The Land Stewardship Letter

30 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

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Thirty years of corresponding with the land *(see page 3)*.

Illustration by Anna King

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—Children of the Corn Farm Policy—

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The
Land Stewardship Letter
Keeping the Land & People Together

Vol. 30—Number 4, 2012

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30 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letters from the land

For 3 decades the* Land Stewardship Letter *has featured people's reflections on our relationship with farms, food, the land & each other

Soon after the Land Stewardship Project was launched in 1982, its supporters received a six-page typewritten newsletter in the mail. At the top in bold letters were the words "The Land Stewardship Letter" next to a circular woodcut featuring a tree, grasses, crops and roots intermingled with the name of this new organization.

This was the first edition of what you now hold in your hands.

Ron Kroese, a former journalist and LSP's first director, had co-founded the organization with fellow National Farmers Union organizer Victor Ray. When Kroese and Ray were working with farm families to promote conservation agriculture in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the writings of people like Wendell Berry played a key role in helping those farmers see that they were not alone in their efforts to develop a more sustainable, stewardship-based type of system.

From its onset, words have been important to LSP. As Kroese explained on the front page of that first *Land Stewardship Letter*, it was critical that farmers and others concerned about land stewardship had a forum, a "networking" tool, for sharing ideas and providing moral support in the midst of an agricultural society increasingly dominated by an industrialized "fencerow-to-fencerow" attitude.

Wrote Kroese of the *Land Stewardship Letter*: "It's intended to be not only a source of information, but of inspiration—a vehicle for the exchange of ideas on how we can most effectively work together, and as individuals, for the cause of land stewardship."

During the next three decades, the *Land Stewardship Letter* has indeed become a place where ideas about land stewardship, sustainability and farming can be shared. Essays, news stories, special investigative reports, reviews and even poetry have appeared on these pages, providing a balance of practical information (When is the next field day?), in-depth analysis (Why is farm policy unsustainable?) and occasionally outrage (How dare factory farms take away our community's future?).

But mostly, the *Land Stewardship Letter* has strived to provide hope. Yes, one of its prime missions is to provide LSP's members an update on the organization's work. But the *LSL* is also a place where our members and others can reflect on what land stewardship means to them, and to share ideas on how to overcome the barriers to creating a truly sustainable agriculture.

From the beginning people have taken to heart the words Kroese wrote in that first issue: "…the success of this newsletter, and indeed of the LSP as a whole, depends upon your participation." The *LSL* is no longer produced with a typewriter and mimeograph machine, and LSP's members now use cutting edge digital and cyber technology to "network." But no matter what the tool, the key to creating a sustainable food and farming system for all people depends on sharing ideas with language we relate to.

In recognition of the Land Stewardship Project's 30th Anniversary, this issue of the *LSL* is featuring excerpts of some of the "correspondence" that has been featured in this publication during the past three decades. It takes the form of articles, essays, reportage and poems. Some of it is from staff, some from members. Still other material was produced by people who are part of the larger sustainable agriculture movement.

We wish we could have included more of that material from the past 30 years, but hopefully what we have reproduced here provides insights into not only the growth and development of an organization, but the evolution of a philosophy that balances environmental sustainability, social justice and a love of the land.

Starting with this page, check out these missives from the past in the green boxes at the bottom. Here's to 30 more years of letters from the land.

— Brian DeVore, editor,
Land Stewardship Letter

Illustration by Anna King

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Affordable conservation

In the '30s we used to hear, "Farmers can't put on conservation practices. Farmers don't have the money." But then the war started. Prices went up. Prices were good. Then we'd get from the same people, "Farmers don't have time to do that. They're producing now. They've got the money, but they don't have the time. They've got to farm everything right up to the hilt."

That idea that "Now isn't the time, now isn't the time." Well, when *is* the time? The time is *never* in the minds of some people. But now *is* the time. Now is always the time. Do it. There is no better time. **— Herb Flueck, Spring 1985 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Can't do it alone

Somebody has got to begin caring "about rural matters." It is doubtful that we can expect better government policies until the care is evident in the general society.… It is not a job that rural people can do alone, for the urban bias presents a strong challenge, as strong as any bias that faced the peace movement, or women, or blacks. And none of those groups succeeded alone. **— Victor Ray, Autumn 1985 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Opportunities Resources

LSP gear, books, videos & more

Check out the Land Stewardship Project's Stewardship Store for t-shirts, caps, bumper stickers and other resources. They make great gifts during the holiday season. For more information on obtaining these resources, see the **LSP Store** link at www.landstewardshipproject.org, or call 612-722-6377.

bumper sticker, call LSP's Policy and Organizing Program at 612-722-6377 or e-mail Bobby King at bking@landstewardshipproject.org. Bumper stickers are also available at LSP's offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366) and Montevideo (320-269-2105).

LSP t-shirt

LSP's black t-shirts have our logo on the front and the words "Land Stewardship Project" on the back. They are USA Union Made, 100 percent preshrunk cotton, and are available in adult sizes: small, medium, large and extra large. Price: $15.

LSP cap

LSP's baseball-style cap is USA Union Made, 100 percent cotton. It comes in black with LSP's green and white embroidered logo featured on the front. A fabric strap and brass clasp on the back make this a one-size-fits-all cap. Price: $15.

Local democracy bumper sticker

Display your support for local democracy with LSP's 3 x 9 red, white and blue bumper sticker. It features the words: "Grassroots Democracy & Local Control: Stand Up For MN Townships." For a free

Glyphosate/roundup presentation

On March 24, 2011, Purdue University emeritus professor Don Huber gave a presentation in Creighton, Neb., on some of the environmental, health and agronomic problems posed by long-term use of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup herbicide. The price of the three-hour DVD: $18.

