to mutual benefit offers insights into how an older generation of landowners can provide a leg-up to beginning farmers while ensuring that the stewardship legacy they've built on their property is preserved and strengthened.

Bringing dairy back

When the Torjesens started looking at bringing livestock onto the farm, milk cows immediately came to mind. Karen grew up on a dairy farm, and both she and Hakon liked the idea of seeing the classic red barn utilized on the property.

They knew from talking to other

organic farmers in the area that it was tough for young organic producers to find access to land, what with high land prices and landowners leery of renting to someone who's doing things a little out of the mainstream. So they put the word out that they needed an organic livestock farmer. It was good timing for the Kaisers. For eight years they had been building an organic dairy herd on the farm of Dan and Muriel French in nearby



Dodge County. Jon did not grow up on a farm, but in 1998-1999 he took the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings® course. After graduation, he started sharemilking with the French family, and through that, as well as with the help of an interest-free livestock loan he obtained through Farm Beginnings, was able to develop an organic herd of 40 cows. Working with the Frenches was good

experience—Kaiser learned the basics of grass-based dairying, as well as how to market milk through the PastureLand butter and cheese co-op the Frenches belong to. But it was time for his family to take that next step and grow the herd to the point where they could afford to buy their own farm.

The Torjesens heard about the Kaisers through the informal organic farming network in the area and began discussing the possibility of them bringing their herd onto the farm. Hakon and Karen were very methodical in dealing with the Kaisers, asking for references and putting Jon through an interview process.

"It was like a job interview," recalls Jon. He applied for and received two USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans—an operating loan and one to buy livestock and machinery. After his business plan was reviewed by the FSA, a loan officer from the agency conducted a face-to-face interview with Jon. Hakon sat in on that discussion and got a sense of how thorough the young farmer's business plan was.

"Saying you want to farm isn't enough," says Jon. "I've talked to other people who want to farm who don't have a good business plan to make it cash flow. I learned how to do a good business plan through Farm Beginnings."

In 2006, the Kaisers and Torjesens agreed to a three-year cash lease on the farm, much of which is considered prime

Fresh Faces, see page 23...



Hakon Torjesen sought out organic dairy farmers Jon and Mindy Kaiser to bring livestock back to his farm. (LSP photo)

Farm Beginnings profiles on the Web

To read the original *Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming* profile of Jon Kaiser from 2004, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html. You'll also find on that page other profiles of Farm Beginnings graduates.

cropland. They set the base price of the lease based on the approximate average rental rates in the area at that time and built in a moderate annual increase: the rate was \$150 in 2007, is \$160 this year and will be \$170 in 2009. In light of what has happened to land prices and rental rates just within the past several months, putting a yearly ceiling on the lease rate has turned out to be a considerable financial break for the Kaisers.

"Since we set that price, the rents have gone wild. That was not a great donation on our part, that was just dumb business," Hakon says with a laugh. "We told Jon once he gets his feet under him, he will owe us one."

The Torjesens have done more than charge a reasonable rental rate. They agreed to help the Kaisers upgrade the farm so that cows could be milked and grazed on it. They considered building a new milking parlor, but instead opted to refurbish the old stanchion barn. The landowners agreed to pay for improving the structure of the building itself, while Kaiser purchased used milking equipment to re-tool the parlor.

"We wanted to keep Jon's risk low and our capital investment low," says Hakon of the decision not to build a new parlor.

The Kaisers rely on rotationally grazed pastures to produce organic milk, so the Torjesens applied for a USDA Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP) Program grant to install fencing on

around 76 acres.

The approximately \$10,000 in EQIP money covered half the cost of the fencing, and the Kaisers and the Torjesens split the balance. The Kaiser family—Mindy and Jon have three children—is also being provided housing on the farm. They live in the farm's original homestead, while the Torjesens live a half-mile away in a house they built on the other end of the farm when they bought it.

Today, the Kaiser dairy herd has grown to 45 cows and the certified organic milk is sold to Kemps. Jon and Mindy are renting 120 tillable acres in total. Besides grazing the land, they are also raising hay, barley and peas for feed. Jon says renting this farm has been a critical step for him as he heads toward his ultimate goal: building his herd to 90 cows and buying his own farm. The lease will run out in 2009, and Jon's not sure what will happen after that. Both he and Mindy are 39, and they are getting anxious to get their own place as their 40th birthdays lurk around the corner. She works at the Mayo Clinic south of

the farm in Rochester, Minn., and the couple would like to stay in the area, but Jon says they will need to stay flexible and be ready to move if the right opportunity comes up for buying a farm.

For the young farmer, already one side benefit of this experience has been the morale boost it's provided to have a landowner not only take him on as a renter, but to fork over money to help get the enterprise on its feet. While searching for farms to rent or buy, Kaiser has found that many conventional farmers don't feel a beginning farmer can make a go of it.

"When looking for a farm, I was told I couldn't make a living," he says. "People don't want to take that risk on a young farmer. I feel with my business plan I've been able to show that it does cash flow."

The Torjesens are happy they took the extra trouble to get young dairy producers onto the farm. They feel the land is benefiting, and the remaining acres they are now farming themselves is much more manageable. Hakon says once the lease is up in 2009, "all options are open," including renewing the lease or possibly selling part of the farm to the Kaisers.

