

# The Land Stewardship

Keeping the Land and People Together



# Letter

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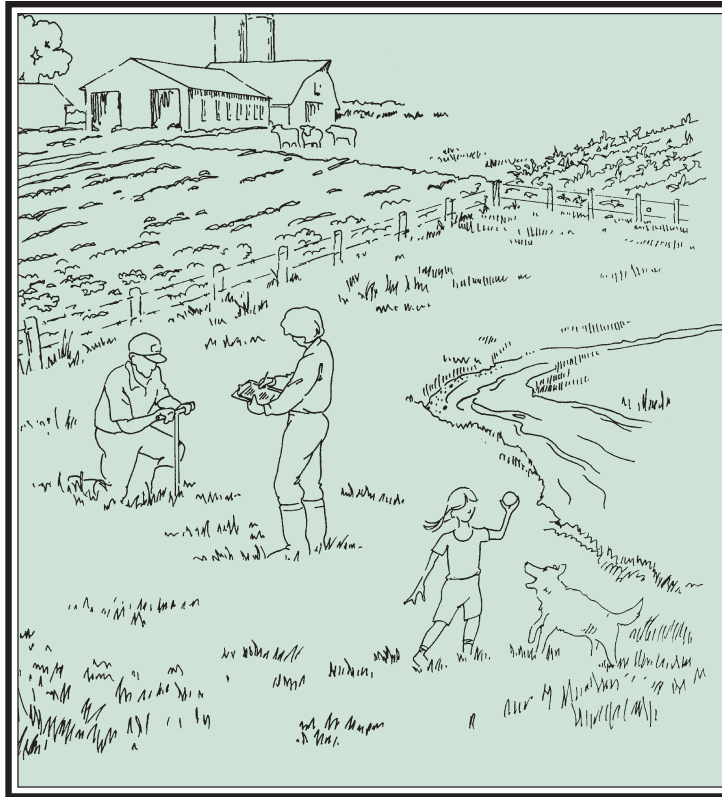


Illustration by Jim Kiehne

The Monitoring Team's decade of influence (see page 20).

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—*India's Farm Suicide Tragedy*—

—*A Sneak Peek at the 2007 Legislative Season*—

—*Sprouting New Farms in Winter*—

—*Farming & Wild Nature*—

*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 newsletter as a benefit. Annual membership dues are \$35.

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## The world's biggest farm beat

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Some of the more successful U.S. farm magazines measure their circulation numbers in the tens or, in a few cases, hundreds, of thousands. Agricultural journalism in India is a whole different story.

Palagummi Sainath covers the farm beat in India, which means writing about over 600 million people, the largest collection of small farmers in the world. Over the years, Sainath has earned an international reputation for his coverage of a population that is often ignored by other journalists. He has written about agricultural subsidies, starvation deaths and the daily struggles of farmers who have suicide rates that are at epidemic proportions. One government estimate is that between 1993 and 2003 over 100,000 Indian farmers committed suicide, mostly by drinking pesticide. In Vidarbha, a cotton-growing region in central India about half the size of Minnesota, an estimated 767 people committed suicide during a 14-month period ending in late August 2006. Sainath, who spends at least 300 days a year out in rural areas doing interviews, says these grisly statistics are gross underestimates, since the Indian government does not consider women when tallying up the farmer population.

Sainath started his career as a journalist in 1980 with the United News of India before working for 10 years at the *Blitz*, a leading weekly of its time. As the economic reforms of 1991 began to play out, he traveled across 10 of the poorest drought-stricken districts, filing 84 columns over an 18-month period. Many of these were included in his 1996 book, *Everybody loves a good drought*.

Sainath is currently the rural affairs editor of the *Hindu* news-



Palagummi Sainath

paper. He is known for combining passionate first-person reporting with a meticulous citing of facts and figures gleaned from government reports. The journalist has come to believe that the recent problems plaguing rural India cannot be dismissed as the result of natural disasters like drought. Government policy is to blame, he maintains; particularly policy that pushes farmers to raise food crops for export while their neighbors starve, and which allows multinational corporations like Monsanto to control everything from what inputs are used in crop production to the lending of money.

His writings and analyses have been instrumental in the revamping of drought management programs, improvements in programs for indigenous people and other policy changes. Through his work, Sainath is also reforming the media's attitude towards the under-reported issues of rural India. During the fall of 2006, he came to the United States to accept a journalism award. While here, he stopped in Minnesota to speak about India's agricultural problems and how they relate to agrarian crises all over the world, including here in the U.S. Sainath spoke at the University of Minnesota at an event sponsored by the Association for India's Development-Minnesota Chapter, with support from the Institute for Global Studies at the University of Minnesota and the Land Stewardship Project. Later on a trip sponsored by Clean Up the River Environment (CURE) and Renewing the Countryside, he toured several Minnesota farms, including those of LSP members Dave and Florence Minar and Audrey Arner and Richard Handeen.

Below are some excerpts of what Sainath had to say while in Minnesota.

### On purpose-driven inequality

"What stands out about the inequality of the last 15-20 years as compared to most other times in our history is that it's an inequality that's been so carefully constructed, so ruthlessly engineered. It's not accidental. It's not the by-product of something. It is the product of the kind of world that we've structured. Inequality has grown faster in the past 15 years than in the preceding 50. The world is more unequal than at anytime since the colonial era—since the present day Third World countries were colonies.

"It elevates the market from being a tool, to being a total tyranny. And in this vision of the world the market is not just a feature of democracy, it *is* democracy. How democratic you are is judged by how free your markets are."

### On India's reputation as an emerging economic power

"Many of the claims about India's success are actually true. They are true for 10 percent of the population. India now ranks eighth in the world in the number of billionaires, but is 127th in human development. What does it mean to be 127th in human development? It means if you're a poor person you are better off living in the occupied territories of Palestine, or in Botswana. We have this booming economy and an impressive gross domestic product growth rate, but the per-capita GDP is lower than that of Nicaragua and Indonesia. Labor productivity has risen 84 percent and real wages of labor have dropped 22 percent. CEO salaries in India have risen thousands of percent.

"In a country that has the second richest billionaires in the world, the farm income, the income affecting 600 million people, has fallen to a spectacular, abysmal low. In the time that we piled up this astonishing number of billionaires, we also added more newly hungry people than all the other nations of the world together. I repeat: we didn't just add newly hungry people to those that existed, we added more newly hungry people than the rest of the planet put together. In the same period that all these massive achievements were on the record for the world to envy, the average rural family in India is eating 100 kilograms of grain less than they did just six or seven years ago. We're talking about people

Sainath, see page 4...

who already had a very limited diet.

“This was a period, even as hunger rose steeply, when India exported 20 million tons of food grain. We exported that on the claim that we’re doing so well that we have these massive surpluses. There were never surpluses. The surplus was of hunger, not of food. There were these huge unsold stocks because the purchasing power of people had collapsed.”

### On the claim that rural problems in India are ‘natural’

“None of this is accidental. None of this is an outcome of a natural disaster. Farmers have faced far greater droughts and floods and famine in the past without resorting to [suicide]. All of this was policy driven.

“[For example] debt and indebtedness are used as a lever to move poor people into the kind of labor required of them rather than what they wish to do. The credit picture is simply stunning. The old village lender of classic Indian literature is finished because his clientele are finished. They can’t repay. I have covered small money lenders’ suicides.

“The agents of seed manufacturers, the dealers for Monsanto, these are the new money lenders of the countryside. All this is happening at the same time that the government has smashed or destroyed the agricultural universities. The Prime Minister said this May that the agricultural extension missionary in India is close to nonexistent. So the guy who is your input dealer, the guy who sells you your pesticide, the guy who sells you your fertilizer, the guy who sells you your seed is also your agricultural expert. He tells you what to buy, and then he sells it to you. He tells you what’s good for you and he says, ‘You buy it from me.’ He gives you credit because there’s no other source since the banks are not doing it.

“How did this come about? Very simply, the same process you guys had 30-40 years ago is on us. Indian agriculture is being cleared of small holders to be handed over neatly packaged to corporations. The rules, the laws are being steadily changed towards this end. The laws governing marketing committees have been drastically changed. The laws governing the purchase of produce are being drastically changed. More and more we are handing agriculture over to corporations. And to do that you have to leverage the peasantry out of agriculture.

• • •  
“Some of the principals affecting agriculture are the same everywhere in the world.”  
• • •

“Here’s the nub of the story: We are witnessing the biggest human displacement in our history. It’s not from a dam. It’s not from a canal. It’s not from a mining project. It’s from agriculture. We’re throwing people off the land in gigantic numbers so they can go to the cities in search of jobs that are not there because our manufacturing is in the



doldrums. What are the options? People unable to see the options are taking their own lives.”

### On common agricultural problems

“Some of the principals affecting agriculture are the same everywhere in the world. Who they are affecting is different. The standards of living are different. But without exception the same all around the world.

“The first of those principals is the corporate takeover of agriculture. It’s far more advanced in the U.S. than it is in most parts of the world. In India corporations still don’t have the day-to-day presence in cultivation, but every other part they’re dominating. The second is the state withdrawing from small family agriculture. The third is the leveraging of debt to force farmers to raise the crops you want, or to move them out of agriculture completely.”

### On why there is reason for hope

“In the last 15 to 20 years people in India are far more assertive of their rights. The ruled are unwilling to be ruled in the old way. The rulers are unable to rule in the old way. There have been upsurges of movement of the lower castes and the untouchables. They have changed their position in politics totally. Today in the biggest states in the country you can’t come to power without negotiating with the lower casts. And you have the biggest system in the world of local governments and village governments.”

### On farmers from different countries joining forces

“I think farmers from around the world teaming up to fight common enemies is good, but your most intense battles are going to have a local character. The privatization of water for example.

• • •  
“The ruled are unwilling to be ruled in the old way. The rulers are unable to rule in the old way.”  
• • •

Such issues look local but they are global. How do you react to the depredations and plunder of your house? That’s going to be a huge motivation for people to stand up and fight. Then you make alliances.”

*For more on Palagummi Sainath, including a sampling of his writing, see [www.indiatogether.org/opinions/psainath](http://www.indiatogether.org/opinions/psainath). To hear an excerpt of the journalist’s Minnesota talk, check out Ear to the Ground No. 28. See page 22 for details on how to listen to the podcast.*

## What’s on your mind?

Got an opinion? Comments? Criticisms? 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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# 51%...

...That's how much more biofuel energy per hectare a diverse mix of native grasses produced when compared to corn-based ethanol, according to research recently featured on the cover of the journal *Science*. The research, which was conducted by the University of Minnesota's David Tilman, Jason Hill and Clarence Lehman, also found that highly diverse plots of grasses such as goldenrod, Indian grass, big bluestem and switchgrass yielded 238 percent more energy than stands consisting of just one species. These stands were more energy efficient for a couple of reasons. First, they were grown without fertilizers and other energy-intensive inputs. Secondly, since the grasses were perennials, they grew back year after year on their own, eliminating the energy and other resources that go into planting them each spring.

In addition, diverse stands of perennial grasses that are used for biofuels actually soak up and trap more carbon than they produce, a result that's catching the attention of scientists concerned about how carbon and other greenhouse gases are affecting the global climate.

For more on the paper, "Carbon-Negative Biofuels from Low-Input High-Diversity Grassland Biomass," see the Dec. 8, 2006, issue of *Science* ([www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/short/314/5805/1598](http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/short/314/5805/1598)). For more on David Tilman's research on perennial grass systems and biofuels, see the April/May/June 2006 issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, page 7.

## Myth Buster Box

*An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them*

→ **Myth:** Large-scale factory livestock farms succeed because of the efficiencies of the free market.

→ **Fact:** Promoters of industrialized livestock production like to argue that their model of agriculture is a natural progression—an example of free market efficiency succeeding. What they don't want the public to know is that factory-scale production of pork, beef and poultry benefits greatly from a silent, but powerful, government subsidy. As some recent analyses have shown, this subsidy may be indirect, but it has had a significantly negative impact on our farmers, our communities and even our landscape.

It has to do with the subsidies crop farmers receive for producing key feedstuffs like corn and soybeans—two of the most heavily subsidized crops in U.S. commodity programs. Corn and soybeans are key ingredients in livestock feed, making up 83 percent to 91 percent of most feedstuffs.

The fact that corn and soybeans are so heavily subsidized produces an oversupply of these commodities on the market. That means low feed prices—prices that are often much lower than what it cost the farmer to produce those crops in the first place. For example, between 1997 and 2005, the market price of corn

averaged 23 percent below what it cost farmers to produce that crop, points out Tufts University's Timothy Wise.

That's very good news for large-scale livestock operations. Feed costs account for 60 percent to 64 percent of raising a chicken or producing an egg. About 47 percent to 65 percent of a pork operation's costs are gobbled up by the feed bill. So any force—whether it be rooted in the market or the government—that keeps the price of corn and soybeans low means bigger profits for factory livestock firms like Cargill, ConAgra, Tyson and Smithfield.

How much of a factor are these crop subsidies in the factory farm business? Wise reports that if the broiler industry had paid what corn and soybean meal was really worth between 1997 and 2005, it would have cost it 21 percent more on average to produce those chickens. Because feed costs make up 60 percent of what it costs to raise a broiler, that translates into a 13 percent reduction in production costs. The hog industry enjoys a similar feed price advantage because of commodity subsidies, according to Wise.