Monitoring Tool Box

The Monitoring Tool Box is a resource developed by the Monitoring Team, a collaboration of farmers, scientists and natural resource professionals. The Monitoring Tool Box provides practical, how-to information on monitoring quality of life issues, farm sustainability and financial data, as well as birds, frogs, toads, streams and pasture vegetation. Price: $45.00 + $8.00 S & H. To order a copy and for more information, see our website or call LSP's Karen Benson or Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366. ❐

LSP shopping night at Ten Thousand Villages Dec. 11

You can support stewardship and Fair Trade this holiday season by buying handmade gifts at the Ten Thousand Villages store in Saint Paul, Minn., on Tuesday, Dec. 11.

Ten Thousand Villages (www.stpaul.tenthousandvillages.com) is donating 20 percent of all sales from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. that day to support the Land Stewardship Project's work. The store is located at 867 Grand Avenue (Victoria Crossing West). LSP is grateful to Ten Thousand Villages for its support and work to advance Fair Trade.

Please come out to show your support for its work and ours on Dec. 11.

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

30 Years of Letters from the Land

We all play a part

And soil erosion is not just the problem of farmers. As long as we eat, we are part of the American agricultural system. When we buy VCRs and vacations because we pay such a low percentage of our incomes for food, we benefit by the oppression of farmers. As long as our economic system makes it impossible for farmers to pay the rent or the interest on the mortgage unless the land is row-cropped every year, we all participate in the degradation of the soil. As long as the net income from farming is so impossibly low that a farmer cannot make a living rotating to a cover crop for two years to five, we all participate in mining the land of topsoil.—**Mary Turck, Winter 1986 *Land Stewardship Letter***

It's not inevitable

One of the most disabling lies concerning the current agricultural crisis is that it was "inevitable." Some say it is the result of our economic system's "impartial dynamics," whose unhindered operation continually leads to "progress." Anyone accepting this belief is rendered powerless, the only option being to accept the "inevitable" present and to conform to a radically altered future. In fact, however, agriculture is the result of human decisions that represent the implementation of certain values. We need to scrutinize those decisions and the values that undergird them. Unless we resolve these contextual dynamics impacting agriculture, even more farmers will be forced off the land in the months and years ahead.—**Gregory D. Cusack, Winter 1987 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

➔ *Myth:* High land prices benefit the economies of rural communities.

➔ *Fact:*

When news broke in October that yet another Iowa farm was sold for a record price—$21,900 per acre in this case—one could be forgiven for jumping to an obvious conclusion: Farm Country is flush with cash these days.

Indeed, based on pure numbers, the statistics are impressive. The average value of an acre of Iowa farmland has tripled in the past 10 years. In Minnesota, the statewide average land value is $4,900 an acre, an increase of about 23 percent over 2011.

In general across the Midwest, land prices have reached levels not seen in a century, even adjusted for inflation.

Armchair economists say it's simply a matter of supply and demand. Market prices for commodities like corn and soybeans are at all-time highs, so it naturally follows that prices for the soil that can produce those commodities would also be through the roof. That's partially true, but, as the *Land Stewardship Letter* has reported (see No. 1, 2012, pages 14-15) it's a little more complicated than that. Government policies like crop insurance remove virtually any risk from farming land that in the past may have been considered too poor to raise a crop on profitably. This has made it quite lucrative for large landowners to bid up prices on even highly erodible, marginal land.

It also turns out that the conventional wisdom that high land prices always result in a healthier rural economy is also pretty simplistic, and in most cases, downright wrong. *Bloomberg News* recently did a fascinating analysis of the relationship between farmland values and income disparities.

The focus of *Bloomberg*'s reporting was Iowa, which has traditionally had a relatively narrow gap between the richest and the poorest residents. A wide income disparity gap has long been more closely associated with metropolitan areas—think New York's Park Avenue and Harlem's slums, for example. However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, less populated areas now dominate the ranks of U.S. counties where income inequality increased the most sharply in recent years.

Some of the disparity can be attributed to the land boom. Take O'Brien County, Iowa, for example, which had the state's highest—$9,513—average per-acre land value in 2011. According to *Bloomberg*, in that county, "The top 10 percent of wage-earning households collected 54 percent of the county's income in 2010, compared with 40 percent a decade earlier. Of more than 3,000 U.S. counties, O'Brien had the 23rd highest jump in income inequality from 2000 to 2010."

Families that sell out to the highest bidder are often not living in the community any more, meaning their wealth isn't staying local. In addition, when a farm is sold, it's more than likely bought to add acres to a larger operation, not to serve as a basis for a new start-up.

"Iowa had had historically low levels of inequality, but now it is skyrocketing," Iowa State University sociologist David Peters told *Bloomberg*. "Today you have far fewer farmers and a small number earning larger and larger incomes. It doesn't spread through the economy like it used to."

This is bad news for Main Street businesses as well as local institutions like churches and schools, which rely on warm bodies to stay viable, no matter what land is selling and renting for. It's also bad news for beginning farmers, who are priced out of even renting land, let alone buying it. As the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program has learned, this means it's a critical time to ask an important question of landowners: is getting the highest price possible for that acre of land worth the price it imposes on the community?

➔ More information

• To read the *Bloomberg News* article, "Nation's Breadbasket Heads to the Soup Kitchen as Inequality Grows," see http://go.bloomberg.com/multimedia/nations-breadbasket-heads-to-soup-kitchen-as-inequality-grows.

• For more information on what LSP is doing to help beginning farmers get access to farmland, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/lspfarmernetwork.

➔ More *Myth Busters*

To download copies of previous installments in LSP's *Myth Busters* series, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/libraryresources/mythbusters. For paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377.

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Too many economists?