"We'll just take one step at a time," says Hakon. "They have turned out to be wonderful renters. They have been absolutely on time with every payment, but we know times are tough. It's not guaranteed they'll make it, but I guess it does feel good to help out a beginning farmer. So far it's been a viable proposition for both of us. It worked for them and it worked for us." □

Food & Farm → → → → Connection

Dine Fresh Dine Local St. Croix River Valley Sept. 11

Dine Fresh Dine Local, a special, one-day culinary celebration of good, local food, will be held Thursday, Sept. 11, in St. Croix River Valley restaurants. During the event, Minnesota and Wisconsin eateries along the St. Croix River will feature menu items with ingredients sourced from Valley growers and processors. Food service providers in hospitals, nursing homes and schools are also invited to celebrate by serving local food on Sept. 11.

This event is co-sponsored by the St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Chapter (a program hosted by the Land

Stewardship Project), the River Market Community Co-op, Renewing the Countryside and the St. Croix Scenic Byway. For details, call LSP's Dana Jackson at 651-653-0618 or visit www.dinefreshdinelocal.com. □



Lake Superior Farm Products Directory

The Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association has developed a *Local Farm Products Directory* for the northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin region.

The *Directory* lists 38 farms and 23 farmers' markets where consumers can get fresh, local, sustainably-produced meat, dairy products, vegetables, fruit and various other items. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms are listed as well.

The *Directory* is available at www.lakesuperiorfarming.org. Paper copies are available by calling 218-393-3276 or e-mailing info@lakesuperiorfarming.org. □

Energy lessons from the coyote

By Terry VanDerPol

Anyone who has been grocery shopping or has tuned into the news knows that the cost of food is on a sharp increase. This is devastating for people around the world who spend a substantial amount of their income on food. And it is affecting low- and modest-income people in wealthy countries. It is also having a profound effect on agriculture, including on farmers who grow for local and regional food systems.

We've all heard the figures: 65 percent of the cost of food is fossil fuel, and our system expends about nine calories of energy to put one calorie of food on the plate. In some measure, the success of any population depends on its ability to efficiently use the energy available. A coyote will not be successful for long if it expends 2,000 calories of energy catching a 220-calorie rabbit. A coyote knows that. We, on the other hand, have been able to fool ourselves into thinking that does not apply to people by tapping into that ancient stored energy, fossil fuel.

The dramatic rise in the cost of fossil fuel is changing the way we think about energy and food. Local and regional food systems have a lot to offer by way of solutions to the problems created by the interdependence of the cost of fuel and of food. Whether we think of the cost of transporting food in terms of food miles, carbon footprint, or energy life cycle assessment, we need to "localize intelligently" for the local foods movement's potential to be realized.

How do we move the sustainably-

raised, good food we grow on our farms along primary routes to population centers *and* laterally to the villages and towns in our area? We have made great strides in maximizing the use of truly renewable sources of energy (e.g. sunlight) and minimizing the use of purchased, nonrenewable fuel (fossil fuel) in producing good food.

Now we're challenged to apply corollary principles of sustainability in the processing, transportation and distribution of the food. This requires smart supply aggregation, transportation and distribution systems and a fearless assessment of our farms' transaction costs. And, this is a challenge the Land Stewardship Project's Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program is stepping into.

We are collecting information about how farmers in western and southeastern Minnesota currently transport their products to markets. With the information we collect we will establish some baseline data about costs, existing transport capacity along various routes

and the potential to aggregate supply and piggyback loads to ensure a full and more efficient vehicle. We will also identify opportunities for backhauling to reduce costs.

We've already come up with some interesting data. A recent transportation survey conducted by LSP in southeast Minnesota found that the rising cost of fuel and the significant amount of travel time spent away from the farm were major problems associated with the transport and distribution of food products grown and marketed in the region. Farmers reported spending \$300 to \$40,000 annually to get their products to market; 80 percent of that transportation was with the farmers' own vehicles.

If you are in southeast Minnesota and would like more information on LSP's transportation and local foods work, contact Caroline van Schaik at caroline@landstewardshipproject.org or 507-523-3366. In western Minnesota, e-mail Tom Taylor at ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org or call 320-269-2105. □

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

'Haulers' List' available

A new "Haulers' List" compiled by the Land Stewardship Project features food transportation companies serving the Twin Cities/southeast Minnesota/western Wisconsin corridor.

The one-page document offers a snapshot of a limited number of transportation companies that are willing to work with small- and medium-scale producers. Telephone and e-mail information is included on the Haulers' List

so that producers can contact firms directly to explore transportation arrangements. The list is not exhaustive, and does not represent an endorsement of any company that's included on it.

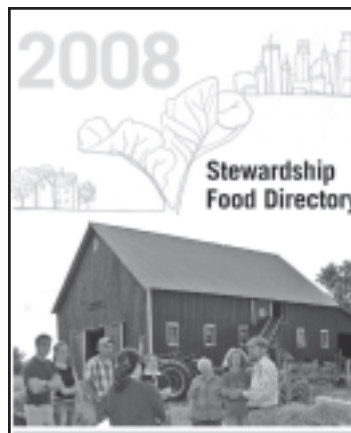
The listing is now available in pdf format at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/se_haulers_list.pdf, or by contacting Caroline van Schaik in LSP's Lewiston office at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

LSP Stewardship Food Directory

The Land Stewardship Project's newly updated *Stewardship Food Directory* (formerly known as the *Stewardship Food Network*) is now available.