"With some diversified family farmers still trying to compete with factory hog farms, the estimated 13 percent reduction in operating costs that factory farms receive from purchased feed is an incentive to industrialization, and gives these operations

the appearance of greater economic efficiency than farms that grow their own feed crops," Wise writes.

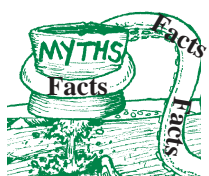
This factory farm subsidy, discount, gift, whatever you want to call it, comes courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer.

But if you are a farmer-feeder who is raising feedgrains in fields right next to your livestock, how does this affect you? When you feed homegrown grains to your own livestock, you are in effect paying full cost for that feed (the price of raising it), while the specialized factory farm down the road is getting it at below cost. That means they can send animals to the market at a lower cost than the diversified family farmer, creating a perverse situation where raising one's own feed is actually a bad financial strategy.

### → More information

• To read more about Timothy Wise's research, see [www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/wp/05-07RealWinnersUSAg.pdf](http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/wp/05-07RealWinnersUSAg.pdf), or [www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/policy\\_research/BroilerGains.htm](http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/policy_research/BroilerGains.htm).

• The Land Stewardship Project has developed a series of proposals for reforming federal farm policy. For a copy of these proposals, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/06/newsr\\_060722.htm](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/06/newsr_060722.htm), or call 612-722-6377.



## Myth Busters series now on the Internet

The *Land Stewardship Letter's* popular Myth Buster series is now available on our website. You can download pdf versions at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-myth.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-myth.html). For information on obtaining paper copies of the series, contact Brian DeVore at 612-729-6294 or [bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org). □



## USDA researchers: organics worth risk

Organic grains continue to garner significant price premiums for farmers, but the risks of transitioning from a chemical-intensive system still deters many from making the switch. In the first few years of a transition, conventional farmers can get waylaid by the kind of weed and insect infestations that herbicides and insecticides are so good at controlling. In addition, maintaining fertility on soil that's used to receiving regular doses of petroleum-based fertilizer can be a major challenge. And it takes at least three years before a conventional farm can get paid the full premiums that come with being certified organic.

Now a study out of western Minnesota shows that the risks associated with the organic transition are worth taking. Even with the sometimes high costs of switching out of a conventional system, farmers can net an average \$50 to \$60 more per acre by going organic, according to the study, which was conducted at the Swan Lake Research Farm near Morris. USDA researchers David Archer, an economist, and Hillarius Kludze, a soil scientist, conducted the study.

For four years the researchers tracked an organic corn-soybean rotation and an organic corn-soybean-spring wheat/alfalfa rotation, half of which was grown with conventional tillage and half using a soil conservation system called strip till. These organic systems were then compared to a corn-soybean rotation using conventional tillage. Computer simulations were used to project costs, yields and risks over a 20-year period using yield and economic data from the four-year study.

The premiums organic crops receive make up for the initial higher costs and possibly lower yields that come with such a system. So what happens if organic prices drop? Well, the researchers concluded, with such a huge profit margin organic farmers have quite a financial cushion in place.

For a copy of the study, "Transition to Organic Cropping Systems under Risk," see [http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/cgi-bin/pdf\\_view.pl?paperid=21997&ftype=.pdf](http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/cgi-bin/pdf_view.pl?paperid=21997&ftype=.pdf). David Archer can be reached at 320-589-3411 (ext. 142). □

## Busy beavers = lazy rivers?

It's hard to find a lazy, looping stream in Midwestern farm country. Most channels have been straightened and dredged to within an inch of their life in an attempt to keep water off crop ground and push the wet stuff downstream as quickly as possible. This has resulted in unstable stream banks that constantly erode, reducing the quality of water even more. Attempts have been made over the years to stabilize stream banks with the best engineering money can buy. These mitigation attempts are expensive and often provide short-term fixes at best.

But research in Nebraska shows that nature itself may provide a more sustainable way to stabilize creeks in the form of an animal that is usually considered a pest in farm country: the beaver.

A beaver never saw a moving body of water that it didn't want to dam up, as anyone who has tried to unclog a beaverized culvert can attest to. While they are usually associated with wooded areas of the country, beavers have actually made an impressive comeback in

intensively farmed parts of the Midwest.

Researchers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln studied a stretch of a stream in Otoe County, in the southeastern part of the state. What they found was that six dams built by beavers on Little Muddy Creek created a stair-step effect in the stream channel, significantly slowing the water's velocity and trapping a lot of soil sediment. On one 730 meter-stretch of the creek, over 1,730 tons of sediment was collected behind beaver dams during a 12-year period.

The beavers did all of this basically for free (not counting all of the corn stalks they cut down over the years). In contrast, in a nearby watershed where human-engineered structures were used to stabilize almost a kilometer of a degraded stream, the price tag was \$110,000.

A copy of "Channel Aggradation by Beaver Dams on a Small Agricultural Stream in Eastern Nebraska" is available at [www.treereseach.fs.fed.us/pubs/23951](http://www.treereseach.fs.fed.us/pubs/23951).



The beaver dam at the top of this photo is on a creek in southwest Iowa that's paralleled by intense corn and soybean cultivation. Research shows such dams can help stabilize stream banks. (LSP photo)



## Family Farm Capitol Breakfast Feb. 6

Join farmers, legislators and Land Stewardship Project members for LSP's Second Annual Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol on Tuesday, Feb. 6, from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. The breakfast will be across from the Minnesota state capitol in Saint Paul at Christ Lutheran Church, 105 University Ave. W. The cost is \$8.

Chef Brad Beal will prepare a breakfast that includes fresh eggs, bacon, and sausage straight off the farms of LSP members. This breakfast will provide an opportunity to let legislators know more about LSP and show support for community based food systems and family farms.

Here is how you can make this breakfast a success:

- RSVP soon and call your state legislators and invite them to meet you at the breakfast.
- Volunteer to help set-up, serve or clean up.
- Stay afterwards to lobby at the capitol for policies that promote family farms and local foods.
- Buy an advertisement in the program. Ads are available in all sizes and price ranges.

To RSVP, volunteer, or buy an ad, contact LSP's Rachel Long at 612-722-6377 or [rachel@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:rachel@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## 'Homegrown Economy' Feb. 26

A conference called "Homegrown Economy: Foods From Local Farms as Economic Development" will be held at the University of Minnesota-Morris on Monday, Feb. 26, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The conference will feature a keynote by Fred Kirschenmann, a Distinguished Fellow at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Rob Marqusee, Rural Economic Development Director for Woodbury County, Iowa, and Ken Meter of the Crossroads Resource Center will also give presentations (read more about

the work of Meter and Marqusee at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/rural\\_develop\\_report.pdf](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/rural_develop_report.pdf)). The conference will also feature panel discussions involving farmers, processors and retailers.

This conference is sponsored by U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson and being planned by the Pride of the Prairie initiative and the Land Stewardship Project.

For more information, contact LSP's Terry VanDerPol at 320-269-2105 or [tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Organic dairy field Day Feb. 13

A Field Day on sustainable organic dairy farming will be held Tuesday, Feb. 13, from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) in Morris, Minn.

The field day will feature low cost winter housing such as compost packs and feeding options. Also to be discussed will be profitable management strategies and maintaining herd health without antibiotics. In recent years, WCROC has been conducting extensive research into organic dairy production (for more in WCROC's research and outreach, see <http://wcroc.coafes.umn.edu>).

Besides a tour of the Center's facilities led by dairy scientist Dennis Johnson, there will also be discussions on marketing organic dairy products and resources for new and transitioning dairy farmers, featuring representatives of the Land Stewardship Project, Minnesota National Farmers Organization, Food Alliance Midwest, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.

Lunch will be provided and a free-will offering will be taken. For more information, contact LSP's Terry VanDerPol at 320-269-2105 or [tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org). More information is also available from LSP's Paul Sobocinski at 507-342-2323 or [sobopaul@redred.com](mailto:sobopaul@redred.com).

This event is sponsored by LSP, WCROC, Cooperative Development Services, the Iowa Institute of Cooperatives and the Minnesota National Farmers Organization. It is funded in part by a

grant from USDA's Risk Management Agency. □

## LSP hog raffle

The Land Stewardship Project's western Minnesota office is selling raffle tickets for two half-hogs from Pastures A' Plenty farm. There will be two separate drawings for the meat. Each half-hog (valued at \$130) will be processed to the winners' specifications. Pastures A' Plenty raises hogs on pasture and in deep straw systems. The farm's sustainable production methods are certified by Food Alliance Midwest.

A ticket can be purchased for a \$10 donation. The drawings will be Thursday, Feb. 15, at 8 p.m. during LSP's membership Appreciation Meeting at the Montevideo Community Center. You need not be present to win. For more information, contact LSP's western Minnesota office at 320-269-2106 or [lspswest@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lspswest@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Twohig leaves LSP

Kate Twohig has left the Land Stewardship Project to do teaching and consulting.

Twohig joined LSP's staff in 2003 as the director of its western Minnesota office in Montevideo. She later worked extensively with LSP's Farm Beginnings® program, and was instrumental in helping launch versions of the education initiative in other states.

In 2005, Twohig was appointed to the USDA's



**Kate Twohig**

Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers. The committee, which includes 19 other members from across the U.S., identifies ways to increase participation

between federal and state programs to provide joint financing for beginning producers. Members of the committee also suggest other creative methods for new agricultural opportunities that will help beginning farmers and ranchers.

Twohig holds a doctorate in adult education with a sustainable agriculture specialization, and did her Ph.D. thesis on the Farm Beginnings program. □

# LSP



# News

## LSP members honored

Four Land Stewardship Project farmer-members have been recognized for their efforts to produce food in a manner that protects the land.

In October, **Dave and Florence Minar** were given the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's "Good Farm Neighbor Award." The award honors livestock producers who are good neighbors and caring stewards of the environment. The Minars produce milk with a 150-cow

herd near New Prague, a community south of the Twin Cities that's experiencing a huge influx of non-farm residents. They are certified organic and utilize managed rotational grazing to produce milk. The Minars are considered pioneers in the area of sustainable agriculture and research conducted on their farm shows their methods are having a positive impact on local water quality. The family processes its milk on the farm and

## Minnesota sustainable ag program intact for now

A proposed reorganization of a key state sustainable agriculture program has been put on hold by the Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture.

In early fall 2006, it was revealed that Ag Commissioner Gene Hugoson was proposing the dismantling of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's "Agricultural Resources Management and Development Division," and dispersing the staff and responsibilities of this division to several other divisions. The mission of this key division is "to support the development of an agriculture that is profitable and environmentally sound." The Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program (ESAP) is housed in this division.

ESAP was established in 1987 in response to concerns over the impact of conventional agricultural practices on farm profitability, health and the environment. "The purpose of the program is to demonstrate and promote alternative practices which are energy efficient, environmentally sound, profitable and which enhance the self-sufficiency of Minnesota farmers," states the Agriculture Department's website.

This nationally-recognized program provides information to farmers about sustainable and organic farming practices, coordinates on-farm research into sustainable and organic farming, and provides cost-share funds to farmers transitioning to organic.

ESAP is also responsible for making grants to farmers for on-farm research

into innovative practices. The results of the research are published annually in the popular *Greenbook*. This hands-on, grassroots type of research has facilitated farmer-to-farmer education and helped farmers move towards more sustainable farming practices.

Despite all of the benefits produced by ESAP, funding for this program was severely cut two years ago.

The Land Stewardship Project and other farm, environmental and consumer groups expressed concern that the proposed reorganization would severely handicap the effectiveness of the ESAP program by dispersing a key group of staffers, says Bobby King of LSP's Policy and Organizing Program.

There were also concerns that the proposed reorganization was developed without involving LSP, the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, the Organic Consumers Association or any other citizen organizations that have helped create and shape many of ESAP's initiatives. Not even the Agriculture Department's own Organic Advisory Task Force, a group made up of farmers and other key players in the state's organics industry, was consulted about the proposed reorganization.

After news of the proposal broke in October, members of the public contacted the offices of Gov. Tim Pawlenty and Commissioner Hugoson via telephone and e-mail, demanding that the division's staff be kept intact. A letter from LSP and 15 other Minnesota farm and environ-

mental organizations has been sent to Gov. Pawlenty requesting that the proposed reorganization be stopped, and that the organic and sustainable ag community be consulted on any future moves to make major changes to ESAP.

At a meeting of the Organic Advisory Task Force in late fall, Hugoson announced that the planned reorganization had been put on hold indefinitely. During the meeting, the Commissioner expressed surprise at how much of a public outcry there was over the proposal. "Thanks to the public outcry, Commissioner Hugoson got the message that the Agriculture Department's sustainable and organic agriculture programs are too valuable to be undermined," says King. "But now we need to keep a close watch to make sure those concerns are respected. If anything, ESAP should be strengthened, not weakened." □

**Audrey Arner** and **Richard Handeen** have been given the 15th Annual River Keeper Award by Clean Up the River Environment (CURE). The CURE award honors people who are dedicated to protecting the Minnesota River watershed. Arner and Handeen raise grass-based livestock in the Upper Minnesota River Valley near the western Minnesota community of Montevideo. They have long been active in conservation and sustainable agriculture activities locally, nationally and even internationally. Among other things, the farmers have been instrumental in promoting policy and research that supports sustainable production practices. Arner and Handeen sell beef products under their Moonstone Farm label ([www.prairiefare.com/moonstone/index.html](http://www.prairiefare.com/moonstone/index.html)). □

### More information

→ To find out how you can help protect the Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, contact LSP's Bobby King at 612-722-6377 or [bking@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bking@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ For details on the Agricultural Resources Management and Development Division, see [www.mda.state.mn.us/agdev/default.htm](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/agdev/default.htm)

→ The Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program web page is at [www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/default.htm](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/default.htm)



# It's Farm Beginnings season

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings® courses are in full swing this winter, with classes taking place in southeast and central Minnesota.