In addition, Wendell Berry argues, the specialists in the academy too often teach about subjects with which they have no practical acquaintance. The problem with professors who cannot practice, he says, is that they are no longer accountable to anyone. Berry is particularly sharp on this issue with professors of agriculture, but the analysis might apply to professors of forestry as well. There has been, Berry says, "for several decades a radical disconnection between the land grant institutions and the farms, and this disconnection has left the land grant professionals free to give bad advice; indeed, if they can get this advice published in the right place, from the standpoint of their careers it does not matter whether their advice is good or not." Elsewhere, he observes wryly that while agricultural economists have frequently seen that there were too many farmers, "No agricultural economist has yet perceived that there were too many agricultural economists." **— Paul Gruchow, Fall 1987 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Not just about price

I firmly believe that as long as we define the problem of agriculture in market terms—as, for example, simply increasing commodity prices—we cannot envision a democratic agriculture....And fairer prices themselves cannot address the property relations which determine the winners and losers from a price increase.

In fact, the vision that I am suggesting is not at base a set of market relationships at all. It is a set of ethical choices about what best serves our needs—what is fair to people and fair to the land. **— Frances Moore Lappé, Winter 1988 *Land Stewardship Letter***

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

LSP News

Are you a CSA farmer?

CSA Directory

If you are a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmer operating in Minnesota or western Wisconsin, the Land Stewardship Project would like to invite you to be listed in the 2013 edition of LSP's *Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory*.

The *Directory* will be published in February and is distributed to eaters throughout the region, as well as posted at www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/findingjustfood/csa.

For information on getting listed, contact LSP's Brian DeVore by Jan. 11 at bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.

CSA conference Jan. 10-11

LSP is partnering with several other organizations to put on the Midwest CSA Conference Jan. 10-11 in Eau Claire, Wis.

Workshop sessions will focus on how to get started in CSA farming, exploring different CSA models, dealing with production issues, building community and developing solid financial management and planning systems. For more information, contact Sarah Lloyd at slloyd@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 608-844-3758; or visit www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com. ❐

Greeson & Marcum join LSP staff

Megan Greeson and **Andrew Marcum** have joined the Land Stewardship Project's staff.

Megan Greeson

Greeson is working as a Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings course organizer (*see page 12*). She has a bachelor's degree in environmental studies and secondary education from Northland College. Greeson has worked on farms in North Carolina and Norway, and she and her husband Adam are 2011 graduates of the Farm Beginnings course. They recently worked for two area Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms and 2012 was their first season operating their own CSA, Sweet Top Farm (www.sweettopfarm.weebly.com). The Greesons grow vegetables and flowers for a 25-member CSA and the Hudson, Wis., Farmers' Market.

Andrew Marcum

Greeson can be reached at 507-923-6251 or megang@landstewardshipproject.org.

Marcum is the new Ag Lands Solutions Outreach Specialist for the Chippewa 10% Project, which is a joint initiative of LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project (*see page 27*). He served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 2006 to 2011, during which time he was a military police officer/military working dog handler. Marcum has worked as a training director for a dog training/breeding firm, as well as a ranch hand. He is currently enrolled in LSP's Farm Beginnings course and is building a grass-based beef cattle business near the west-central Minnesota community of Glenwood.

Marcum can be reached at 320-269-2105 or andym@landstewardshipproject.org. ❐

2013 Family Farm Breakfast in February

The Land Stewardship Project's 8th Annual Family Farm Breakfast and Day at the Capitol will be held one of the first two Tuesdays in February at Christ Lutheran Church on Capitol Hill in Saint Paul (105 University Avenue West).

This is a great opportunity to have conversations with Minnesota state lawmakers about sustainable agriculture and family farm issues while dining on delicious, locally produced food.

There will also be an opportunity later in the day to lobby legislators on LSP's priority issues.

If you would like to volunteer for this event or provide food, contact Jeanette Torkelson at 612-722-6377 or JTorkelson@landstewardshipproject.org.

Watch www.landstewardshipproject.org and the *LIVE-WIRE* e-letter for details on the date. ❐

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Parks & reclamation

It is tragically ironic that as a culture we Americans cherish the lands we've set aside as parks and preserves while we treat with callousness the soil and water upon which our very survival depends. **— Ron Kroese, Spring 1988 *Land Stewardship Letter***

What is sustainable ag?

A sustainable agriculture may be defined as farming in such a way as to insure that we, ourselves, and our descendants will have the option of living on and farming the same land that is available to us now. **—Chuck Thesing, Spring 1989 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Farmer-to-farmer

Within the Stewardship Farming Program (SFP) in southeastern Minnesota, our efforts involve assisting farm families making the transition to farming practices which protect groundwater, conserve soil and reduce farm production costs while maintaining or improving overall net profit. In assisting farmers in that transition, the SFP staff does not act as experts on sustainable farming practices.

…The implications of such a partnership approach is that farmers no longer are seen as consumers of marketable information, and researchers no longer are seen as holding "the answer." …Farmers, Extension and researchers, then, form not a vertical structure of information dissemination, but a circular arrangement, where Extension and researchers are part of the team with farmers in examining questions. **— Richard Ness, Autumn 1989 *Land Stewardship Letter***

2012 Farm Art Bowl rolls a strike

Beginning farmers and their supporters came together Nov. 4 at the Bryant Lake Bowl in Minneapolis for the 2012 Farm Art Bowl.

The fundraiser for the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course (*see pages 12*) featured live music provided by Mike Munson, Brad Fernholz and the Cactus Blossoms. A silent auction consisting of locally-produced art and other donated items was also featured, as well as food from local LSP farmer-members. And of course, attendees had the opportunity to bowl a few frames during the evening.