This resource lists farmers and retailers who are members of LSP and who provide locally-produced vegetables, fruit, meat, dairy products, grains and other food items to area consumers.

The *Directory* is categorized by region



as well as food items. Over 130 farms and 20 retail establishments are listed. Contact information and the various ways food can be obtained (on-farm pick-up, farmers' markets, direct delivery, etc.) are included in the *Stewardship Food Directory*.

The 21-page listing is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/foodfarm-main.html#sfd or by contacting one of LSP's offices. □

Ennis leaves FA

Jim Ennis has stepped down as Director of Food Alliance Midwest to become Executive Director of the



Jim Ennis

National Catholic Rural Life Conference. Ennis has headed up Food Alliance Midwest since it was established in 2000 by the Land Stewardship Project and Cooperative Development Services. Before helping launch Food Alliance

Midwest, Ennis had

extensive experience working in the food industry.

“Jim understood how to bring family farmers and the values of sustainable agriculture into useful connection with food businesses involved in distribution, food service and retailing,” says George Boody, LSP’s Executive Director. “He has done so with integrity and passion.”

Food Alliance Midwest Business Development Manager Bob Olson will serve as the group’s interim director.

“Food Alliance Midwest is in good shape,” says Olson. “We have a strong core of certified farmers, and Jim’s departure presents an opportunity for reflection and evaluation. In the coming months we will be collecting data about Food Alliance Midwest’s impacts in furthering the growth of sustainable agriculture.” □

Gary Gilbertson remembered

Gary Gilbertson, a Food Alliance certified farmer and Land Stewardship



Project member, died unexpectedly of a heart attack on March 29. He was 54. Besides his wife Annette, Gary is survived by three children: Mark, Melisa and Carol.

Gilbertson raised vegetables and flowers with his family near Scandia, just east of the Twin Cities. Their operation is across the road from the farm where Gary was born, which also served as the birthplace of his mother and grandmother. Gilbertson Farms became Food Alliance certified in 2001, and is well known in the area as a vendor at several area farmers’ markets, as well as for its use of sustainable production systems.

Over the years, Gary had worked hard to educate consumers about the importance of supporting local food production. Recently, the Gilbertsons had traveled to college and corporate campuses throughout Minnesota to serve roasted sweet corn while talking to students and employees about their farm.

In February, the Gilbertsons received the Food Alliance Midwest’s “Keeper of the Vision for a Sustainable Future” award for their leadership in developing supply and demand for sustainably-grown foods. During the award ceremony, then-Food Alliance Midwest Director Jim Ennis said the Gilbertsons, “embody sustainability and have been leaders for many years. They do a superb

job promoting and educating both growers and consumers about sustainable agriculture practices.” □

MN Cooks at 2008 State Fair

Chefs and consumers will come together with Food Alliance Midwest-certified farmers for a day of fresh, sustainably-produced food during the sixth annual Minnesota Cooks event Tuesday, Aug. 26, at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in Saint Paul. Cooking demonstrations and panel discussions involving chefs and farmers will take place throughout the day, beginning with a breakfast show at 8:30 a.m. The program will take place in Carousel Park, just west of the Grandstand Ramp.

Minnesota Cooks is sponsored in part by the Agricultural Utilization and Research Institute, and is co-presented by Food Alliance Midwest, Minnesota Farmers Union and Renewing the Countryside.

For more information, contact Food Alliance Midwest’s Jill McLaughlin at 651-209-3382 or jill@foodalliance.org. More information is also available at www.minnesotacooks.org. □



Twin Cities chef J.D. Fratzke is a frequent participant in Minnesota Cooks events. (LSP photo)

What is Food Alliance Midwest?

The Food Alliance seal certifies that a farm is producing food using environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices. Food Alliance certification is available for all crop and livestock products, including fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products and meat products.

Food Alliance Midwest, based in Saint Paul, Minn., was established in 2000 by the Land Stewardship Project and Cooperative Development Services.

It is the Midwestern affiliate of the Food Alliance, which is based in Oregon.

Food Alliance certified products are available for sale throughout the U.S. and Canada in natural food co-ops and grocery stores, as well as select restaurants and food service dining halls. For details on Food Alliance Midwest, including a list of stores that carry its products, visit www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs/mwfa.html, or call 651-265-3682.

Food Alliance is looking for farmers

Food Alliance Midwest is looking for farmers in the Upper Midwest who produce fruit, vegetables and livestock using sustainable methods and are interested in getting those methods certified. Details on what it takes to get certified by Food Alliance are at www.foodalliance.org/certification/index.html. More information is also available by calling 651-265-3682.



The Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook

Local Food, Local Restaurants, Local Recipes

Presented by Renewing the Countryside

Foreword by Garrison Keillor
2008; 160 pages
Voyageur Press
www.voyageurpress.com

Reviewed by Dana Jackson

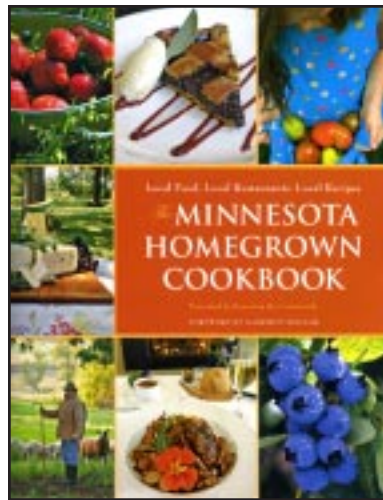
Joannides, whose Renewing the Countryside group helped make *The Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook* a reality, explains in the acknowledgments that a USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant to boost awareness of sustainably-grown foods supported production of the book. Thankfully the result isn't a dry grant report, but a work of interesting stories about cooks, farmers and processors illustrated with gorgeous photographs of people, land and food. The book presents all the usual good arguments for why consumers should buy local food, plus one more: "because you can." *The Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook* proves that Minnesota restaurateurs can and do.