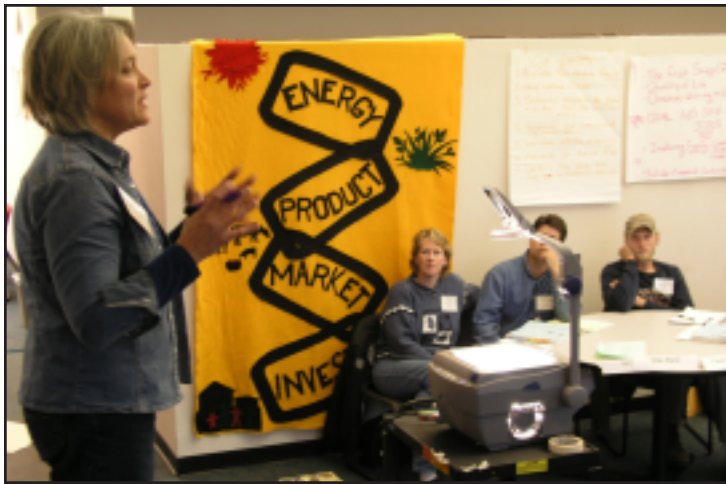
Farm Beginnings provides participants an opportunity to learn firsthand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course consists of a series of classes that take place twice a month from October through February. After February, course participants have the opportunity to attend on-farm educational field days. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial planning, business

plan creation, alternative marketing and innovative production techniques. The course consists of 34 hours of class time, on-farm education, skills sessions and one-on-one mentoring.

This is the 10th year the Land Stewardship Project has offered Farm Beginnings in the region. The course has over 260 graduates to its credit—60 percent of whom are farming. To expand the course's availability, during the 2006-2007 session separate classes are being held in Winona and Hutchinson. For the second year in a row, Farm Beginnings

courses are being offered in Illinois and Nebraska.

The next Farm Beginnings course will begin in the fall of 2007. For information on registering for that session, contact Karen Stettler in southeast Minnesota at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org. In western Minnesota, contact Amy Bacigalupo at 320-269-2105 or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org. More information, including a fact sheet and profiles of Farm Beginnings graduates, is available at [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org). See page 16 for the latest Farm Beginnings "Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming" profile. □



**LEFT: Western Minnesota farmer Audrey Arner talked about goal setting and clarifying values during a Farm Beginnings class session in Hutchinson. (LSP photo)**

**BELOW: Extension Educator Jodi DeJong-Hughes (in hole) led a soils workshop for Farm Beginnings participants at the Hutchinson farm of Katy and Peter Hemberger. The Hembergers are Farm Beginnings graduates. (photo by Amy Bacigalupo)**



**Participants in the 2006-2007 Farm Beginnings course in Winona (above) and Hutchinson (right) posed for class photos recently. Classes take place twice a month through February (LSP photos)**





## Farms, taxes & profits

Whether you make money farming or not, filing the federal tax worksheet for farm deductions is going to save you money. This was the take-home message for participants in a workshop at the Land Stewardship Project's southeast Minnesota office in late November.

LSP is cooperating with the Washington, D.C.-based Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural (RC) to further our shared goals related to record keeping by family farmers. RC learned through a national survey that only a small percentage of farmers who file taxes actually include a Schedule F. The Farm Loss and

Profit worksheet allows the deduction of many farming expenses regardless of the bottom line. Good record keeping captures those expenses, which translates into a more thorough packet of deductions and greater savings from a tax point of view.

The workshop addressed the how, why, and what of record keeping and then delved into a line-by-line explanation of this year's Schedule F form. Duane Hutton of Agra-Advisory Service in Minnesota City, Minn., walked participants through such particulars as dividends, meals, depreciation, filing a 1099

versus W-2, how to address the sale of breeder stock, and how long to keep what records.

A similar workshop took place Dec. 20 in LSP's western Minnesota office. This year's Farm Beginnings® participants are also getting a dose of the material, which includes definitions, an introduction to home budgets, and peer-to-peer teaching.

The Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural is an alliance of regionally and culturally diverse organizations working to build a more just and sustainable food system. With partners nationwide, RC works at both grassroots and policy levels to ensure fair working conditions and fair market returns to minority and other small farmers and rural communities. LSP is one of those partners working especially on financial literacy.

For more information, please contact Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or [caroline@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:caroline@landstewardshipproject.org), or Amy Bacigalupo at 320-269-2105 or [amyb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:amyb@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Help with that dairy transition

The decision to transition from a conventional dairy to one that is grass-based and/or organic would be better informed if benchmark data were available to provide some ballpark numbers.

However, producers report that the widely used FINPACK analysis does not accurately reflect such enterprises and is therefore not a reliable indication of the cash flow potential in either operation.

In a project conducted with Cooperative Development Services and the Iowa Institute of Cooperatives, the Land Stewardship Project is helping to design changes to FINPACK so that the market potential in certified organic dairying can be accurately penciled out by would-be dairy farmers or those interested in transitioning.

In December, farmers met in LSP's southeast Minnesota office to troubleshoot the assumptions built around conventional, grass-based, and organic dairies. They proposed changes to such line items as veterinary bills, purchased feed, repairs, milk production and hauling costs. They also challenged the assumption that a grass-based dairy is less profitable than a conventional one. LSP is conducting this

research and outreach in partnership with funding from USDA.

If you are considering a grass-based and/or organic dairy and would like to run some numbers on a one-on-one basis later this

winter, please contact Caroline van Schaik in the Lewiston LSP office at 507-523-3366 or [caroline@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:caroline@landstewardshipproject.org).



Right to left: Bob Olson, Heidi and John Wise, Paul Drenckhahn and Arlene Hershey participated in a recent workshop on FINPACK at LSP's Lewiston, Minn., office. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)

## Feeding the local economy

By Caroline van Schaik

Throughout this past year, there has been a coming together of farmers and others interested in keeping our farm products closer to home than, say, the Twin Cities and Chicago. We want the renaissance of the farm as a place—a source—of economic activity that defines more directly the look and feel of the landscape. As Land Stewardship Project staff and members pull together around community-based food systems, the need for a dual strategy focused on markets and farmers is pretty clear.

For example, the region's health care facilities could be a huge "place-based" market opportunity that in turn encourages new farmers to sign on. The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., can serve up to 15,000 meals a day. That's a lot of meat and potatoes, maybe even the whole hog grown right here in a sustainable fashion. One could make a case for "the whole hog" as a metaphor for using every resource at hand to benefit every mouth at the table. It's probably more fundamental than that.

"Getting healthy food in a hospital seems like a no-brainer," said a vegetable producer during a meeting at LSP's Lewiston office in November. "Awesome," "It's daunting," and "It's going to happen," said others. "We need to keep our food here."

In fact, we do need to keep our food here, wherever "here" is. Health care facilities are one way to do it because they are everywhere, serve a lot of meals to patients, staff and visitors, and have a food budget that is often bigger than some other institutions such as schools.

That is, if we can all get past the status quo when it comes to the paradigms that deliver food to our plates. We in southeastern Minnesota are facing a billion dollar food leak caused by market, transportation, and pricing systems that work against the idea that we can feed ourselves quite well, thank you (see sidebar). Imagine how many families, farms, bird nests, trout streams, Main Street stores and communities that money could support if it stayed at home?

Did I say trout streams? This is about

landscape change, be assured. Behind every pound of Featherstone broccoli, Earth-Be-Glad beef, or Hidden Stream chicken served to patients, there is a farm family (or two), a community school, a choir, one to three processing plants, a lot of good soil, and the Mississippi River. Local business coffers are filled with this act of serving such a meal, and that includes the business of farms. Besides, it also sets a powerful example of how environmental stewardship can fit hand-in-glove with the relationships that meld individuals into community.

In southeastern Minnesota, LSP staff members are actively involved with the Winona County Economic Development Authority (EDA) and its Local Foods working group. Last February, the two organizations and others held a hugely

### When food hits the road, so does wealth

- ◆ In a recent analysis, the seven-county southeast Minnesota region had **303,000** residents, who had **\$10 billion** in annual purchasing power.
- ◆ There were **8,436** farm families in the region.
- ◆ The region's farmers sold **\$912 million** worth of commodities annually, but spent **\$996 million** annually, on average, to produce those crops.
- ◆ The region's farmers spent about **\$500 million** buying ag production inputs from outside the area.
- ◆ Consumers spent **\$500 million** annually buying food from outside the region (out of **\$670 million** in total spent on food).
- ◆ So the region shipped out as much money producing and buying food as the entire value of all the commodities produced.

—analysis by Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center, [www.crcworks.org](http://www.crcworks.org); 612-869-8664

successful Local Foods Forum and Expo. LSP members have since been able to tap into a well-placed vein of interest at the Mayo Clinic. There were local foods presentations there in December and January. A second Local Foods Forum and Expo is planned for March 9, with a special focus on health as a driver in bettering our rural economy and making room for more stewardship farmers (see the Stewardship Calendar on page 28).

Most recently, farmers met to gauge interest in what seems like a nearly inexhaustible marketing opportunity. They said over and over how important it was to start slow—not all 15,000 meals, but one or two items based on farmer availability. With experience and good planning, the product list could grow and so could the number of farmers.

Some volunteered for homework to learn about specific precedent-setting farmer/health care models in place around the country. There is no doubt that the implications for stemming that billion dollar food leak give rise to hope—farming families still shape the psyche of the region, and strong markets help to guarantee a farming future. Helping to cure our sick with good food should not even be up for discussion. But since it is, there are excellent benefits for everyone in the process.

Not that it's going to be a piece of cake, homemade or otherwise. Not all local food is created equal; delivering enough supply by other than one farmer at the back door at a time will have to be addressed. And, oh yes, there is the matter of the whole hog and teaching chefs how to use it all, just to name a few challenges.

But that's all they are—not insurmountable barriers, and nothing that open, respectful, careful planning can't address. This is as much our work now as it has been for 25 years. And it's an order of magnitude more than just a good plate of ribs.

The work is a jump-start to LSP's federal and state agricultural policy proposals (see pages 12 and 14) that make a case for regional food systems—for beginning farmer and rancher training, for market promotion including interstate sales opportunities, and for institutional sourcing. □

*Caroline van Schaik is leading LSP's Community Based Food Systems work in southeast Minnesota. She can be reached at 507-523-3366 or [caroline@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:caroline@landstewardshipproject.org).*

## LSP members pitch policy reform in D.C.

By Adam Warthesen

Land Stewardship Project farmer-members joined a coalition of farmers from across the Midwest in calling for federal farm policy reform during a trip to Washington, D.C., in November. The coalition of farmers talked to policymakers about the 2007 Farm Bill and the need for initiatives that support new and beginning farmers, local and regional food systems and conservation on working farmland.



**Participants in the D.C. fly-in stood for a photo on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court. They included:** (back, left to right) **Ron Kielkopf, Steve Potts, Gary Larsen,** (front, left to right) **Bill Christison, Lisa Whelan, Jim Deutsch, Alison Deutsch, Rhonda Perry, Keith Bolin, Paul Sobocinski, Bill Gorman, Steve Jurgens, Gayle Keiser, John Schmidt, Adam Warthesen and Mitch Hunter.** (LSP photo)

The LSP members were in Washington as part of a delegation of 16 farmers and leaders from a coalition of Midwestern farm groups representing the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment. Over three days, the farmers from Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and Missouri held over 30 meetings with Congressional offices and national organizations.

The delegation focused on further development and expansion of the Conservation Security Program (CSP), which rewards farmers for utilizing good stewardship methods. The farmers also focused on how Congress can reform commodity programs so they work better for farmers and cost less. In addition, farmers talked about the need for a Beginning Farmer Act, which would help

beginning farmers by providing support for training programs, access to lending and savings opportunities and incentives to utilize conservation programs.

“As new farmers getting started on the land, we’ve run into numerous barriers trying to access capital for our farm,” says Alison Deutsch, who, along with her husband Jim, participated in the trip to D.C. The couple graduated from LSP’s Farm Beginnings® program in 2006, and they now farm near Preston, Minn.

“Enacting a Beginning Farmer Act that includes support for mentoring programs

and lending options could really help individuals looking to get started,” adds Alison.

The delegation also supported a “New Farm Initiative” to optimize development of farms and farm-based business that grow and market to local and regional communities. Priorities for this initiative include an expanded Farmers’ Market Promotion Program, improving the Value-Added Producer Grant Program and increasing the size and scope of the Farm to Cafeteria Program. □

*Adam Warthesen is with LSP’s Policy and Organizing Program. He can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.*

## Judge: Checkoff can’t support factory farm immunity

Pork checkoff funds cannot be used to give factory livestock farms “safe harbor” from prosecution related to air pollution violations, according to a recent ruling by an Administrative Law Judge. The judge ordered the National Pork Board not to use checkoff funds to pay for the Environmental Protection Agency’s consent agreement providing certain factory farms immunity.