Besides Bryant Lake Bowl, other sponsors included Seward Co-op, Lorentz Meats, Clancey's Meat and Fish, Bluff Country Co-op, Organic Valley and Albert Lea Seed House. (*LSP photos*)

Acknowledge the source

The singular demand for production has been unable to acknowledge the importance of the sources of production in nature and in human culture. Of course, agriculture must be productive; that is a requirement as urgent as it is obvious; there are two more requirements equally important and equally urgent. One is that, if agriculture is to remain productive, it must preserve the land, and the fertility and ecological health of the land; the land, that is, must be used *well*. A further requirement, therefore, is that, if the land is to be used well, the people who use it must know it well, must be highly motivated to use it well, must know how to use it well, must have time to use it well, and must be able to afford to use it well. Nothing that has happened in the agricultural revolution of the last 50 years has disproved or invalidated these requirements, though everything that has happened has ignored or defied them. **—Wendell Berry, Summer 1990 *Land Stewardship Letter***

30 Years of Letters from the Land

CSA: A community effort

A combination of lifestyle changes and modernized agricultural practices have resulted in the average citizen being disconnected from food production and distribution. As a result, concern is growing over the safety of our food supply, the long term sustainability of the land to provide for future generations, and the increasing difficulty for farmers to make a living. Out of this concern has grown a grassroots food movement that is rebuilding relationships among people, the earth and the cycles of the growing season.

…Besides providing wholesome produce, a community farm builds community and strengthens ties between citizens and the challenges of farming. Shareholders participate in the uncertainties of farming as well as sharing the rewards. Having direct contact with the land can be a spiritually and physically rewarding experience for shareholders. Growers benefit through a guaranteed market that includes a dedicated community, a year-round source of income, help with labor-intensive tasks, and freedom to experiment with new varieties and techniques. **—Dan Guenthner, Spring 1992 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Policy & Organizing

The Farm Bill's mixed harvest

Ag policy plays a huge role in what our landscape & rural communities look like—& often that's not a good thing

By Brian DeVore

Can public policy have a split personality? Yes. This becomes clear while standing on a strip of ground that marks the boundary between two southwestern Minnesota farms. On one side of the fence, a diverse mix of grass and woody vegetation covers the rolling acres of a grass-based beef cattle operation. Across the property line are rows of newly sprouted corn poking out of otherwise bare soil. The row-crop field offers no cover for wildlife. During a dry spell, winds could send soil into the road ditch and eventually the Minnesota River a mile away.

Both land uses are shaped by federal farm policy. "It definitely pulls you in two different directions—no doubt about it," says Darrel Mosel, who has a 600-acre crop and livestock farm further down the Minnesota River valley.

Over the past three-quarters of a century, nothing—not markets, weather, nor advances in agronomic science—has played a more consistent role than federal farm policy in determining why a particular acre of farmland is growing corn instead of grass or other soil-friendly crops, like hay and small grains, according to Ferd Hoefner, policy director for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

Today, half the land in Minnesota is farmed, and at least 70 percent of the state's farmers are enrolled in federal farm programs. This means agriculture has a tremendous impact on the state's land and water. And farm programs have enormous influence on the land-use choices farmers make.

Most federal farm and food policies are guided by the Farm Bill, which comes up for renewal every five years. Congress is now considering changes in the 2008 Farm Bill (*see sidebar on page 10*). The bill currently favors planting corn, soybeans, and other so-called commodity crops and offers far less incentive for conservation practices. Nevertheless, some Minnesota farmers are choosing land-use practices that prevent erosion, protect water quality, and provide wildlife habitat.

Children of the corn

Modern farm policy was launched in the 1930s as a helping hand for farmers wracked by the double catastrophe of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. The chief architect was Henry A. Wallace, a seed corn pioneer, Depression-era agriculture secretary, and Iowa native who sought financial support for producing certain crops such as corn. He saw government support for raising commodities as a way to ensure an "ever-normal granary." Since then, federal farm policy has evolved into an amalgam of subsidies, disaster payments (crop insurance), cost-share funds, and loan guarantees. Despite the many reiterations it's undergone, at its core, farm policy has stayed true to what Wallace wanted: producing lots of a few crops and lots of one in particular.

More than 70 percent of the crop subsidies Minnesota farmers receive go to support corn. No wonder Minnesota farmers planted almost 9 million acres of that crop this year.

"In the Midwest we are children of the corn," says Steven Taff, an economics professor at the University of Minnesota. "We really, really, really know how to grow corn. The Farm Bill has been a great success at supporting that."

This wholesale conversion of land to corn, soybeans and other row crops is taking a toll on the natural habitat of the prairie pothole region of Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota and Iowa. Intensive production of row crops has led to declines in grassland bird populations that are steeper and more consistent than declines seen in any other North American group of birds over the past quarter-century, according to the National Wildlife Federation.

Minnesota's number one farmland conservation initiative is the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which is part of the Farm Bill. CRP pays more than $100 million annually to Minnesota farmers in return for planting perennial cover crops on roughly 1.5 million acres. Since the early

Farm Bill, *see page 9…*

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Black Energy

Life is seething in this soil
which has been millions of years
in the making.
It has been forever
in the making.

A mingling of everything
which ever whistled here, leaped
or waved in the wind.
Plants and animals,
grasses of this prairie.
Buffalo and antelope grazing down
into roots and back again
into the sun.
Birds and insects, their wings still hum
in this soil.

And this swarm drinks
sunlight and rain,
and rises again and again
into corn and beans
and flesh and bone.

The quick bodies of animals and men
risen
from this black energy.

— Joe Paddock, Winter 1993 *Land Stewardship Letter*

Choosing our communities

The kind of farming we choose to pursue does, it seems, influence the kinds of towns we will live in. Sure, farming is an engine of economic growth, but the growth will be local only if we work to make it so. So as we choose farming practices that are environmentally sound, let's think not only of water and air. Let's think of schools, hospitals and communities, too.

Our communities, not just us, are "farming dependent." **— Richard A. Levins, Aug/Sept 1994 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Taking on the power

For the LSP vision to become a reality, we have to be willing to take on political and economic power in this country. **— Paul Wellstone, Winter 1993 *Land Stewardship Letter***

…Farm Bill, *from page 8*

1990s, CRP grassland habitat has increased the number of ducks in the prairie pothole region of Minnesota and the Dakotas by 2 million a year, according to the USDA.