What makes this more than a pretty coffee table tome, or just another cookbook, are stories about the personalities who cook the food, manage the delis and bed and breakfasts, and their relationships with local food suppliers. Their connections to the communities where their businesses are located and friendships with those who provide ingredients for their cuisine are described vividly, especially by journalist Tim King in sections about rural Minnesota establishments. Eateries with sophisticated menus can be found far beyond the Twin Cities, along with chefs trained at New York's Culinary Institute, the Culinary Institute of America, and the Chez Pannise kitchen. And even though it takes several hours more each week to forage for local foods, the chefs are loyal business partners with small local producers of chickens, pork, berries, eggs, veggies and maple syrup. But they also appreciate high quality beef from the much larger (but Minnesota-based)

Thousand Hills Cattle Company, that can provide a reliable quantity of grass-fed meat for their menus.

The book is divided into six geographical sections: North Shore, Pine and Lake Country, Red River Valley, Minnesota River Valley, Bluff Country and Twin Cities Area. Each section contains profiles of several restaurants and a bed and breakfast. Each profile features one supplier with whom the business has a special relationship, but also contains a list of the other local producers who sell them ingredients. And of course, each piece is followed by a few recipes for signature dishes the restaurant serves.

Readers who have vacationed on the North Shore of Lake Superior will find



their mouths watering just remembering delicious soups and salads at the New Scenic Café north of Duluth, and lake fish at the Angry Trout or Chez Jude's French cuisine in Grand Marais. Scott Graden, chef at the New Scenic Café, depends upon the greenhouses at Bay Produce in Superior, Wis., to provide great quality tomatoes for salads seasoned with fresh herbs grown in the café's front yard. George Wilkes and Barb La Vigne's Angry Trout Café is linked to Shele Tofte and the Dockside Fish Market for the fresh and smoked fish on their menu, and for neighborliness that adds value to the catch of the day. And Judi Barsness at Chez Jude buys poultry from Wild Acres Game Farm in Pequot Lakes, run by the Ebnet family. I found it interesting that Judi also combines orders with the local Cook County Whole Foods Cooperative to enable both small businesses to reach minimums required by organic wholesalers.

In each section, the book describes unique places to eat that reflect the local

culture and geography, and sometimes a worldly smartness. The Brewed Awakening Coffee House near Grand Rapids specializes in vegetarian soups, like tomato coconut curry and German potato stew. Java River Café in Montevideo, founded by former Land Stewardship Project employee Patrick Moore and now owned by Amanda and Cathy Blaset, is a gathering place in the community where a lot of ideas are cooked up along with the food. Lisa Durkee created a small, popular café out of a former gas station in Amboy, a town of 600 people 40 minutes from Mankato where she used to work as a nurse. She cooks with organic grains from the Whole Grain Milling Company in Welcome, Minn., as well as local vegetables, and is quoted as saying: "I think I'm doing more here to contribute to people's health than I was working as a nurse in the modern health care system."

Homegrown Minnesota features many well known Twin Cities restaurants, like Restaurant Alma, Bryant Lake Bowl, Birchwood, Heartland and Trotters, to name a few, and less well known, like El Norteno operated by natives of Chihuahua, Mexico, and supplied by the Whole Farm Co-op from central Minnesota.

This is a beautiful book, but the text gets thinner and the quality of design declines in the last section. Some photos appear illogically, like the shot of Dave and Florence Minar among recipes for Heartland Restaurant, although neither the Minars nor their dairy products are mentioned in the story/recipes related to chef Lenny Russo. The chocolate cake, puddings and roasted green bean recipes following bed and breakfast profiles don't make sense. Most disappointing is the inadequate presentation of Lucia Watson of Lucia's Restaurant, and Fischer Farm, her pork supplier. Watson, a pioneering advocate for local food, who, with Beth Dooley, wrote *Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland* 14 years ago, deserved a better write-up. The empty spaces where at least one photo of Fischer Farm should have been suggest unfulfilled assignments and a decision to publish the book on time anyway.

Much as I understand deadline panic, I think this detracts from an otherwise beautiful and unique cookbook. □

Dana Jackson coordinates the St. Croix River Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign out of the Land Stewardship Project's White Bear Lake office. She can be contacted at 651-653-0618 or danaj@landstewardshipproject.org.

Poetry

Corn Rows

One by one,
before they were even three,
he'd set them down
and say, "If you get lost,
just follow the corn row,
the one you're in.
Don't cross over.
The row you're in.
Take it all the way
out to the fence."

Out front in the yard
he'd point to the grove.
"That's north," he'd say.
"The barn here, that's east.
The barn is always east of the house.
The creek's behind us,
so that means south.
That don't change.
Same with the corn:
north-south; east-west."

At night, he'd work them
on the North Star and the Big Dipper;
daytime the sun's path.
"The shadow of the corn
never points south. Can't.
The sun is at its back."