The ruling came as a result of a petition filed by the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment (CFFE) in 2005 urging USDA to immediately halt the use of checkoff dollars for the program.

The safe harbor agreement grants immunity for certain air pollution violations to factory farms that sign up for an air quality study. More details are at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/06/newsr\\_061111.htm](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/06/newsr_061111.htm).

CFFE is a coalition of farm and rural groups leading the fight against the corporate takeover of the hog industry and working for policies supporting independent family farmers. CFFE members groups include the Land Stewardship Project, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, Missouri Rural Crisis Center, Citizens Action Coalition of Indiana and the Illinois Stewardship Alliance. Farmers’ Legal Action Group (FLAG) is the legal representative of CFFE. □

## Race equity report card

The Organizing Apprenticeship Project (OAP) recently released its *Minnesota Legislative Report Card on Racial Equity*.

The focus of the report card was to address racial disparities within Minnesota and assess the performance of legislators and legislative policies that affect people of color in this state. The Minnesota Legislature received an F overall, and the Governor received a C- for his support of racial equity bills.

The Land Stewardship Project has had a long relationship with the Organizing Apprenticeship Project; having various LSP staff members go through the program and serve as mentors. To read more about OAP or to download the race equity report card, see [www.oaproject.org](http://www.oaproject.org).

# There's a new farm policy face on Congress

## New ag committee chairs for both the House & Senate

By Adam Warthesen

The 110th U.S. Congress has been sworn in and a new body of Senators and Representatives will play prominent roles in the development and direction of federal policy, including the 2007 Farm Bill.

The November elections have changed the make-up and dynamics of Congress. After 12 years of control in the U.S. House of Representatives, Republicans will now be in the minority party. The Democrats also have control of the Senate and hold a narrow two-seat majority at this writing.

With the shake-up in both chambers of Congress, new chairs have been appointed to committees and subcommittees. This includes two Midwestern policymakers who will chair the Agriculture

Committees in the U.S. House and Senate.

In the U.S. House, Congressman Collin Peterson (D-MN), whose district resides in western Minnesota, has taken over as chair of the Agriculture Committee. The Senate's Agriculture Committee is now chaired by Tom Harkin (D-IA).

Minnesota will continue to have both of its Senators—Norm Coleman (R-MN) and newly-elected Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)—serving on the Agriculture Committee. In the House, incoming Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN) will be serving on that body's Agriculture Committee.

With the Congressional Agriculture Committees having a strong Upper Midwestern flavor, the role of the Land Stewardship Project as a voice representing farmers and citizens engaged in the debate over our food and agriculture

system will be more key than ever. □

Adam Warthesen can be reached at 612-722-6377 or [adamw@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:adamw@landstewardshipproject.org).

## LSP's Farm Bill priorities

In July 2006, Land Stewardship Project organizer Paul Sobocinski testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture. This testimony provides a good background on LSP's priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill. An excerpt of that testimony was printed in Autumn 2006 edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, page 4. The full text of the testimony can be found at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/06/newsr\\_060722.htm](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/06/newsr_060722.htm).

## 'No time for delay' on Farm Bill reform, says SAC & LSP

### Congress given a poor grade for handling of current agricultural policy

The Land Stewardship Project and other members of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC) have released a comprehensive package of proposed reforms for the 2007 Farm Bill. The groups have also issued a report card on the performance of 10 key components of the 2002 Farm Bill. The Coalition gave Congress a D+ and the Bush Administration a C- for their implementation of the 2002 Farm Bill.

The platform, "No Time for Delay," calls on Congress to embrace reform and construct new policies and programs that promote economic opportunity, environmental stewardship and rural prosperity. The Coalition urges the federal government to adopt a series of key policies that are urgently needed to help new farmers enter agriculture, promote profitable family farms, enhance the environment and build healthy, diversified rural economies.

One of the most critical reforms SAC and LSP are supporting is expanding and fully funding the Conservation Security Program (CSP). "No Time for Delay" calls for making this program the primary stewardship incentive program in the Farm Bill. CSP should also be available to producers nationwide and on a continuous basis, say SAC and LSP.

Since 2004, CSP has delivered over \$5.6 million to more than 700 Minnesota farmers in seven watersheds for practices that protect soil and water quality as well as promote habitat restoration for wildlife. Yet because of a confusing rule-making process and consistent raiding of CSP dollars by Congress, the program has not yet reached its full potential.

"Leveling the playing field with a program that supports conservation practices on the land you're farming is critical," says Bill Gorman, a Goodhue, Minn., area dairy farmer and LSP Federal Farm Policy Committee member. "A new and improved Conservation Security Program is that program. Making it available to all farmers consistently and providing some real dedicated funding is what Congress needs to do."

The inadequate implementation of CSP and consistent cutting of funds by appropriators is one of the reasons Congress and the Administration did so poorly on the Coalition's Farm Bill report card.

"No Time for Delay" also calls for the next Farm Bill to support a new generation of farmers and ranchers. Identifying and solving barriers new and beginning farmers face is a key component of the platform. One such effort is reauthoriza-

tion and adequate funding of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, a competitive grants program that supports community-based efforts to develop networks and mentoring programs for beginning farmers. Coupled with policies that start to address access to credit and land, as well as innovative savings opportunities for new farmers, this package of proposals is being referred to by some groups as the Beginning Farmer Act. Such legislation is leveraging support from members of Congress in the Upper Midwest and could be introduced this year and incorporated into the 2007 Farm Bill.

The package of reforms also contains a number of other policy options such as: establishing new entrepreneurial development and asset building programs to strengthen rural economies; providing research, marketing and production assistance for organic farmers and farmers wanting to convert to organically certifiable practices; and supporting renewable energy through an innovation grants program.

The SAC report card and the full text of "No Time for Delay: A Sustainable Agriculture Agenda for the 2007 Farm Bill" are posted at <http://www.msawg.org/key-farmbill.html>. □

## What's ahead for LSP at the 2007 session of the Minnesota Legislature

By Bobby King

The 2007 session of the Minnesota Legislature started Jan. 3 with 53 new lawmakers. Committee structure and committee chairs in both the House and Senate also have a fresh look. With all these changes, there are some real opportunities to pass legislation that is good for family farms, sustainable agriculture and rural communities.

### A platform for change

The Land Stewardship Project's State Policy Committee has created a policy platform: "Revitalizing Family Farms and Rural Minnesota." See the sidebar below

for the highlights. As always, LSP will be vigilant and proactive in protecting local control. With the changes at the capitol, we are optimistic about advancing our platform to promote environmental stewardship and family farms.

### New ways to get involved

LSP's strength comes from members' involvement in our work, both in the ideas for the legislation that we propose and in getting it passed. Every session hundreds of LSP members play a part in working to advance our legislation. But we struggle with how to keep members up to date so they can be as effective as possible in working with us for positive change. This year we will try two new

ideas. The first is periodic e-mail updates, probably weekly, on the status of our legislative efforts. These e-mails will provide guidance on how LSP members can help advance key proposals.

The second will be conference calls every other week where LSP Policy organizer Paul Sobocinski will facilitate a discussion about the opportunities and challenges in getting our agenda passed and how members can help. To participate in either of these, contact me at [bking@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bking@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-722-6377. □

*Bobby King is an organizer with LSP's Policy and Organizing Program.*

## Highlights from LSP's 2007 state policy platform

### *State legislative initiatives to revitalize family farms & rural Minnesota*

**1. Supporting the Next Generation of Farmers:** LSP's Farm Beginnings program is full every year. The program even turns applicants away some years. There are young people wanting to start family farms but resources to help them are limited. LSP proposes state legislation to:

→ Help beginning farmers get access to land by creating state tax credits for landowners who rent to beginning farmers. The credit would amount to 15 percent of the gross rental income.

**2. Stewardship of the Land:** Stewardship of our farmland is critical to leaving future generations a healthy environment and viable opportunities to farm. Research has shown that farming can be done in ways that enhance water quality and wildlife habitat while preventing erosion and building soil. LSP proposes legislation to:

→ Offer incentives for pasture and perennial cropping systems that improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Perennial cropping systems, such as pastures, dramatically reduce runoff and create wildlife habitat while keeping working lands working. Our state must reward these practices. This can be done, in part through increased funding for the state's Clean Water Legacy Act.

→ Fully fund the Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program (ESAP).

Established in 1987 as part of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, ESAP's mission is to promote alternative practices which are energy efficient, environmentally sound, profitable and which enhance the self-sufficiency of farmers. The work of ESAP is nationally recognized but the budget has been severely cut over the years.

**3. Local Democracy and Corporate Accountability:** Minnesota has a heritage of strong local democracy. With over 1,700 townships and 87 counties, Minnesota's local governments allow for meaningful citizen participation in the decisions that impact our lives. Maintaining and respecting this tradition is critical to keeping our rural communities vibrant. LSP will strongly oppose any legislation that undermines local democracy

**4. Community Based Local Food Systems:** The local foods movement continues to grow. More farmers are finding profit in producing food for local markets, but more infrastructure and resources are needed to help farmers realize the full potential of these growing markets. As a society we have collectively invested in highways, lock and dams, and railroad systems that make marketing of agriculture products to distant places possible and affordable. We need to invest resources in re-creating an infrastructure that makes local marketing possible. LSP proposes state

legislation to:

→ Fund a comprehensive study to assess bottlenecks and opportunities for community based food systems. Farmers, distributors and purchasers are struggling to create local food systems. Realizing the tremendous economic, environmental and health benefits of locally grown foods, large institutions such as the Mayo Clinic and state colleges and universities are exploring the use of locally grown foods. The state should allocate money to the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) to coordinate a comprehensive study to identify the barriers and propose solutions to realizing the potential of this growing market.

**5. Community Based Renewable Energy:** Minnesota can be a leader in developing and promoting renewable energy. Our policies should ensure that renewable energy is community based and is developed in ways that benefits family farmers, the environment and rural communities. LSP supports legislation to:

→ Create a Renewable Energy Standard of 25 percent renewable energy by 2020.

→ Fund research and demonstration projects related to cellulose based ethanol.

# Mega-dairy drops plans for Dodge County

A four-year campaign by a group of Land Stewardship Project members to protect their community from a 3,000-animal unit dairy proposed by a New Jersey investor has ended in success.

The mega-dairy was proposed for Ripley Township, in southeast Minnesota's Dodge County. The majority of the community's residents were opposed to the project, expressing concerns about the impacts its huge liquid manure lagoon system would have on the environment and property values. Over the years, the mega-dairy's proposers have tried lawsuits, support of

an annexation of the township by the town of Claremont and outside political pressure to force the project into the community—all unsuccessfully. The proposed factory farm was seen by corporate agriculture interests as key in the fight to undermine local government control and clear the way for expansion of large-scale factory livestock operations.

The final blow to the Ripley project came on Nov. 28 when a Minnesota District Court ruled that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency was wrong to not require further environmental study of the project. Earlier, a District Court Judge ruled that the mega-dairy's challenge of

the township's planning and zoning ordinance banning construction of livestock operations over 1,500 animal units was "without merit." Ripley Dairy did not appeal that ruling, and has not re-submitted a request for a conditional use permit.

On Nov. 29, attorneys for the mega-dairy submitted a letter to the Minnesota Assistant Attorney General announcing that Ripley Dairy "does not presently intend to pursue a dairy project in Dodge County, Minnesota."

For more on the Ripley Dairy issue, see the Autumn 2006 issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, page 14. □

## Urban residents provide input on 2007 Farm Bill

More than 100 Twin Citians turned out on a rainy night in mid-December to provide their input into what kinds of reforms they'd like to see in the 2007 Farm Bill. Participants in the meeting, which was sponsored by Oxfam America and the Land Stewardship Project, provided input on three areas of ag policy reform:

- Addressing environmental impacts of U.S. farm policy.
- Public policy that helps build healthy local and regional food systems.
- Global and domestic ramifications of U.S. farm and food policy.

For more information on how to get involved in forming a Farm Bill that's good for the people, the land and our communities, contact Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or [adamw@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:adamw@landstewardshipproject.org). For information on Oxfam America's farm policy reform work, see [www.oxfamamerica.org/agriculture](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/agriculture), or call 800-776-9326.



Participants in the meeting broke up into small groups to discuss what changes they would like to see in the 2007 Farm Bill. Their input is being summarized by LSP's Policy and Organizing Program. Similar Farm Bill input meetings have been held in rural Minnesota, and more are planned this winter. (LSP photo)



Bill Gorman, a dairy farmer from Goodhue, Minn., discussed his recent trip to Washington, D.C. to talk to lawmakers about ag policy reform (see page 12). "It's important for farmers like me to go to D.C. and make our voices heard," he said. "But you here in the Twin Cities eat too. You need to make your voice heard too. I see this big crowd and I know change can happen." (LSP photo)

Dave & Erin Varney

# Stacking the odds

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Farm Beginnings graduates Erin and Dave Varney were first profiled in the *Land Stewardship Letter* in 2004. A lot has happened to the Varneys since then, so we decided to do an updated "Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming" feature on them.

Dave Varney passed a group of rooting hogs, crossed a small creek and came to a stop in a riot of vegetative life. The southwest Wisconsin farmer contemplated his surroundings.

"I'll bet we could rattle off 12 different food crops that are all within 50 feet of us right here," he says. "I see spinach. I see beets. I see raspberries, strawberries, hazelnuts, asparagus. I see elderberries right here. We're in a diverse setting."