However, contracts covering around 850,000 acres in Minnesota will expire during the next five years. Farmers will re-enroll some of that land, but market forces and farm policy favor plowing and planting commodity crops.

"If we lose those acres, that will have a dramatic landscape impact in the state," says Bill Penning, the prairie habitat team supervisor for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Unintended consequences

The argument could be made that, because corn's average per-bushel price has almost tripled to around $6 to $7 in the past few years, market forces now govern why so much corn is being raised in Minnesota. But high corn prices are rooted in farm policy soil. For more than three decades, the government encouraged corn ethanol production through a tax credit given to energy producers, and farmers responded. Ethanol consistently competes with livestock feed as the biggest user of corn grown in this country.

Ethanol's rise led to one of the unintended consequences in farm policy. Darrel Mosel, who farms in south-central Minnesota's Sibley County, says he originally invested in a local ethanol plant as a way to market excess corn. But he and other early supporters of the industry never foresaw how it would not only gobble up surplus corn but also drive farmers to plant every last acre to the crop.

"There is a place for ethanol, but we weren't proactive and didn't look at what the impact of raising the price of corn would be," he says, describing a recent rainstorm that eroded row-cropped land in his area.

Richard Handeen (*right*) describes how he integrates livestock production and wildlife habitat during a field tour. "The thing I notice when I visit the farm is the amount of bird life and the number of insects, which are a key part of the wildlife food pyramid," says wildlife expert Dave Trauba. (*LSP photo*)

"We can grow corn, but we can do it in a way that is more environmentally sound. We don't need to plant fencerow-to-fencerow."

Another unintended consequence has emerged from the crop insurance program, meant to keep farmers from being financially devastated by weather-related disasters. To increase participation in the program, in 1996 the government dropped the requirement that farmers use basic conservation measures in order to qualify for insurance payouts. Thus, the crop insurance program removed the economic brake on plowing up land—much of it set aside in CRP—once considered too wet, erosive, or otherwise marginal to produce a decent crop. (*For more on crop insurance, see the No. 1, 2012,* Land Stewardship Letter, *pages 14-15.*)

Targeting conservation

Between 1995 and 2011, Farm Bill programs such as direct payments and crop insurance provided $13.45 billion in subsidies to Minnesota farmers growing corn, soybeans and other commodity crops. During that same period, the programs paid $1.96 billion to farmers to implement conservation practices.

In 2006 Darwyn Bach, who raises 520 acres of corn and soybeans in southwestern Minnesota's Yellow Medicine County, used cost-share money from the fed-

Farm Bill, *see page 10…*

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Sacred land

This land is sacred
and no amount
of steam
or grease
or grinding gears
or screaming tires
lagoons and screaming pigs
can change
that fact

— Franz Aubert Richter, March/April 1995 *Land Stewardship Letter*

Hard facts about soil

Get with it. Come on down to earth. Discover the soil. Or get out.

Early colonists farmed, wore out the soil, moved down the coast, wore out the soil there, finally moved into the Ohio Valley, then moved West. Now there's no place to move to. Soil is to be used without losing it, and it is to be used without losing its structure so the water can soak in every time it rains.

Our Army recently returned from duty in the place where agriculture started 6,000-7,000 years ago. One returning soldier said that driving on the land over there was like driving in a quarry.

Does more need to be said?

—Arnold Lecheler, March/April 1995 *Land Stewardship Letter*

Thinking like a watershed

Watershed-based partnerships work because they force agencies, landowners and citizens out of our boxed-in, straight-lined way of doing things. If truly you are going to address the water quality and flooding problems in a given watershed, you cannot do it alone—you must involve, consult and compromise with other people outside of the community. Improving a watershed requires the willingness to meander river-like beyond the daily boundaries we live by.

Watershed-based approaches reintegrate and form new communities by bringing upstream and downstream landowners face-to-face.…We must all come to terms with new realizations of interdependence. **— Patrick Moore, Sept/Oct 1996 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Policy & Organizing

…Farm Bill, *from page 9*

eral Environmental Quality Incentives Program to convert from moldboard plowing, which exposes topsoil to the elements, to mulch tillage. The mulch system protects the soil by leaving plant residue from the previous year's crop on the surface. Because it requires specialized equipment and involves a learning curve, Bach had to hire someone to do his mulch tillage while he transitioned into the system.

Bach also qualified for $7,182 per year for five years from the Farm Bill's Conservation Stewardship Program because he agreed to initiate conservation practices such as applying chemicals precisely and widening the grassy buffers that guide water runoff within and between his row-cropped fields. However, he had to spend $10,500 to make his spraying equipment more precise and to update his planter. Bach says the changes have been worth the time and money spent. He feels better about how he's raising his crops, and he can see the conservation benefits. After spring rains he used to have to go out and fill in newly formed gullies. Not anymore.

Bach also feels practicing conservation on his farm is a way of giving back to the taxpayers who fund farm programs. Another way he's done this is by enrolling 40 acres in CRP on odd corners of his farm. These are areas too wet or rocky to consistently produce a good crop. The CRP acres are now home to waterfowl, pheasants and deer.

"I think the taxpayer should see benefits from the support they give farmers. It should be expected," he says, sitting in his dining room bedecked with white-tailed deer racks.

A little wildness

The U of M's Taff says the key is to provide farmers some economic incentive—either through government subsidies or the marketplace—to take on the risk of adopting and maintaining farming systems that protect water quality and wildlife habitat but aren't necessarily lucrative at first.

Sometimes, what starts out as a subsidy can evolve into a market-based reason to keep a little wildness on the farm. Remember that southwestern farm with the mix of shrubs and grass next to the cornfield? It's owned by Audrey Arner and Richard Handeen, who put 41 acres of marginal land into CRP in 2000. Over the years they've used cost-share funds from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to establish wildlife-friendly plantings of hazelnut, elderberry, high-bush cranberry and other native species on that CRP ground.