Corn was check planted
in those days, wires
guiding the planter.
From any place you'd stand,
straight lines, up the hills,
straight lines down. Nowadays,
no fence rows. No lines.
No more north.

"Find your way to the barn,"
he used to say. "Then you'll know
exactly where you're at."

—Morgan Grayce Willow

Iron Oxide

I have always been red,
joining green to blue
at the horizon,
essential as an axle,
turning the farm
through time.

Sky looms in the place
where I stood for nearly a century,
my shadows stretching
from my foundation
across the farmyard to the house,
then tucking inward,
doubling back toward the cattle pens,
and alfalfa fields, through the soybeans
and into corn.

I remember the slow layering
of shingle over shingle,
and the setting of the cupola
into the steep roof-ridge
when I settled into myself,
even before paint, the red
so bright they could see me
from anywhere:
the market, the church.

Up to the highest peak
under rain hood, red.
White trim on doors and windows
came later. Finally,
wheat dust and hay,
the smell of cows and swine,
a press of hooves,
the flat pat of cat paws.
Pigeons, too, their voices
quavering from the weathervane.
Swallows packing mud
into homes under eaves.
And humans coming and going
all day long.

Built for storing,
painted and repainted.
Redder than heart,
bright as blood.
I remember back to pine smell,
to boots climbing,
the prick of nails,
the beat of hammer.
The beginnings of shape
and story.

—Morgan Grayce Willow



Photo by Pat Deninger

Land Stewardship Project member Morgan Grayce Willow grew up on a small dairy farm in Iowa. She says although she now lives in Minneapolis, the home place remains her truest muse. These poems are from a collection-in-progress: Barn. For information on obtaining the collection upon its publication, you can e-mail mgwillow@comcast.net.

Land & Stewardship Legacies launched

New initiative allows landowners to continue their farm's heritage while ensuring the future of sustainable ag

Jon Kaiser's farming credentials are stellar. He's a graduate of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginning® course, has a rock-solid business plan, worked on an innovative grass-based dairy operation in southeast Minnesota for several years and from scratch built up an organically-certified dairy herd of 45 cows. Through Farm

going to hold with the price of farmland where it is." (For more on Kaiser, see page 22.)

Lack of access to land, that foundation of farming, has become a major barrier to beginning farmers like Kaiser. In some ways it's ironic, since this resource is in a major state of flux these days. In Iowa,

increases in land sale prices have been common during the past several years.

For years, a federal crop subsidy system that pays farmers to raise crops such as corn and soybeans has helped buoy farmland prices at artificially high levels. Now, the recent spike in demand for corn, soybeans and just about any other crop grown in the Midwest is expected to send land prices higher by the end of 2008.

The *New York Times* recently reported that major Wall Street investors are in the market to buy up farmland and "consolidate small plots of land into more productive large ones." When big players get involved, land inflation increases even more. There have been recent reports of farmland going for \$3,000, \$4,000, even more than \$5,000 an acre.

And caught in the middle are beginning farmers, most of whom have meager financial resources. Now, more than ever, they are being priced out of the market.

Dan Guenther, who along with his wife Margaret Pennings operates a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm in western Wisconsin, has hosted many interns over the years. Many of these young people are highly motivated and knowledgeable when it comes to farming.

"The generation of people who want to farm is there," he says.

"The phone is ringing off the hook with people who want to farm. But ultimately lack of land becomes a barrier they have a hard time overcoming."

Increasingly, when a farm is sold off to the highest bidder, often a generations-long legacy of producing food and stewarding the land ends as the property becomes just another addition to a larger operation.

"We're seeing an unprecedented transfer of land and capital in rural America," says Guenther, who is a member of the Land Stewardship Project's Board of Directors. "And as people consider the future of their family's land, the difficult thing is a lot of



Farmers Mindy and Jon Kaiser, shown here with their son Nicholas and niece Tianna Abrego, had a difficult time finding a farm to rent, despite their solid background as dairy producers. They recently found a landowner who was willing to work with them. (LSP photo)

Beginnings, Kaiser qualified for an interest-free livestock loan, which he paid off a few years ago. He's also recently qualified for a couple of USDA beginning farmer loans. But when Kaiser has approached landowners about renting or buying their land, it's become clear that all the farming credentials in the world have their limits.

"I hate to burst your bubble, but the guy who was a conventional farmer and just retired isn't going to be interested in helping out someone like me," says Kaiser, 39. "Especially with today's land prices. What I found when I went looking for other situations is they'd say you can't make it farming unless you're big. I'm ultimately not sure what the future is

economist Mike Duffy estimates that almost one-quarter of that state's farmland will change hands in the next few years as an aging rural population retires and dies. Similar trends track in other Midwestern states. At first blush, the potential availability of all this land would be a boon to beginning farmers like Kaiser who are in the market for real estate.

The reality is that record high land prices and rental rates are a major barrier to such operators. In southwest Minnesota—prime corn and soybean country—the average per acre sale price of farmland increased from over \$2,500 in 2006 to over \$2,800 in 2007—an 11.5 percent jump. In fact, double-digit percentage

Legacies, see page 29...

them don't see any options."

Land & Stewardship Legacies

That's why the Land Stewardship Project this summer is launching a new initiative called *Land & Stewardship Legacies*. It will provide a way for landowners to not only continue the heritage they have built up on their farms, but to help the next generation of farmers while supporting the multifaceted work of LSP. Through the *Legacies* initiative, LSP will work with landowners and their advisers to plan a gift that meets their goals and advances the vision that they and LSP share for vibrant rural communities, a healthy environment, a diverse landscape and sustainable family farms.