And as Varney points out, that diversity doesn't just stop with the plant life; such a mix of food crops allows for a diversity of people as well. Indeed, at this moment on a morning in late September, his brother Adam is busy back across the creek in a commercial kitchen that's attached to the Varney home, making delicious pizzas and other baked goods out of produce and meat raised right on the farm. Dave's wife, Erin, is out making sales calls at co-ops and grocery stores, drumming up business for those baked goods. And on the other end of the short valley that One Sun Farm lies in, Jillian Jacquinet, a former intern on the farm, is planting spinach for her new Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation.

"We're able to integrate a large amount of production in a very small amount of space not with just one business, but two businesses running side-by-side in the same field," says Varney. "So we can have more than one farmer on a single farm working in this kind of system. It's not like a field of corn, where you just have corn."

The Varneys had no intention of just raising corn when they bought 35 acres between Viroqua and La Farge in 2001. At the time, they were enrolled in the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings® course, which provides participants a chance to learn firsthand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The Varneys and their classmates were exposed to goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation,

alternative marketing and innovative production techniques. Established farmers and other professionals presented at the seminars. The course also offered a series of on-farm educational field days during the spring and summer where students like the Varneys got to see the production systems they were learning about in action. A mainstay of Farm Beginnings is brainstorming all the possibilities a farm can hold, helping participants think beyond the corn-soybean paradigm. The Varneys took that to heart.

"Farm Beginnings helped us throw the book out the window of what you're supposed to do when you get to a farm," says Dave.



well as how they get it to consumers.

Soon after buying the farm they began raising vegetables for the wholesale organic market and farmers' markets. They then launched a CSA operation in partnership with two other farms. CSA farms sell shares in the operation before the growing season, in return providing members fresh, organic produce on a regular basis. But the Varneys were sure from the beginning that they didn't always want to raise annual vegetables in mass quantities. The labor is difficult and the income can be spotty. Plus, they are



Dave, Erin, Daisy, Sam, Adam and Jillian show off some of the farm's products in their new retail/storage facility. (LSP photo)

Not that the Varneys—Erin is 35 and Dave is 37—were exactly entrenched in the traditional farm model. Before taking Farm Beginnings, their experience in the food system consisted of eating, raising a garden and waiting tables at a restaurant in the Twin Cities area. When their children were born, they wanted to be part of a healthy food system.

"For us, it's all about the food," says Erin. "It's all about getting people to appreciate good food. It's all about how we can get it in their mouths."

That means the Varneys have had an open mind about how they raise food, as

concerned about the fragility of the land they farm, and whether even organic production of annual crops is sustainable in the long term. As a result, almost from the beginning the Varneys have been working to make perennial food plants a major part of their operation. But fruit and nut bushes can take years to produce an economic return. So as they get perennials such as hazelnuts started, the Varneys are growing annual crops for short-term cash flow amongst the

Fresh Faces, see page 17...



## Chipping in on waste management

One Sun Farm is constantly looking for ways to protect their soil and water through a tight nutrient cycle. Dave and Erin Varney recently struck on a way their farm can tighten the nutrient cycle in the larger community as well.

In the county where their farm is lo-

cated, Amish sawmills produce “edgings” that are considered a waste problem in the region. But on a recent fall day bundles of the edgings were sitting on the Varney farm, waiting to be ground into chips. It turns out raspberries and hazelnuts thrive when growing in a woodchip mulch.

The Varneys recently invited their local

Extension educator and the county solid waste manager to the farm to see how a waste problem could become an agricultural solution.

“Our farm alone can take a large amount of this waste being produced by these sawmills,” says Dave. “If there were other farmers doing it, it wouldn’t be a waste problem anymore. We might be fighting over it.”

### ...Fresh Faces, from page 16

bushes—a system called “stacking.”

The farm has over 2,500 hazelnut bushes. There are also cherry trees and cherry bushes, as well as blueberries. They have a few head of cattle and hogs to add value to their forage and help cycle fertility back to the land.

The Varneys have recently adjusted how they market their products. While wholesaling vegetables and marketing through the CSA, Erin needed to work off-farm to supplement their income. That left Dave to do all the day-to-day work on the farm. They needed some way to add value to what they were producing so both Varneys could be on the farm full-time. In December 2004 they established a commercial kitchen in the basement of their house.

Today, besides frozen pizzas, One Sun Farm markets sandwich cookies, pies and scones. They are made from products either raised on the farm or procured locally. For example, they use their own spinach and pork, but buy cheese from Organic Valley up the road in La Farge.

“It’s very much a local product we’re producing,” says Dave.

It’s also a delicious product, according to their customers. One Sun Farm products are in nine retail outlets, all within a 50-mile radius of the farm. The Varneys are in discussions with co-ops in Madison, Wis., and the Twin Cities.

### Priming the financial pump

All of this activity takes investment, which means seeking loans. Financial credit can be hard to come by when one is pursuing enterprises that are off the beaten track agriculturally.

“They’re used to corn and soybeans, and we’re talking beets, hazelnuts and pizza,” says Erin of most ag lenders they dealt with.

Establishing perennial plants such as hazelnuts and raspberries was costly, and the Varneys maxed out their credit cards to finance the plantings and get the

bakery started. After being rejected by half-a-dozen creditors, in 2005 the Varneys got a loan through their local USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). FSA offers low-interest, fixed-rate loans to farmers who have been rejected by other private lenders (in fact, FSA had previously rejected the Varneys). After using that loan to consolidate their debt, the Varneys wrote the FSA and made the argument that it was time to take the farm the next step: build a retail outlet/cold storage facility on the farm and remodel the house so that meals could be served to diners. In addition, housing needed to be built for workers on the farm. Their loan officer agreed, and they got a second loan

## Give it a listen

To listen to Dave Varney talk about One Sun Farm’s permaculture system, check out LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast. One Sun Farm is featured on installments 26 and 27. See page 22 for details on how to listen to *Ear to the Ground* podcasts.

in 2006.

Erin credits their financial history, plus their Farm Beginnings training, with their success in getting the FSA loans. “We’ve had our financial struggles, but we’ve always paid our bills on time,” she says. “To them that’s gold. They respect good records even though they may not be familiar with the type of agriculture you’re doing. If you walk in there and you have no idea what you sold last year, they aren’t going to be interested, no matter what type of farming it is.”

And while in Farm Beginnings, the Varneys learned how to write a good business plan to show that even though what they are planning is unconventional, it is viable.

On this fall day, the new retail/storage building is open for business and its cold room is stacked with pizzas. Up the

driveway, workers are remodeling the house. After five years working elsewhere, Erin is on the farm full-time. This has given she and Dave more time to spend with their children: Daisy, 10, and Sam, 12. It’s also allowed them to focus on building the farm’s long-term viability.

“We’re living our business plan right now,” says Erin.

The Varneys are also living their dream of getting other farmers started. The CSA partnership with the two other farms dissolved in 2005, but Jacqinot, 23, is getting her own CSA operation off the ground with 20 members. She’s renting land from One Sun Farm, and using their hoop house and storage facilities. Plus she produces vegetables for the baking business.

“Dave kind of pushed me off the ledge,” says Jacqinot while picking raspberries for her members. “I learned a lot this year.”

Having Jacqinot on the farm is part of the Varneys’ plan to integrate not only plants and animals into the operation, but people as well. Dave’s brother Adam came to the farm in 2005 after waiting tables as well. “We’re all misfits of the industrial food system,” says Dave.

The Varneys are also pleased that they’ve been able to spread the life of the farm onto neighboring land. Landowners in the area have parcels too small for larger crop farmers to bother renting. This has provided the Varneys an opportunity to get access to an additional 35 acres of land, where they graze cattle.

Says Dave, “I insist there could be 10 One Sun Farms around here.” □

## Farm Beginnings

To read other profiles of graduates of the Farm Beginnings® program, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html).

For more on Farm Beginnings, see [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org), or call 507-523-3366 in LSP’s southeast Minnesota office, or 320-269-2105 in western Minnesota.

## A little local on the prairie

By Terry VanDerPol

On the western prairies of Minnesota, the village of Milan is home to 326 souls with a strong sense of their own history and cultural identity. The Milan Village Arts School features classes on silversmithing, woodcarving, and rosemaling as well as the premiere Syttende Mai (Norwegian Constitution Day) celebration in Minnesota.

Milan also boasts a popular small town grocery store, Bergen's Prairie Market. At a suggestion from Dan Struxness, an area farmer who raises 100 percent grass-fed beef a few miles west of Milan, proprietor Bergen Standahl carries as much locally grown product as possible.

"When I bought the store four years ago I was new to the grocery business, so I didn't know what would work and what wouldn't," says Standahl. "But the locally grown products have been real strong sellers. I wish I could get more. The customers love it for its flavor and its quality. Area ladies who have baked bread and cakes all their lives love Dry Weather Creek's organically grown, on-farm milled flours."

Standahl's store also carries Pride of Main Street products from an area dairy processor, as well as pork from Kalliro Farm, bison from J & L Bison, veggies from Eartrise Farm, strawberries from Coyote Grange, eggs from the Birds of a Feather Poultry Co-op, and beef from Double D Natural Meats – all farms within a few miles of the store. One day recently as Standahl and I visited about the powerful demand for local farm products, Bev Struxness, part of the Double-D Natural Meats Farm, stopped in to check the beef inventory. "Even though it's not a huge inventory, it's easy for me to maintain because it's local," explains Bev. "But you know, I've lived a few miles from Milan most of my adult life, and still, nearly every time I come in here I see someone I don't recognize." Standahl agrees. Local foods are definitely a draw.

Struxness and her husband Don farm just a few miles east of Milan. Their son and daughter-in-law, Dan and Missy, farm just west of town in scenic Lac qui

Parle County. Their grass-fed beef is organic and certified by Food Alliance Midwest, a certifier for sustainable farming practices. In addition to Bergen's Prairie Market, they direct market beef

and sell some by quarters and halves. They also market grass-fed beef through Thousand Hills Cattle Company. Thousand Hills, also Food Alliance certified, works with a number of Midwestern farmers to supply high quality grass-fed beef to customers who want the flavor, quality and health benefits of 100 percent grass-fed beef. Bergen's Market and

**Prairie Market, see page 19...**



**Farmer Bev Struxness and grocer Bergen Standahl restocked t-bone steak and ground beef at Bergen's Prairie Market recently. "...the locally grown products have been real strong sellers," says Standahl. "I wish I could get more. The customers love it for its flavor and its quality." (photo by Terry VanDerPol)**

## 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 United States and Canada in natural food co-ops and grocery stores, and in select restaurants and food service dining halls.

For details on Food Alliance Midwest and its certification program, visit [www.foodalliance.org/midwest/partners\\_mw.htm](http://www.foodalliance.org/midwest/partners_mw.htm), or call 651-265-3682.



Double-D, together with their loyal customers throughout the area, are proof that biggest isn't always best. "People can think about what's good for the community when they make food and farming choices," says Bev. "It's working here. The partnership between the market and area farmers means more dollars stay in the community." □

Terry VanDerPol does Community Based Food Systems work in the Land Stewardship Project's western Minnesota office. She can be contacted at 320-269-2105 or [tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org).

## Food Alliance meeting Feb. 8

"How Brands Can Leverage 'Sustainable Agriculture' in the Marketplace" is the theme of the Food Alliance Midwest's Annual Meeting on Thursday, Feb. 8, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the Radisson Hotel in Roseville, Minn.

These annual meetings are a chance for Food Alliance producers to get together with retailers, distributors and food service management company representatives to discuss how this sustainable seal can support land stewardship and healthy foods.

For more information, contact Food Alliance Director Jim Ennis at 651-265-3684 or [jim@foodalliance.org](mailto:jim@foodalliance.org). □

## FA at 'Food & Wine' Feb. 23-25

During the 2007 Twin Cities Food and Wine Experience, Food Alliance Midwest will be putting on a "mini" Minnesota Cooks event, with 12 chefs cooking up local foods over three days. The Food and Wine Experience is Feb. 23-25 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. For details, see [www.foodwineshow.com](http://www.foodwineshow.com). □

## Food Alliance on ice

When famed polar explorer Will Steger strikes out this February on his four-month adventure across the Canadian Arctic's Baffin Island, he will be documenting the effects of global climate change on some of the most remote Inuit villages in the world. So it's fitting that some of the food Steger and his teammates will be dining on has been certified by Food Alliance Midwest as produced

using environmentally-friendly methods. Steger's Global Warming 101 Expedition will be carrying meat produced by Moonstone Farm and Thousand Hills Cattle Company, as well as PastureLand butter and cheese. These Food Alliance certified suppliers are made up of farmers who are Land Stewardship Project members using pasture-based systems to raise livestock.

Steger has been an important eyewitness to the shrinking of polar ice due to global climate change, and has been busy recently spreading the word that a combination of policy changes and personal choices are the only hope for averting disaster. Falling under the "personal choices" category are food choices that support sustainable practices.