"Without CRP it would have been harder to put so much of our acreage into set-aside," says Handeen, who raises grass-fed beef cattle on 240 acres. "In hindsight, it's more of a sacrifice than we realized with current crop prices."

Those high crop prices loom large as the farmer considers that the CRP contract comes up for renewal in 2015. However, those wild acres nicely border the farm's rotationally grazed pastures, providing a buffer against water runoff and wind that can erode soil. It's also frequented by pheasants, deer, and at last count 90 different bird species. The natural habitat on this farm has become a key selling point for Arner and Handeen, who market their beef directly to consumers and restaurants.

"The thing I notice when I visit the farm is the amount of bird life and the number of insects, which are a key part of the wildlife food pyramid," says Dave Trauba, who oversees DNR wildlife operations in Big Stone, Lac qui Parle, and Swift counties. "You don't see that everywhere."

Even if it doesn't stay in CRP, that land could easily be rotationally grazed while maintaining wildlife habitat, and there is a potential market for products such as hazelnuts, which can't be sold while the land is enrolled in the government set-aside program. In other words, those 40 acres of perennial plants have become an integral part of the farm's economic and ecological fabric, whether it's the government or the marketplace that provides the financial stitching holding it together.

"We won't be plowing it up," Handeen says without hesitation. ❐

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter. *This article was originally written for the* Minnesota Conservation Volunteer *magazine (www.dnr.state.mn.us/volunteer/index.html).*

What about the 2012 Farm Bill?

The 2008 Farm Bill expired Sept. 30 without a law to replace it, and as this *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press it looked like sometime in 2013 is the earliest there will be a new bill.

Without a new Farm Bill, programs related to sustainable agriculture, economic development and beginning farmer support all come to a dead stop. Many of these are programs that were won through hard work by the Land Stewardship Project and other sustainable agriculture groups during the last Farm Bill, but require action on the part of Congress to be funded in the future.

In addition, key reforms that were passed by the Senate this summer will wither on the vine without a 2012 Farm Bill. That means, for example, huge direct payments to large-scale crop farmers will continue, and crop insurance payments will be made without any restrictions on how the land is farmed.

Unfortunately, Congress also passed a Continuing Resolution for Fiscal Year 2013, which will result in across-the-board slashing of key conservation initiatives like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). As a result of the Continuing Resolution, CSP enrollments for 2013 would he halted completely, with resources only available to maintain and administer existing contracts.

LSP is working with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and other allies to pressure Congress to pass a Farm Bill that supports beginning farmers, conservation and rural development. For the latest news on the Farm Bill, see the **Federal Farm Policy** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org. You can also contact Adam Warthesen, an LSP organizer who works on federal policy, at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Paying for sustainability

One reality of farming is that smaller producers must realize much more net profit per unit of production. Sustainable farmers have historically done that by lowering production costs. But after all the cost-cutting is done, a higher price per unit may be the critical element in making smaller operations profitable enough to be viable. Consumers have shown that they value food which is "farm fresh," "Minnesota grown," "humanely raised," "antibiotic-free" or "organic." The favorable impressions of family farms and sustainable agriculture must be enhanced, and somehow turned into sales.—**Paul Homme, Nov/Dec 1995 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Health care—Minnesota needs to be a leader…again

By Megan Buckingham & Paul Sobocinski

In the early 20th century, rural people and farmers in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan began to organize locally to bring doctors to their communities. At the time, residents of rural municipalities in sparsely populated areas of Saskatchewan had almost no access to medical care. In following decades, rural communities continued to organize to improve their access to health care by, among other things, building municipal hospitals and creating effective public solutions to address a tuberculosis epidemic.

In 1962, the organizing that began with rural communities finding a creative new way to keep doctors nearby culminated in the passage of Canada's universal health care legislation. Since then, Canadians have repeatedly voted to protect their popular province-based health care system.

Minnesota also has a legacy of citizen action in its democracy, and of creative, sensible health care policy. Twenty years ago Minnesota became a national leader in moving toward a people-centered health care system with the creation of MinnesotaCare. Since 1992 that state-run program has helped hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans across the state get access to the care they need. The program has been important for low-income Minnesotans who otherwise would struggle to afford the ever-rising costs of insurance, as well sick people who have been denied coverage by the HMOs.

Today the corporate-run private insurance market is making it increasingly difficult for Minnesotans to afford quality health care. Over 9 percent of Minnesotans go without health insurance, and, more shockingly, 21 percent are "under insured"—a category that includes the thousands of families turning to high-deductible "catastrophic" coverage. Meanwhile HMOs make record profits.

According to a 2007 study, farmers have a more difficult time than the general public affording quality health care. While most farm families do make an effort to stay insured, nearly one quarter of farmers surveyed pay more than 40 percent of their income for health care.

MinnesotaCare offers another path. Currently MinnesotaCare makes it possible for 148,000 families and individuals in each of Minnesota's 87 counties to pay affordable premiums, based on their income, and still get access to care. Single adults with an income up to 200 percent of the federal poverty line—$22,340 per year—are eligible to participate in the program, as are families up to 275 percent of the poverty line, capped at a family income of $57,500 per year. MinnesotaCare helps farmers (especially beginning farmers), workers, small business owners and families get the health care they need while keeping costs down.

Now, with the creation of a state-based health benefits exchange, Gov. Mark Dayton and Minnesota legislators have the opportunity to build on that legacy. Under the Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare), Minnesota has the option of strengthening MinnesotaCare by making it a Basic Health Plan. Making MinnesotaCare into a Basic Health Plan could make it possible to cover thousands more Minnesotans, while also setting a path to put more of the power in our health care system back in the hands of the people.