History of the initiative

The roots of the *Land & Stewardship Legacies* initiative lies with LSP's positive experience with Farm Beginnings (see pages 18-23), and how it fits in with the overarching land transfer trends in agriculture. By 2003, Farm Beginnings had made it clear that it is possible to produce an entire generation of beginning farmers who are adept at utilizing sustainable farming methods. But as people like Jon Kaiser have discovered, access to land is key to long-term success. This is particularly true when one is utilizing an alternative farming enterprise such as organic agriculture—conventional landowners are often not comfortable with systems they've had limited exposure to.

Boody says another factor that went into planning this initiative is that over the years LSP members have approached the organization, saying, "I don't have kids who want to take over the farm, can you help us do something with it that's meaningful?"

LSP's Board of Directors formed a Land Gifts Committee in 2003. Besides Guenther, the committee is made up of Sandy Olson Loy, Lou Anne Kling and JoAnne Rohricht. LSP Board Member Bruce Vondracek and former Board member Jim Erkel played key roles in the early stages of the initiative's planning.

During the past five years, the Land Gifts Committee worked on how best to proceed with an initiative that would benefit beginning farmers, rural communities, the landowners themselves and LSP. In the midst of all this discussion, LSP received notice that it was the recipient of its first land gift in the form

of a 148-acre farm in Hector Township in Minnesota's Renville County. The gift also includes an additional 150 acres that will come under LSP's control in the future.

The Anderson farm

The estate of Heidi and Don Anderson donated the farm to LSP because of the organization's work organizing Renville County residents against factory livestock operation in the 1990s. At the time, hog farms, including ValAdCo and Churchill, were constructing large-scale confinement operations in the county. It soon became clear these operations, with their massive lagoons of liquid manure, posed environmental, human health, even livestock disease risks. Citizen testing showed hydrogen sulfide levels were at unsafe levels downwind from the operations and liquid manure spills became common, with one contaminating

• • •

"We're seeing an unprecedented transfer of land and capital in rural America. And as people consider the future of their family's land, the difficult thing is a lot of them don't see any options."

—LSP Board Member
Dan Guenther

• • •

over 18 miles of a stream and killing 690,000 fish.

Two families in the midst of this battle were Don and Heidi Anderson and JoAnn and Tony Eckstein. Working with LSP, they and other citizens organized and attended meetings, gathered documentation and even testified at the state capitol.

"They were very instrumental in dealing with the whole livestock issue in Renville County," says Paul Sobocinski, an LSP organizer and southwest Minnesota farmer who worked with the Andersons and others in Renville County. "They were strong believers in standing together with their neighbors for stewardship."

Sobocinski says it was because of the work of people like the Andersons that Minnesota has a ban on construction of new earthen manure lagoons for hogs. Their work also set the stage for a nationally recognized hydrogen sulfide standard for factory farms.

At one point, the Ecksteins and

Andersons raised pigs in a portable building on the fenceline overlooking a proposed Churchill site. This upset Churchill officials—due to disease concerns, they didn't want pigs from different herds within two miles of their own herd.

"They weren't too happy," Eckstein recalls with a laugh. "What could they do? We were there first."

Eventually the Ecksteins and Andersons had to move the building because of a threatened lawsuit, and the factory farm was built. But JoAnn is convinced fewer facilities were constructed in the county because of the activism of people like Don and Heidi (Don died in 1994, Heidi in 2003 and Tony in 2005).

"They were good people. I'm really glad we did what we did, otherwise it would have been worse," says Eckstein, adding that both Don and Heidi were lifelong Renville County residents; Don was born and raised on the farm he died on. "Heidi and Don were really serious about preserving agriculture and wildlife habitat. They were really down to earth. Just simple, down-to-earth people."

Boody says this "incredibly generous" gift from the Anderson estate helped make it clear that LSP had to develop a program where people could use their land to extend their legacy after they are gone. "To think that the Andersons would donate a farm Don spent his entire life on, and that they worked so hard to steward and protect over the years is quite humbling, and has served as a great motivator for moving this initiative forward."

Two options to help

Land & Stewardship Legacies consists of two ways to support stewardship farming long into the future: the *Land Legacy* and the *Stewardship Legacy*.

Land Legacy

Most charities accept gifts of property with the sole intention of liquidating them. Churches, for example, often have no choice, since they need the money produced by the sale. Also, few institutions are in a position to connect landowners with beginning farmers or to make sure the land is managed in an environmentally sustainable manner far into the future.

"So many groups are taking advantage of this transfer of land trend we're

experiencing, and what's missing is the stewardship piece," says Guenther.

But LSP's Farm Beginnings program, along with the organization's quarter-

established. In addition, the rental money and government subsidies paid to absentee landowners often don't stay in the community, which has reverberations up and down Main Street.

Duffy also points out that we are reaching a time when an increasing

Stewardship Legacy

The *Stewardship Legacy* is a way of supporting LSP, and thus creating a good environment for getting more sustainable farmers established on the land, among other things. Through the *Stewardship*



Illustration by Malena Arner Handeen

century history of working with sustainable farmers, puts it in a relatively unique position, says Boody. During the past decade, over 300 people have graduated from Farm Beginnings, and many have proven that innovative, sustainable production methods can produce a viable living on modest amounts of land.