For more on the expedition, including links to the Moonstone, PastureLand and Thousand Hills websites, see [www.globalwarming101.com](http://www.globalwarming101.com). □

## CSA Farm Directory available in March

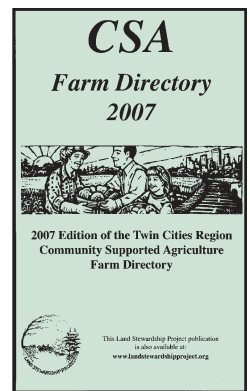
The Land Stewardship Project's annual *Twin Cities Area CSA Farm Directory* will be available in March. This directory is a listing of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms that deliver to the Minneapolis/Saint Paul area. The CSA model

allows consumers to buy a "share" in a farm before the growing season. In return, the farm members get a regular delivery of organically raised produce, usually from June to October. During the past 16 years, more than two dozen CSA farms have sprung up in the Twin Cities region.

You can check out the 2006 edition of the *CSA Farm Directory* at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html). When the 2007 edition is updated, it will be placed at that same Internet address. If you would like a free paper copy of the 2007 directory, contact Louise Arbuckle at 651-653-0618 or [lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org).

## CSA farmers needed

If you are a CSA farmer who would like to be listed in the *Twin Cities Area CSA Farm Directory*, please contact Lori Golightly at 651-653-0618 or [lorigo@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lorigo@landstewardshipproject.org). □



## Stewardship Food Network

The *Stewardship Food Network* is a list of Land Stewardship Project members who produce meat, dairy products, eggs, vegetables, fruit, flowers, grain and other goods in a sustainable manner. The *Network* also lists LSP member-businesses selling or processing food produced by other LSP members.

Some of the production methods used by the *Network* farmers include certified organic, antibiotic and hormone-free, humanely raised and slaughtered, free of genetically modified organisms, pasture-based, integrated pest management to reduce pesticide use, deep-bedded straw livestock housing and conservation tillage. The listing provides contact information for the farmers so consumers can communicate with them directly to learn more about production methods, availability of products and prices.

For a complete listing, see the Jan./

Feb./March 2006 *Land Stewardship Letter*, or contact our Twin Cities office at 651-653-0618. The list is also at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/foodfarm-main.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/foodfarm-main.html). LSP periodically updates and makes corrections to its *Stewardship Food Network* list. If you are an LSP member who would like to be listed, call 651-653-0618, or e-mail [cathye@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cathye@landstewardshipproject.org). Here is the latest addition:

### Twin Cities Metro Area

#### □ Braucher's Sunshine Harvest Farm

Mike Braucher  
2230 35th Street West  
Webster, MN 55088  
Phone: 952-652-1911  
E-mail: [sunshineharvestfarm@hotmail.com](mailto:sunshineharvestfarm@hotmail.com)

➔ Products: **Grass-fed beef & lamb; pasture-raised chicken & eggs; no feed antibiotics used**

# The Monitoring Team

*For 10 years the work of this ground-breaking group has been influencing farming, environmental protection and public policy.*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** 2007 marks 10 years since a remarkable initiative called the Monitoring Team wrapped up its official duties. A unique collaboration of farmers, university researchers, natural resource agency personnel and nonprofit staff, the Monitoring Team was coordinated by the Land Stewardship Project and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, which is affiliated with the University of Minnesota.

By the time it wrapped up in 1997, the team had become a model for how natural resource practitioners and farmers can work together to create environmental benefits on farms. In addition, the 26 members created a set of sustainability indicators and distilled them down into a field resource called the *Monitoring Tool Box*.

The *Tool Box* is now being used throughout North America and around the world, and the team's work is even influencing agricultural policy. As government conservation personnel looks for ways to measure the impacts sustainable agriculture is having on the land and water, the Monitoring Team and their *Tool Box* serves as an important model. The Team's work is also influencing scientific research involving natural resources and agricultural practices, particularly such initiatives as the Multiple Benefits of Agriculture project. Finally, the *Tool Box* is being used in the training of a new generation of beginning farmers in Minnesota and other states through LSP's Farm Beginnings® course.

But it all started with six farm families in Minnesota who were utilizing a sustainable livestock production technique called managed rotational grazing and who wanted to know what impact they were having on the land and its wild inhabitants. Below is a description of how one monitoring tool—birding—became a key element in determining that impact. It also ushered in a way to improve sustainability for the environment *and* the farmers.

One summer afternoon, a Chevy Suburban truck bounced along a fence-line, its occupants blurting out the names of birds flitting about in a nearby pasture.

"Flycatcher!"

"Grackles!"

"Eastern kingbirds!"

"What's that? A savannah sparrow?"

"No, it's a fence tightener," announced one of the birders with a laugh after a quick check with the binoculars.

This wasn't a group of urban ornithologists talking excitedly about the difference between a songbird and a hand-sized piece of ratcheted steel. This time, farmers were the ones packing the binoculars and field guides on a tour of a farm in southern Minnesota. They were being given a mini-course on the feathered residents by Art "Tex" Hawkins, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, and Art Thicke, a dairy farmer who has made birding a part of his livestock chore

routine.

Both men are founding members of the Monitoring Team. Their enthusiasm for birds is infectious, and it's easy to see why birding became one of the team's most popular monitoring tools. It's user-friendly and can put the development of sustainable management techniques in the hands of the farmers themselves. Because it can be worked into livestock chores like moving cattle and fixing fences, birding is a handy way for gauging some of the impacts a farmer is having on the land. It's also more pleasant than grubbing up soil samples.

How certain monitoring activities rate on the "fun scale" while fitting into daily farm activities is not trivial. During the mid-1990s, John Doran, a U.S. Department of Agriculture soil scientist based at the University of Nebraska, tried to develop a comprehensive soil quality testing kit for farmers. The kit contained resources for testing, among other things, soil respiration, infiltration capacity, bulk density, acidity levels, nitrate levels, electric conductivity, and compaction. Taken together, all of these indicators

should give farmers an excellent idea of how their farming practices are affecting the biological health of the soil. But when, as a dry run, Doran sent the kit out to a few innovative farmers who were trying various sustainable practices, he was disappointed in how they used it. The farmers reported back that they simply didn't have time to fit the kit into their routine, says Doran.

Some farmers were overwhelmed by all the tests that could be done and simply picked and chose indicators at random as if they were grabbing different-sized wrenches out of a tool box. Such selective use of the kit may have helped the farmers determine, for example, if their soils were short on nitrogen or too acidic, but it didn't give an overall picture of soil quality. That's why one no-till farmer in Illinois was able to use the kit to reaffirm his belief that his intensive use of chemicals was good for the soil. Doran's experience with the soil quality testing kit reinforced his belief that to be truly useful for farmers and scientists, monitoring systems must give qualitative measures—sights, sounds, and smells—the same weight as their quantitative counterparts—hard numbers on pH and nutrient levels, etc.

Dickcissels and vesper sparrows aren't the end-all indicators of how a farm is doing ecologically, but their presence or absence tells a big-picture story that's hard to fudge. Wildlife biologists consider grassland bird species to be good biological barometers in farm country because they respond so quickly



to changes in land use—bad and good.

That's why it's so exciting that by the third year of the monitoring initiative, bird sightings and activities were among the first items farmers mentioned during their monthly reports. When they got together for meetings or field days, farmers were not bragging about their corn yields, milk production, or even improvements in soil structure. Instead,

**Monitoring Team** *see page 21...*

they were quick to let each other know about the number of successful bluebird or bobolink nestings they had witnessed on the land.

As they became more aware of the bird life on their farms (and began enjoying the birds more), the farmers took the next step: they started wondering what impacts their livelihoods were having on the life cycles of their feathered neighbors. At team meetings, the farmers began discussing with Hawkins concerns they had about nesting disruptions caused by haying, pasture clipping (a method for keeping the grass more palatable for livestock), and even grazing. Although several of the farmers observed that cattle were sometimes able to graze a paddock with an active nest in it without destroying the nest eggs or nestlings, the results weren't always as positive when it came to mechanical forage harvesting.

It became clear that the hay fields and managed pastures were in danger of becoming avian "population sinks," or booby traps, rather than "population sources." As a result, several farmers reduced or delayed pasture clipping to allow fledglings to achieve some level of mobility before the mower disrupted the nests.

Beef producer Mike Rupprecht did not clip any of his paddocks one year. It didn't appear to have any negative effect on the productivity of the pastures or beef cow herd, and he and his wife Jennifer observed a number of male dickcissels using taller plants in their pastures as singing perches. Art Thicke also eliminated clipping on some of his paddocks one year and by the fourth grazing, he says, "You couldn't tell where you clipped and where you didn't." In other words, despite the lack of clipping, the cows still found the grass palatable.

One of the management techniques that has the farmers most excited about improving grassland species nesting success is the establishment of rest areas within their managed grazing paddock systems. This is the grass farmer's version of leaving a piece of land idle for part of a season, allowing the vegetation to grow undisturbed by grazing. In 1995, each farm held one paddock out of grazing from the beginning of the season until at least the end of July (most farmers on the Monitoring Team had 20 to 30 fenced paddocks).

The densely vegetated rest areas provide a place for birds to nest undis-

## Interested in monitoring?

The *Monitoring Tool Box* is available for purchase. This guide is for farmers and other land managers interested in learning easy-to-use techniques for monitoring the impact of management decisions on their land, finances and family. It covers the monitoring of quality of life, finances, birds, frogs, soils, pastures and streams.

Copies are available in the Land Stewardship Project's offices in southeast Minnesota, western Minnesota and White Bear Lake, Minn. Ordering information is also available at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-pubs.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-pubs.html).

To read more about the Monitoring Team, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/04/itn\\_040201.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/04/itn_040201.html) for an article that appeared in the Spring 2003 issue of *Conservation In Practice*, a publication of the Society for Conservation Biology.

Details on the Multiple Benefits of Agriculture initiative are at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs\\_mba.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_mba.html). The Conservation Security Program is an initiative that holds great potential for rewarding farmers who produce environmental benefits and can use monitoring techniques to prove it. Details on that program are at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs\\_csp.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_csp.html).

To hear a podcast where one farm family describes how monitoring has affected their operation, check out *Ear to the Ground* No. 4 (see page 22).



Illustration by Jim Kiehne

turbed by cattle or machines. They also allow birds disturbed in adjoining paddocks to retreat to the lush cover and re-nest. Farmers noticed greater concentrations of bobolinks and dickcissels in the rest areas during the first year of the experiment. A search of a rest paddock on the Rupprecht farm in 1996 confirmed a successful bobolink re-nesting. By the end of the nesting season in late July of that year, Art Thicke and his wife Jean saw more than 60 bobolinks, some of which were fledglings, flocking together on their farm.

In addition, the rested paddocks give grass and legume seeds an opportunity to mature so they can re-seed either directly or through the livestock. Allowing the grasses and legumes to grow for a longer period also increases the root structure of the plants, thus improving soil structure.

The term "win-win" is much used and abused these days, but that's what we seem to have here. Because these rest areas are showing a benefit not only for wildlife but also for pasture productivity, these are management practices that benefit the farm financially, as well as improve the environment.

If the farmers had been told right out of the gate that their farming methods were threatening grassland bird species, defenses would have gone up, reducing opportunities for even minor management changes to have occurred. Even farmers who have made the transition into more environmentally sustainable methods, such as these had, aren't going to welcome outright criticism of their production system. But monitoring took them through a process that started with newfound knowledge and ended with appreciation and action. □

# Ear to the Ground podcast sounds off on farming, food & the land

The Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* audio magazine is available on our website. This podcast features interviews and field reports related to LSP's work.

These shows can be listened to on a computer, an MP3 player or via compact disc (despite the name, you don't need an iPod to listen to podcasts).

To sample some of the podcasts, see [www.thepodlounge.com/listfeed.php?feed=34810](http://www.thepodlounge.com/listfeed.php?feed=34810). For a step-by-step guide on how to subscribe to the free *Ear to the Ground* service, visit [www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html).

## Looking for story ideas

We are looking for story ideas for future *Ear to the Ground* podcasts. We'd like to hear from you; contact Brian DeVore at 612-729-6294 or [bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Ear to the Ground shows thus far

- **No. 1:** First of a three-part series on Frances Moore Lappé and living democracy.
- **No. 2:** Second of a three-part series on Frances Moore Lappé and living democracy.
- **No. 3:** Third of a three-part series on Frances Moore Lappé and living democracy.
- **No. 4:** A farm family unearths some unpleasant environmental history, pushing



them even harder to be good stewards of the land.

- **No. 5:** The role of women in agriculture is examined through the "Planting in the Dust" play, and the *Voices of Minnesota Farm Women* documentary film.
- **No. 6:** How Farm Beginnings® helps new farmers set goals and put tools in their place.
- **No. 7:** Launching a financial plan for a new farming operation.
- **No. 8:** A tribute to the late Dave Serfling, a farmer, leader, husband, father and steward of the land.
- **No. 9:** A research initiative examines how farming can produce multiple benefits for society beyond food and fiber production.
- **No. 10:** A scientist working on the Multiple Benefits of Agriculture project talks about how working farms can help reduce fish-killing water pollution.
- **No. 11:** A dairy farmer talks about how he has used rotational grazing to improve

water quality on his land.