During the 2012 state legislative session, the opportunity to build on Minnesota's tradition of progressive, common sense health care policy was squandered. Instead of bringing forward policy that would strengthen our health care system by making it more people-centered, accountable and democratic, the Legislature passed HF 8, a bill that would have handed more of the people's power and money to the corporate HMOs. This "Unified Trust Accounts" bill, sponsored by Sen. David Hann (R-Eden Prairie) and Rep. Steve Gottwalt (R-St. Cloud), would have diverted funding meant to help people get affordable care into accounts managed by insurance brokers. However, Dayton vetoed HF 8 in the wake of calls and e-mails generated by LSP members and others from all over the state. (*For more information on HF 8, see the No. 2, 2012,* Land Stewardship Letter, *page 9*.)

With a change in leadership on health issues at the legislature, elected officials now have a real opportunity—and responsibility—to build a good Basic Health Plan. In addition to expanding coverage to more Minnesotans, a good Basic Health Plan should start putting into place the building blocks of a better health care system, one that is more people-centered and that doesn't rely on corporate HMOs.

Since the 1990s, supposedly "nonprofit" HMOs in Minnesota have been making huge profits by taking hundreds of millions of dollars more money from the state than they spend on health care for people. A 2012 report by the Greater Minnesota Health Care Coalition (www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/affordablehealthcareforall) makes clear the lack of accountability and transparency in the HMO contracts.

With a Basic Health Plan, Minnesota would have to give people the option to cut out the HMO middleman. At a time when corporations have increasing influence over our health and money, cutting HMOs out of the equation would be a huge step. Taking that step depends entirely on people organizing to demand action from our leaders.

It's time for the people of Minnesota—rural and urban—to work together and make Minnesota a leader in health care again. ❐

Megan Buckingham and Paul Sobocinski are LSP Policy Program organizers.

You & health care

Get involved in LSP's organizing for real health care reform:

➔ Do you have experience with MinnesotaCare, or with accessing affordable health care in the corporate-dominated private market in Minnesota? We would love to hear your story. Contact Paul Sobocinski at 507-342-2323, sobopaul@redred.com; or Megan Buckingham at 612-722-6377, meganb@landstewardshipproject.org.

➔ Do you want to be involved in LSP's health care organizing? Contact Sobocinski or Buckingham to get regular updates on LSP's health care work. More information is also available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/affordablehealthcareforall.

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Thinking holistically

So, can a sound economic decision be bad for the society? No. If it is, it is not sound. Can a good social decision be had for the environment? No, for without a healthy environment, society ceases to be. So, can a good economic decision be bad for the environment? No, it cannot. This insight, if it is logical, and it seems to me that it is, has far reaching implications for American agriculture. It means we must change our view of what constitutes a good economy. Also it requires that we pay attention to how we produce our crops as well as how we care for our livestock. We will need to mind our neighbors. And these neighbors are more than the folks next door: they are the community. **— Jim Van Der Pol, May/June 1996 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Farm Beginnings

2013-2014 Farm Beginnings course accepting applications

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course is now accepting applications until Aug. 1 for the 2013-2014 class session. There will be two separate classes—one in central Minnesota (Saint Cloud area) and one in southeast Minnesota (Winona area).

In 2013, LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its 16th year of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is designed for people of all ages just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers looking to make changes in their operations. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial planning, enterprise planning, marketing and innovative production techniques.

Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the area. The classes, which meet approximately twice-a-month beginning in the fall, run until March 2014, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 550 people have graduated from the Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings program. Farm Beginnings graduates are involved in a wide-range of agricultural enterprises, including grass-based livestock, organic vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture and specialty products.

Besides Minnesota and Wisconsin, Farm Beginnings classes have been held over the years in Illinois, Nebraska and North Dakota. Farm Beginnings courses have recently been launched in South Dakota, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, New York and Maine.

For application materials or for more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org, or contact Karen Benson at 507-523-3366; lspse@landstewardshipproject.org. ❐

LSP Farmer Network

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program has created the Farmer Network, a group of over 130 producers who represent a broad spectrum of farming enterprises. Members of the Farmer Network share their experiences and provide informal mentoring to those in the beginning to intermediate stages of production agriculture.

For more on LSP's Farmer Network, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/lspfarmernetwork, or contact Parker Forsell at 507-523-3366, parker@landstewardshipproject.org.

Grazing expert Howard Moechnig (*left*) led a workshop and class on launching a pasture-based livestock enterprise at the Martin and Loretta Jaus farm last summer. The Jauses have a grass-based organic dairy operation. On-farm educational events and skills sessions are a key component of LSP's Farm Beginnings course. (*photo by Julia Ahlers Ness*)

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Obsolete conservation

One thing I like to point out when we're touring the Mike and Jennifer Rupprecht farm is an old stone spillway built by the Civilian Conservation Crops in 1934. It's this structure at the top of a slope that was supposed to divert water and keep it from eroding a gully deeper. It's the kind of thing that people would ride by in a wagon and not even think twice about. But to look at that thing and to see there's no bare earth and to see that hardly any water flows through there is a real education. It's just sitting there seemingly with no function. But at one time 50 years ago that was built because there was a horrendous gully there and it was carrying away tons of topsoil. The fact that the Rupprecht family's farming methods have made this thing obsolete really impressed people. **— Dave Palmquist, Sept 1996 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Livestock is key

The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) indicates time after time that we don't support animal agriculture, when in fact nothing could be further from the truth. The Land Stewardship Project and the rest of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment believe we cannot attain a sustainable form of agriculture without the production of livestock on diverse, independent family farms. It's our policy against a factory livestock production system that's environmentally, socially and economically unsound that frightens the NPPC, plain and simple. The NPPC got caught red-handed and now they're trying to divert attention from the real issue: they are pro-factory farm, and anti-family farmer. **—Paul Sobocinski, April/May 1997 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Success not the only measure

Clearly we've had some great successes through LSP and other organizations. On the other hand, we still have a lot of problems and you could argue things are worse than they ever were.