A gift of suitable farmland to LSP is distinguished by its potential to serve as an incubator to help beginning farmers build assets before they purchase their own land. Or it might be sold with affordable terms to a promising graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings Program.

"Either way, we see this as a critical tool for helping the next generation of stewardship farmers," says Boody.

In states like Minnesota and Iowa, an increasing amount of the land is owned by absentees. For example, the amount of Iowa farmland owned by people who actually live on the farm decreased 10 percent to 47 percent from 1982 to 2002. And the percentage of landowners who do not live in the state at all has increased steadily—from 6 percent in 1982 to 19 percent in 2002, according to Duffy, the agricultural economist.

This trend has two major implications: First, absentee landowners are much more likely to cash-rent their land, rather than share-rent. Traditionally, share-renting—an arrangement where the landowner and the farmer split the costs and profits of farming—has been a great way for beginners with little capital to get

amount of farmland may no longer be in the hands of that first generation of owners—the non-farming children of farmers, for example. Each succeeding generation will have less of an affinity or emotional attachment to the land.

"In other words, the land today is being passed on to those who either grew up on it or still have some nonmonetary attachment to the land," according to Duffy. "Their children may not have the same affection for the land and as it is passed to them, the land will again be transferred via the market rather than within the family."

That's why the timing of an initiative like the *Land Legacy* is critical, says Rohricht.

"I think particularly in an agricultural state like Minnesota there is still a second or third generation that's financially attached to some farmland," she says. "This initiative could help them do something positive about the future before it's too late."

Legacy, LSP will accept gifts of farmland or other real estate from members and other friends of our organization. Donors can choose to make a gift now or leave a bequest to LSP through a will. If they donate using an annuity or trust, they can make a generous gift while still providing future income to themselves and other family members. LSP will work with colleague organizations and financial professionals to develop a situation that best fits the donors and the organization.

As it heads into its next quarter-century, LSP's work is increasingly focusing on three main areas: beginning farmers, local food systems and creating better policy, says Boody. "What's been exciting is to see how these three program areas dovetail with each other as we work toward our ultimate goal of a countryside that includes more diverse family farms and more people on the land producing healthy food," he says. "The *Stewardship Legacy* provides our members and friends a fitting way to support this work." □

How to continue the legacy

If you are interested in learning more about whether the *Land & Stewardship Legacies* initiative fits into your giving plans, call or e-mail the Land Stewardship Project. We'd be happy to discuss what kinds of options you have in giving, the benefits you can experience and the variety of ways LSP might utilize the gift. There is no pressure—we will simply begin the conversation about whether this initiative is right for you and LSP.

Details are available at www.landstewardshipproject.org (look for the link under **Take Action**). You can also contact your local LSP office or talk with LSP's George Boody at 651-653-0618, or e-mail him at gboody@landstewardshipproject.org.



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Membership Update

LSP receives Charities Review Council seal

The Land Stewardship Project has been awarded the Charities Review Council "Meets All Standards" seal indicating that it meets all 16 of the Council's accountability standards.



Nonprofit organizations such as LSP earn the seal by voluntarily participating in the Council's online Accountability Wizard. The Accountability Wizard is available to all nonprofit organizations soliciting in Minnesota and addresses a nonprofit organization's performance in four critical areas: Public Disclosure, Governance, Financial Activity and Fundraising. By participating in the Accountability Wizard, nonprofit organizations can demonstrate responsibility, integrity and transparency.

LSP is now listed as a reviewed organization on the online Giving Guide of the Council's Smart Givers Network (www.smartgivers.org) and the Council's *Smart Giver* newsletter. The listings help a nonprofit organization demonstrate its commitment to accountable ethical practices to the public and that it is a trustworthy organization. The Council's Smart Givers Network is the source of unbiased information on responsible giving.

Through this resource, the giving public can investigate an organization's mission statement and programs, so they can be sure of what their money supports and determine whether it meets widely accepted standards.

For more information, contact LSP's Cathy Eberhart at 651-653-0618 or cathy@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Thank you

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

- ◆ **Richard & Marjorie McManus**
In memory of Mark and Katie McManus
- ◆ **Cynthia S. Robinson**
In memory of Kenneth Starkey
- ◆ **Paula Foreman**
In honor of Janice Randall and in memory of Vernis Randall
- ◆ **Nancy Jackson**
In memory of a recently deceased retired farm widow; also in memory of Steve, son of George and Pat Bates; in honor of Leo and Gloria

- Stein's 50th Wedding Anniversary*
- ◆ **Rachel Long**
In memory of Barbra Holmes Long
- ◆ **Ron & Diane Stevens**
In memory of Howard B. Hanson
- ◆ **Nicholas & Rosemary Heille**
In honor of Tom Taylor
- ◆ **Marlea Zimmer Gruver & Barry Gruver**
Given to the Dave Serfling Memorial Fund for Sustainable Agriculture Education
- ◆ **Wanda Copeland & Thomas Johnson**
In honor of daughter-in-law Nina Childs Johnson
- ◆ **Jennifer Galovich & Tom Sibley**
In honor of the marriage of Rick and Carol Gibson-Miller

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

Support LSP in your workplace

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

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



MINNESOTA
Environmental Fund

You can support LSP in your workplace by giving through the Minnesota Environmental Fund. Options include giving a designated amount through payroll deduction, or a single gift. You may also choose to give to the entire coalition or specify the organization of your choice within the coalition, such as the Land Stewardship Project. If your employer does not provide this opportunity, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it.