- **No. 12:** Fred Kirschenmann talks about the future of agriculture in the first of a two-part series.
- **No. 13:** Second of a two-part series on Fred Kirschenmann and his views on the future of agriculture.
- **No. 14:** Economist Richard Levins describes how farmers can use market power to get paid a fair price for their production.
- **No. 15:** Farmer Audrey Arner talks about her experiences with globalization.
- **No. 16:** How Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) brings farmers and consumers together.
- **No. 17:** A Farm Beginnings® discussion about planning for profit.
- **No. 18:** An introduction to innovative direct marketing for beginning farmers.
- **No. 19:** Beginning farmers learn how to successfully obtain credit.
- **No. 20:** A West African farmer talks about the negative impacts of unlimited U.S. commodity crop subsidies.
- **No. 21:** A beginning dairy farmer faces the realities of agriculture.
- **No. 22:** LSP's Mark Schultz discusses federal farm policy reform.
- **No. 23:** LSP calls for sustainable farm policy at a Congressional hearing.
- **No. 24:** A farm family gets rewarded for good stewardship.
- **No. 25:** The farm as natural habitat.
- **No. 26:** Perennial permaculture gets established on a Midwestern farm.
- **No. 27:** A farm makes a waste product into a sustainable input.
- **No. 28:** India's top farm journalist. □

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## Land Stewardship Project blog discusses food & sustainable ag

The Land Stewardship Project has entered the "blogosphere." We are writing a weekly "food and sustainable agriculture" web-based blog for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership at <http://looncommons.org/category/food-and-sustainable-agriculture>. Check out our well-reasoned rants and give us your equally well-reasoned reactions. □

## Blogs thus far

- I Eat & I Vote
- A Steady Diet of De-Skilled Food
- Greenhouse Gases & Gully-Washers
- Factory Farming's Secret Subsidy
- Counting Calories in Agriculture

- Selling Conservation in Farm Country

Minnesota  
Environmental  
Partnership



- How CSP can Reward Conservation Farming
- Ditching Dead Zone Apathy
- Will MDA Gut Environmentally Friendly Farming?
- The Farm as Natural Habitat
- It's Enough to Give Popeye a Bellyache
- Farming's Other Public Goods
- Gas, Grass & Biomass
- Keeping Farming's Natural & Economic Wealth at Home
- Cast a Mealtime Ballot for Conservation
- Ads on WCCO Don't Pass the 'Reality' Test



## Voices of Minnesota Farm Women

*Voices of Minnesota Farm Women* is a 30-minute film documentary produced by Cynthia Vagnetti that presents a positive, hopeful story about family farming based on good land stewardship and the production of healthful food that farmers direct market to people locally or in their region.

The Land Stewardship Project is offering three options for groups that may want to use this program:

- Schedule a showing and discussion of this film for your group or club led by a specially-trained LSP volunteer.

- Purchase an educational packet containing a *Voices* DVD, background material, introduction, discussion guide, handouts, “take action guide,” and more. Use these materials to do multiple *Voices* programs for your group or church.

- Purchase the *Voices* DVD for your own showings.

For more information, call LSP’s Dana Jackson at 651-653-0618, or visit [www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs\\_linking.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_linking.html). □

## Township manual

An updated edition of a popular guide for Minnesota township supervisors and residents interested in understanding their township zoning powers is now available. First published by the Land Stewardship Project in 1997, *When a Factory Farm Comes to Town: Protecting Your Township From Unwanted Development*, is designed to help townships begin the process of creating zoning ordinances that reflect their local values and land use needs. An increasing number of townships are creating local zoning ordinances to protect the health, safety and welfare of their residents.

The 2006 edition of the manual reflects changes that have been made to state laws over the past several years. These changes have not weakened township powers but do affect the process of adopting an interim ordinance.

*When a Factory Farm Comes to Town* is available at no charge on LSP’s website at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/PDF/township\\_manual06.pdf](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/PDF/township_manual06.pdf). Copies can also be purchased for \$8 (that price includes the 6.5 percent Minnesota state sales tax) by calling LSP’s Policy office at 612-722-6377. Information on obtaining copies is also available from LSP’s offices in

Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) and White Bear Lake (651-653-0618). □

## Rural development

“Putting Farming Back in the Driver’s Seat” is a special report based on a series of articles that ran in the *Land Stewardship Letter* in 2006. It describes firsthand the efforts of Woodbury County, Iowa, to utilize local, sustainable family farming as a rural economic development tool in the region. This 10-page publication can be downloaded for free at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdfrural\\_develop\\_report.pdf](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdfrural_develop_report.pdf). Paper copies are available by calling 612-729-6294 or e-mailing [bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Farm business training tuition help

Certified organic farms in Minnesota qualify for a rebate on their Farm Business Management (FBM) program tuition. Through this program, farmers work one-on-one with a farm business management instructor, learning to use farm financial management software called FINPACK and a benchmarking database called FINBIN. A confidential, personalized analysis helps participants track production and financial performance. Many producers use the analysis at tax time or in discussions with lenders.

Tuition assistance for organic farmers starts at 80 percent during the first year in the program, 70 percent in the second year and 60 percent in the third year. To find out how to enroll in FBM, farmers should contact the FBM program at their local Minnesota State Colleges and Universities campus, or visit [www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/organic](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/organic). More information is also available by calling Meg Moynihan with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Sustainable Agriculture Program at 651-201-6616. □

## Grass-fed marketing

*Successfully Direct Marketing Grass-Based Meat: Lessons From Three Iowa Farms* is a CD package of resources for farmers, agricultural educators and government agency staff. The package consists of three farm case studies, pdf documents of the marketing material developed by the farms and a Powerpoint presentation. The CD was developed by Practical Farmers

of Iowa in cooperation with Food Alliance Midwest, with support from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

For more information, visit [www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/marketing.htm](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/marketing.htm) or call Rich Pirog at 515-294-1854. □

## Small bizz assistance

Are you a farmer in western Minnesota interested in direct marketing, tourism or on-farm processing? The Southwest Minnesota Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and the Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) are partnering to offer free small business consultations in Hutchinson, Minn. An SBDC consultant will be available from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on the first Wednesday of each month for walk-in appointments. Both potential small business owners and current small business owners are welcome to stop in for a free consultation.

Call 1-800-642-0684, ext. 7386, with questions or to schedule an appointment for another time/date if the first Wednesday is not convenient. □

## ‘Food Connections’ interns needed

The Land Stewardship Project’s Farm and City Food Connections program in White Bear Lake, Minn., has openings for two interns to work through spring 2007.

One intern is needed to help organize LSP’s new “Buy Fresh Buy Local” campaign in the St. Croix River Valley. A second intern is needed to coordinate the Community Food and Farm Festival that is a part of the Living Green Expo held on the Minnesota State Fair Grounds in May. The work schedule will be flexible.

If you are interested, contact LSP’s Dana Jackson at 651-653-0618 or [danaj@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:danaj@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Local food guide

The 2006 edition of the *Pride of the Prairie Local Food Guide* is now available in western Minnesota businesses and at the Land Stewardship Project’s Montevideo office (301 State Rd., Suite 2; phone: 320-269-2105). It is also available on the Internet at [www.prideoftheprairie.org](http://www.prideoftheprairie.org) or from any of the *Pride of the Prairie* partners. □

## Organic primer

Where does a farmer start when it comes to getting organically certified? The *Guidebook for Organic Certification* answers common questions about getting certified for organic production.

For a copy, see [www.mosesorganic.org/attachments/hwguidebook06.pdf](http://www.mosesorganic.org/attachments/hwguidebook06.pdf) or call 715-772-3153. □

# Farming and the Fate of Wild Nature

## Essays in Conservation-Based Agriculture

Edited by Daniel Imhoff & Jo Ann Baumgartner  
2006; 252 pages  
Watershed Media/Wild Farm Alliance  
Distributed by University of California Press  
www.watershedmedia.org

Reviewed by Dana Jackson

Many sustainable agriculture activists have long been concerned about the fate of family farming. Not as many, however, have been concerned about the fate of wild nature at the hands of farming. Furthermore, those who are passionate about protecting wild nature have often been at odds with farmers passionate about protecting their crops and livestock from the impositions of wild nature.

Wendell Berry, the patron saint of family farming, has been impatient with wild lands advocates, seeing them as lacking respect for people who earn their living from the land. Dave Foreman and Reed Noss, forceful defenders of large carnivores and habitat protection, have offended family farmers and ranchers with what seems like blanket condemnation of their practices, particularly cattle grazing.

Yet, both sides know that farming and wildness must co-exist, however hard that is, and try to meet in a middle area called resource conservation.

It is appropriate that the first reading in *Farming and the Fate of Wild Nature* be a piece by Berry. He challenges both sides to work together against a common enemy: corporate totalitarianism. As Berry writes:

I am a conservationist and a farmer, a wilderness advocate and an agrarian. I am in favor of the world's wildness, not only because I like it, but also because I think it is necessary to the world's life and to our own. For the same reason, I want to preserve the natural health and integrity of the world's economic landscapes, which is to say that I want the world's farmers, ranchers and foresters to live in stable, locally adapted, resource-preserving communities, and I want them to thrive.

## Reviews



Laura Jackson's essay "The Farmer as Conservationist?" questions the ability of farmers to make decisions that result in resource conservation. As a biology teacher residing in the American Corn Belt, the "vast ecological wasteland of northern Iowa," Jackson knows that neither farmer nor conservation biologist has any say in the design of the agricultural system and its impact on the landscape. The industrial system, she writes, "perpetuates the nostalgic myth of farmer heroism and responsibility for the land," but agribusiness corporations and their government lackeys are the managers, and it is they who must take responsibility for the fate of farming and wild nature.

The editors of this book of essays are Dan Imhoff and Jo Ann Baumgartner, the president and executive director, respectively, of the Wild Farm Alliance, an organization founded in 2000 to "promote a healthy, viable agriculture that protects and restores wild nature." They selected the pieces in this book to inspire advocates of both sustainable agriculture and wildness. Readers will recognize several acclaimed writers in the table of contents—Barbara Kingsolver, Rick Bass, Richard Manning, Michael Pollan and Gary Nabhan for example—who have permitted the reprinting of essays published in other places, which is a laudable kind of resource conservation in itself.

Only one-third of the essays are newly published in this book; three are written by members of the Wild Farm Alliance Board of Directors: Becky Weed, Dan Kent, and John Davis, as well as one by the executive director, Jo Ann Baumgartner.

In "Grassland Manifesto," Montana sheep rancher Becky Weed declares, "It's all about grass." But the "art of grass farming and the wisdom of wild grasslands" that she sees as key to the fate of both farming and wild nature are being lost. Set against a background of the Bridger Mountains, which provide habitat linkages for wolverines and other threatened species between the Rocky Mountains to the south and the Canadian Rockies to the north, Becky's ranch is "predator friendly." The wolves, bears, and coyotes that call this area of Montana home are not killed on her organically certified Thirteen Mile Lamb and Wool Company. In other writings, Weed

has described techniques for co-existing with predators, but in this piece she describes a more serious threat to western ranching: the corn-bean-feedlot machine of the Midwest. Becky explores how a vision of grassland restoration could shut down the machine, but notes that corn ethanol could re-ignite it.

In "Evolution of an Ecolabel," Dan Kent, executive director of Salmon Safe, tells how his organization tied together good farming and wildlife protection in the Pacific Northwest. To earn the Salmon Safe certification, growers have restored streamside native vegetation, managed irrigation more efficiently and employed other erosion control measures that made farms more productive while protecting wild salmon habitat. Most Salmon Safe certified land is in vineyards, and this label identifying wine producers as local land stewards boosts sales for vintners.

Jo Ann Baumgartner describes the "wilder farm consciousness" that is emerging among organic certifiers in her essay, "Making Organic Wild." Even though the Organic Food Production Act enacted in 2002 stated that producers must initiate practices to support biodiversity, inspectors have largely ignored this mandate. Under Baumgartner's leadership, the Wild Farm Alliance worked with the Independent Organic Inspector's Association and later the National Organic Standards Board to develop a set of questions relating to biodiversity conservation for inspectors, and some certification agencies are beginning to use them. This essay provides examples of wilder organic farms and describes basic steps in planning for biodiversity conservation on an organic farm.

In "Rebuilding after Collapse," John Davis bluntly states the thesis of his essay: "I believe forces largely beyond our control will continue wrecking the natural world, despite our defensive efforts, until the industrial economy collapses. We need to extend our efforts, to expand and durably protect natural areas and other parts of a whole Earth through cataclysms and beyond." Though a familiar voice in the movement to preserve wild lands for biodiversity conservation, John is unfamiliar in the sustainable agriculture world. I would like to make this chapter an assigned reading to my colleagues, to shock us into serious discussion about farming and the fate of wild nature. □

*Dana Jackson works for Land Stewardship Project, is vice president of the Wild Farm Alliance and is the mother of Laura Jackson, whose essay appears in this book.*



# The Worst Hard Time

## The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl

By Timothy Egan  
2006; 340 pages  
Houghton Mifflin Company  
www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com

Reviewed by Brian DeVore

One of the most striking things about Timothy Egan's riveting historical account of one of the greatest soil erosion disasters of all time is how long it took the government, scientists, even residents of the hardest hit areas to accept the inevitable reality: the Dust Bowl of the 1930s was not a natural phenomenon.

The "dusters" which regularly sent a state's worth of soil into the air, creating midnight at noon, conjuring up enough static electricity to power cities and literally killing children who got lost or came down with "dust pneumonia" had their roots in the way in which human beings treated the land. As Egan documents in *The Worst Hard Time*, it was a combination of government agricultural policy, hubris and blind boosterism that doomed High Plains communities in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado and Nebraska to a catastrophe of Biblical proportions.

Egan tracked down survivors and combed through diaries to bring alive what it was like to see the land that had offered so much promise betray its residents. He also gives a sense of why these people didn't join John Steinbeck's Okies in heading to California. Some simply had no way to leave; others felt too rooted in this landscape to imagine living anywhere else.

It turns out we can thank these stubborn High Plains residents for a lot of advances in soil conservation and land stewardship. If it wasn't for them, American society may have written off the Dust Bowl region completely, dismissing it as an uninhabitable wasteland. But they stuck it out, and their stories got back to Washington, D.C.

What also got back to the government was a convincing argument that humans had played a major part in this problem. As Egan documents, Hugh Hammond Bennett gets a lot of credit for that. Bennett was the founder of the Soil Erosion Service, which later became the Soil Conservation Service. Today it's

called the Natural Resources Conservation Service. A scientist who had studied soil all over the world, Bennett was convinced that government policies which had promoted intense cultivation of the High Plains were to blame. Sure, a severe drought, or "drouth" as people from the Midwest and West still call it, wasn't helping matters any, but the region had experienced dry weather in the past and had not collapsed this completely. Removing the grass that had rooted the soil in place for untold years had decimated the ecosystem, argued Bennett.

Despite his practical and academic background, Bennett was dismissed at first. "Some called him a crank. They blamed the withering of the Great Plains on weather, not on farming methods," writes Egan. "Basic soil science was one thing but talking about the fragile web of life and slapping the face of nature—this kind of early ecology had yet to find a wider audience." (It's worth noting the similarities to the lengthy period of time it's taken policymakers to accept that humans are playing a major role in global climate change.)

Bennett used science, firsthand accounts and a little theatrics (he once timed his testimony before Congress to coincide with the remnants of a massive High Plains duster blowing into Washington) to eventually convince Washington that the Dust Bowl was a manmade

disaster, and thus could and should be fixed by human intervention. Bennett got funding and other resources to create major soil conservation efforts, including the development of local soil conservation districts, entities that today are still major players in protecting the landscape. Severe droughts have hit the High Plains since the 1930s, but catastrophic erosion has not returned. Studies have credited the presence of soil conservation districts for staving off the return of the Dust Bowl. Of course, today the High Plains faces other environmental problems, including the draining of the Ogallala Aquifer by intense irrigation, and the onslaught of factory livestock operations.

Another factor helped win the argument for Bennett: the presence of all those tough-as-leather homesteaders. The streets of Washington could be swept clean after a dust storm originating in Texas. But the people were harder to ignore. Newspaper stories, newsreels and literature all played a role in putting a human face on the Dust Bowl. It was the people's attachment to the High Plains long after the land had rebelled that kick-started serious soil conservation.

Such an attachment is needed to bring long-term, sustainable land use to any region that relies on the soil for survival.

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.

## Poetry

### Going Out to Get the Mail

Across this whole prairie,  
nothing,  
to stop the wind.  
It bends  
everything that will bend  
and rattles human structures  
like old bones.

In shifting patterns, snow  
snakes across the road.  
sweeping plowed fields clean,  
Filling ditches,  
the wind is an army  
driving everything before it.

Highway signs shudder  
at their posts.

Nothing stays the same.  
The horizon has gone  
white,  
leaving me exposed  
as a lightning rod.

Nothing to stop the sky's  
bare-taloned drop  
to cover me with white wings.

Coming back, swimming hard,  
I almost drown in this current.  
Breath is a dry gasp, a burning  
in the nostrils.

Hunched crows yell from the bare grove  
and the snow  
has nearly covered my tracks  
over the broken field.

— From *Trust the Wild Heart*, by Nancy Paddock (April 2006); available for \$15 from Red Dragonfly Press at [www.reddragonflypress.org](http://www.reddragonflypress.org). Paddock is the author of *Planting in the Dust*, a Land Stewardship Project play addressing soil conservation from a woman's point of view. Over 500 audiences saw the play in the 1980s and 1990s.



## Membership Update



# Donor fatigue & donor enthusiasm

By Cathy Eberhart

If you are like me, the mail each day brings several appeal letters asking for money for good causes. My e-mail inbox receives frequent requests for financial contributions, especially heavy in the weeks leading up to federal elections. And then there are those telephone calls—perhaps a student from my alma mater, or someone from the hospital where my children were born.

Requests for donations for good projects surround us. It's not surprising that many of us have moments of exasperation at all this fundraising. Kim Klein, a grassroots fundraising guru, calls this "donor fatigue."

And yet, even though we are very aware of this reality, the Land Stewardship Project continues to ask for your financial support too, through the mail, over the telephone, and yes, occasionally, even in your e-mail.

The primary reason we keep asking is that we continue to believe passionately about the work we do. There are few things as fundamental as the food that we eat and the need to care for the land where it comes from. We believe that our industrialized food system is deeply

flawed, so we are hard at work building communities and networks that support family farmers and provide healthy food for us all.

We also ask because we continue to need your support. We have very deliberately kept our basic membership fee as low as possible to make participation in our work accessible. We need as many people as possible involved in stewardship of the land and table and active in their role as citizens.

But the reality is that our basic membership rate is not nearly enough to support all of the work that needs to be done. So two times a year—usually in the fall and spring—we send you a letter asking for a special gift above your regular membership. Once a year, we might give you a call as well. And in 2006 for the first time, we offered an online auction as a fun new way to contribute. We also offer options for monthly or quarterly giving through our Stewardship Circle pledging program (see the envelope enclosed with this newsletter for more details).

We work hard to ask in ways that are effective and efficient. The good news is that our fall 2006 fundraising efforts were successful. In spite of the general donor fatigue that may exist, our donors remain enthusiastic.

Our online auction surpassed its goal, raising more than \$4,200 with over 100 donated items. When this newsletter went to print, our fall mailed appeal about our community based food system work had already raised more than \$8,600, and our organization-wide phone bank over \$7,500. We are extremely grateful for all of you who stepped forward to make an extra gift or renew your membership.

Finally, we try our best to ask in ways that are respectful and appreciative of you the donor. If at any point you feel we are not doing this or if you would prefer not to receive fundraising calls from us, or only want to receive annual membership renewal reminders and not our two special appeals, just let us know by contacting me at 651-653-0618 or [cathye@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cathye@landstewardshipproject.org).

We also try to include your renewal date clearly on all appeals that we send you (and on this newsletter), so that you know when your annual membership is due. We have no desire to "trick" you into giving early. When and if you can give above your basic membership, we want you to do that willingly and intentionally—enthusiastically even. We promise to enthusiastically put your contribution to good use building a better food and farming system for us all. □

*Cathy Eberhart is LSP's Membership Coordinator.*

## Thank you!

*As we begin our 25th year of working to keep the land and people together, we would like to extend out heartfelt thanks for our members' support. Your gifts, volunteer work and support are the foundation of our organization.*

—the staff and board of the Land Stewardship Project



*Photograph by Guy Schmickle, [www.explorethelightphotography.com](http://www.explorethelightphotography.com)*

## LSP available for faith community talks



LSP Policy and Organizing Director Mark Schultz spoke Dec. 12 about federal agriculture policy at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minn. (LSP photo)

The Land Stewardship Project's Policy and Organizing Program is interested in talking with church groups and other communities of faith this winter and spring about the environmental stewardship and social/economic justice impacts of U.S. farm policy as well as state policy.

If you are involved in a congregation or parish in Minnesota or western Wisconsin and

would like to invite LSP to present on these issues, please contact the Policy office at 612-722-6377, or e-mail Mark Schultz at marks@landstewardshipproject.org.

Whether the talk would be with an adult education group in the church, a social justice committee, the entire congregation, or another group within the congregation, we'd be interested in hearing from you.

## Calling all volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of an organization like the Land Stewardship Project.

You name the job you'd like to do, and we probably need it done. Volunteering can also be fun, providing an opportunity to hang around other LSP members who are as passionate about family farms, rural communities and the land as you are. To volunteer, contact an LSP office near you:

→ **Southeast Minnesota (Lewiston):** 507-523-3366 or lspse@landstewardshipproject.org.

→ **Western Minnesota (Montevideo):** 320-269-2105 or lspwest@landstewardshipproject.org.

→ **Policy Program (Minneapolis):** 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

→ **Twin Cities (White Bear Lake):** 651-653-0618 or lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org. □

## LSP resources

The Land Stewardship Project has publications, videos, fact sheets and other resources to help our members work for family farms and sustainable agriculture. Call your local LSP office for a list, or see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-main.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-main.html). □

## Get connected with

**LIVE  WIRE**

Sign up for *LIVE-WIRE* for regular e-mail updates and news from the Land Stewardship Project. Stay current on information and activities related to land stewardship, local food and grassroots organizing.

To subscribe, call Louise Arbuckle at 651-653-0618 or e-mail lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org, and put in the subject line "Subscribe LIVE-WIRE." □



## 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.



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

- **JAN. 17—Food, Farms & The Environment: Impacting the 2007 Farm Bill**, Mankato, Minn.; Contact: Suzanne Belongia, Catholic Charities, 507-454-2270
- **JAN. 19-20—Minnesota Organic Conference & Trade Show, St. Cloud Civic Center**; Contact: Mary Hanks, 651-201-6012; Mary.Hanks@state.mn.us
- **JAN. 19-21—Wisconsin School for Beginning Market Growers**, Madison, Wis.; Contact: www.cias.wisc.edu/marketgrower.php
- **JAN. 20-21—LSP's Dana Jackson will participate in a "Consultation on Genetics" for the ELCA Church in Society Program**, Chicago, Ill.; Contact: Rev. Roger A. Willer, 773-380-2823
- **JAN. 23—Organic certification workshop with Jim Riddle**, Plainview, Minn.; Contact: Edgar Hansgen, Southeast Chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, 507-932-4219
- **JAN. 24-27—Ecological Farming Conference**, Pacific Grove, Cal.; Contact: www.eco-farm.org; 831-763-2111
- **JAN. 26-27—Midwest Value-Added Conference, featuring LSP's Karen Stettler, Mark Schultz & Caroline van Schaik**, Treasure Island Casino, Red Wing, Minn.; Contact: www.rivercountryrcd.org; 715-834-9627
- **JAN. 26-27—Northeast Minnesota Hunger Retreat**; Contact: Ken Peterson, 218-768-4116
- **FEB. 5—Farm Transition & Estate Planning Workshop**, St. Cloud (Minn.) Civic Center; Contact: 763-434-0400; www.mfvga.org
- **FEB. 6—LSP Family Farm Breakfast**

- at the Minn. Capitol, St. Paul (see page 7)
- **FEB. 6-7—Upper Midwest Regional Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference & Trade Show, St. Cloud (Minn.) Civic Center**; Contact: www.mfvga.org; 763-434-0400
- **FEB. 8—Food Alliance Midwest Annual Meeting**, Roseville, Minn. (see page 19)
- **FEB. 9-10—28th Annual Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society Winter Conference**, Aberdeen, S. Dak.; Contact: 701-883-4304; www.npsas.org
- **FEB. 10—Clean Up the River Environment's (CURE) 15th annual meeting, featuring the "River Keeper" award presentation to LSP members Audrey Arner & Richard Handeen**, Hollywood Theater, Main Street, Montevideo, Minn.; Contact: 320-269-2984; www.curemnriver.org
- **FEB. 13—Field Day on Sustainable Organic Dairy Farming**, West Central Research & Outreach Center, Morris, Minn. (see page 7)
- **FEB. 14—LSP's Mark Schultz will participate in a panel discussion called, "Towards Stewardship & Justice: Needed Reforms in U.S. Farm Policy,"** 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., St. Martin's Table, 2001 Riverside Ave., Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: Mark Schultz, 612-722-6377; marks@landstewardshipproject.org
- **FEB. 15—Western Minnesota LSP Membership Appreciation Meeting & hog raffle drawing**, Montevideo Community Center (see page 7)
- **FEB. 17—Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota's 16th Annual Conference**, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn.; Contact: Anne Borgendale, 320-226-6318; www.sfa-mn.org
- **FEB. 21—Minnesota Environmental Partnership Citizens' Day at the**

- Capitol**, 1 p.m., Lakes & Plains Regional Council of Carpenters & Joiners Hall, 700 Olive St., Saint Paul; Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 612-722-6377; bking@landstewardshipproject.org
- **FEB. 22-24—18th Annual Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org; 715-772-3153
- **FEB. 23-25—Twin Cities Food & Wine Experience, featuring Food Alliance Midwest** (see page 19)
- **FEB. 26—Homegrown Economy: Foods from Local Farms as Economic Development Conference**, University of Minnesota-Morris (see page 7)
- **MARCH 6-8—Sustainable Agriculture Coalition/Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Meeting & Farm Bill Campaign Conference & Fly-In**, Washington, D.C.; Contact: Adam Warthesen, LSP, 612-722-6377; adamw@landstewardshipproject.org
- **MARCH 9—Southeast Minnesota Local Foods Forum**, Signatures Restaurant, Winona, Minn.; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, 507-523-3366; caroline@landstewardshipproject.org
- **MARCH 25-27—Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program 20th Anniversary Celebration**, Kansas City, Mo.; Contact: Sean McGovern, 614-306-6422; www.sare.org
- **MAY 5-6—2007 Community Food & Farm Festival**, Minn. State Fairgrounds, St. Paul; Contact: Dana Jackson, LSP, 651-653-0618; danaj@landstewardshipproject.org; www.livinggreenexpo.org/index.cfm

For the latest on upcoming events, check out the Land Stewardship Project's *Events of Interest* page at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-events.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-events.html).



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