For more information, contact LSP's Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

- **JULY 22**—Northeast Minn. Lutheran Earthkeeping Network of the Synods (LENS-MN) Creation Care Workshop, Duluth, Minn.; Contact: www.lcppm.org; 651-224-5499
- **JULY 23**—Northwest Minn. Lutheran Earthkeeping Network of the Synods (LENS-MN) Creation Care Workshop, Moorhead, Minn.; Contact: www.lcppm.org; 651-224-5499
- **JULY 24**—Southwest Minn. Lutheran Earthkeeping Network of the Synods (LENS-MN) Creation Care Workshop, Willmar, Minn.; Contact: www.lcppm.org; 651-224-5499
- **JULY 25**—Public Farm Beginnings tour of Lorentz Meats, Cannon Falls, Minn.; Contact: Heather Flashinski, LSP, 715-289-4896; fbse@landstewardshipproject.org
- **JULY 28**—Workshop on Sustaining a Small-Scale Hog Business with Current Economic Challenges, St. Charles, Minn.; Contact: Amy Bacigalupo, LSP, 320-269-2105; amyb@landstewardshipproject.org
- **AUG. 1**—Aerial Seeding Field Day, Andy Hart farm, Elgin, Minn., area; Contact: 507-876-2256
- **AUG. 1-2**—Grazefest, featuring Joel McNair, editor & publisher of *Graze* magazine, Verndale & Bluegrass, Minn.; Contact: Mary Jo Forbord, 320-760-8732; www.sfa-mn.org
- **AUG. 2**—Organic Apple & Berry Field Day, Elm Tree Farm, Afton, Minn.; Contact: 608-967-2362; www.mosesorganic.org/treefruit/events.htm
- **AUG. 4-8**—21st North American Prairie Conference: The Prairie Meets the River, Winona (Minn.) State University;

- Contact: Bruno Borsari, 507-457-2822; <http://bio.winona.edu/NAPC>
- **AUG. 5-6**—Future Farms 2008: Planning for Change Conference, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Contact: Kerr Center, www.kerrcenter.com; 918-647-9123
- **AUG. 7**—Central Illinois Farm Dreams Workshop, Ullin, Ill.; Contact: 847-570-0701; http://central.illinoisfarmbeginnings.org/farm_dreams/classes.aspx
- **AUG. 12-14**—Sustainable Agriculture Coalition summer meeting, 20th Anniversary celebration & symposium on the future of sustainable agriculture, Farmington, Minn.; Contact: Adam Warthesen, LSP, 612-722-6377; adamw@landstewardshipproject.org
- **AUG. 14**—Western Minn. Farm Beginnings graduation potluck, Independence Park, Marshall, Minn.; Contact: Susan Hurst, LSP, 320-269-2105; fbwest@landstewardshipproject.org
- **AUG. 15**—Application deadline for Lake Superior Farm Beginnings course (see page 19)
- **AUG. 16**—Minnesota Garlic Festival, Wright County Fairgrounds; Contact: Jerry Ford, 320-543-3394; www.sfa-mn.org
- **AUG. 26**—Minn. Cooks Event, Minn. State Fair, St. Paul (see page 25); Contact: Food Alliance Midwest, 651-209-3382
- **AUG. 28**—Application deadline for 2008-2009 Land Stewardship Project's Minnesota Farm Beginnings Course (see page 21)
- **SEPT. 1**—Application deadline for Central Illinois Farm Beginnings; Contact: <http://central.illinoisfarmbeginnings.org>; 847-570-0701
- **SEPT. 1**—Application deadline for Stalene (Illinois/Wisconsin) Farm Beginnings course; Contact: www.learn-growconnect.org; 815-389-8455

- **SEPT. 6-7**—15th Annual Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association Harvest Festival, Bayport Festival Park, Duluth, Minn.; Contact: www.lake-superiorfarming.org; 218-393-3276
- **SEPT. 11**—St. Croix River Valley Dine Fresh Dine Local event (see page 23)
- **SEPT. 20**—Organic Vegetable Field Day, Fisher-Merritt Farm, Wrenshall, Minn.; Contact: MOSES, 715-772-3153; www.mosesorganic.org
- **SEPT. 25**—Global Climate Change, Sustainable Ag & Bioresources: Challenges, Opportunities & Choices, (with a panel discussion featuring LSP's George Boody & LSP member Carmen Fernholz), Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: www.cas.umn.edu; 612-624-9811
- **OCT. 18**—LSP's Farm Beginnings classes begin in Paynesville, Minn. (see page 21)
- **OCT. 20-22**—Farming with Grass: Achieving Sustainable Mixed Agricultural Landscapes in Grasslands Environments, featuring LSP's George Boody, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Contact: www.swcs.org/fwg; 515-289-2331
- **OCT. 25**—LSP's Farm Beginnings classes begin in Goodhue, Minn. (see page 21)
- **OCT. 23-27**—World Meeting of Food Communities-Terra Madre, Turin, Italy; Contact: www.slowfoodusa.org/events/terra_madre_2008.html; 718-260-8000
- **OCT. 28**—American Public Health Association annual meeting, featuring LSP's George Boody presenting on "Healthy Farms, Healthy People: An Agroecological Approach," San Diego, Cal.; Contact: www.apha.org/meetings; 202-777-2742

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



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