The bottom line for me is we have to believe in it and keep trying. Succeeding is not the only measuring stick. Just being out there and trying to create a better world is enough. Of course, I like to win but you're not always going to win.…It's like Wendell Berry's poem about the Mad Farmer where he talks about planting the seeds for the millennium. That's what we have to be about: giving people seeds. **— Steve O'Neil, June/July 1997 *Land Stewardship Letter***

John & Heidi Wise

Dairy farming's pit bulls

Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

When you're wallowing in the pit of despair, it helps to know that others have preceded you and survived. And for John and Heidi Wise, they have another pit-beater: they didn't exactly jump in without giving it some careful forethought. After more than a decade of classes, working with mentors, business planning and searching, the couple has finally launched a dairy farm in northwest Wisconsin. And yes, they've done their share of pit-slogging.

"You're not prepared for how long those days are going to be," says John on a recent November morning during a break from morning chores. "Sometimes I didn't take time to eat those first few months."

In 2010 the Wises bought a 160-acre farm, built a milking parlor in the 1920s-era hip-roofed barn, established rotationally grazed pastures on hilly land, and began producing milk from a 60-cow herd. Unfortunately, the cows they bought were accustomed to being milked in a stanchion type system, rather than the herringbone-shaped pit parlor the Wises had built. They often had to be literally muscled into place to be milked.

Then came the winter. November brought a 17-inch snowstorm and the Wises didn't even have equipment to plow out their driveway for the milk truck. By December of that year barns in western Wisconsin were collapsing under the weight of record snowfalls. To top it off, the Wises ended up calving in January and February outside.

"Oh boy, did we get a wake up call," recalls Heidi. "That first year was horrible."

Things looked up in 2011 as they got their rotational grazing system better established and the cows adjusted to the parlor. But then the Wises added more cows to the herd to bring it up to 80 animals. It turned out those new additions to the herd weren't trained to deal with rotational grazing paddocks. It became routine to wake up to livestock wandering the rolling hills of the farm.

"They wrecked our interior fencing system so we ended up losing our rotational grazing and had to start buying hay too early," says Heidi.

Heidi and John Wise, shown with their son Peter, recall how Farm Beginnings farmer-instructors talked about the "pit of despair," where everything seems hopeless. "And even though that wasn't some sort of technical, textbook directive, phrases like that stuck with me and have reminded me that others have made it through similar situations and you are in charge of your goals," Heidi says. (*LSP photo*)

Fresh Faces, *see page 14…*

30 Years of Letters from the Land

The fish aren't biting

This is a story with many vital statistics: 100,000 gallons of raw hog manure spilled; 690,000 dead fish; 18.7 miles of polluted stream. These numbers represent the results of one factory farm disaster on a typical creek in the Upper Midwest this summer. Unfortunately, they are not uncommon statistics in this age of industrial meat production. In rural America, initial shock is giving away to feelings of helplessness and apathy as the fish body count climbs, rivers of manure rage and burgeoning banks of pollution line miles of streams. This apathy is the by-product of trying to digest and imagine facts and figures of astronomical proportions.

But this story takes a look beyond the sterile statistics of news reports and offers a down and dirty glimpse into what happened to one rural community's natural and human residents when factory farming went awry. **— Brian DeVore, Aug/Sept 1997** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

A public good

The benefit to society in the long term may have to be weighed against the benefits to the individual farmer in the short term. Society may have to look at helping that farmer establish an infrastructure for growing more than one crop.**—David Tilman, Dec 1998** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

Farm Beginnings

…Fresh Faces, *from page 13*

To paraphrase an old saying, there will be days (and months) like this.

John and Heidi were reminded of that at one of the first Farm Beginnings class sessions they attended back in 2002. The Farm Beginnings course, which the Land Stewardship Project has been offering since 1998, has become a national model for providing wannabe farmers with training in innovative business planning, marketing and goal-setting, among other things (*see page 12*). Farm Beginnings is also known for its use of established farmers and other agricultural professionals as class instructors. The Wises remember when veteran dairy farmer Dan French talked specifically about how they would find themselves in that infamous "pit of despair," and how through a combination of goal-setting, careful planning and some good old-fashioned sweat equity, there are ways of scrabbling out of that pit with your sanity, and farming aspirations, intact.

Years of preparation

One thing that's helped the Wises deal with the adversity of launching a farming enterprise is that they've waited a long time for this opportunity. They have plenty of "life experience"—another way of saying they aren't the stereotypical young beginning farmers. John is 47 and Heidi 45. They grew up in the Twin Cities, and both had careers before they started looking seriously into farming over a decade ago. Besides taking the Farm Beginnings course, they've also sought out on-the-ground farming experiences as much as possible.

In 2001 and 2002, John was mentored by Dan and Cara Miller, who raise grass-based beef in southeast Minnesota. Dan has extensive experience as a Farm Business Management Instructor, and John learned the basics of not only setting up a rotational grazing system and handling large animals, but business planning and enterprise analysis.

The Wises' original plan was to raise grass-based beef, but after taking a mini-course on dairying, they switched their goals to milking cows. The Wises felt dairying would allow them to still raise cattle on grass with minimal inputs while maintaining a regular cash flow.

Dairy switch

But they knew beef and dairy farming were two different animals, so to speak. So in 2007 and 2008, John and Heidi worked on Roger and Michelle Benruds' dairy farm in Minnesota's Goodhue County. The Benruds graduated from Farm Beginnings' inaugural class in the late 1990s, and since then have set up a grass-based milking operation. The Wises spent weekends and evenings getting firsthand experience in everything from milking to artificial insemination.

They even did what Heidi calls a "milk camp" on the Benrud operation—spending a week straight helping with calving.

"It was a baptism by fire," Heidi says.

In just over half-a-year, the Wises were confident enough to do relief milking while the Benruds went away on a family trip. The experience provided invaluable nuts-and-bolts skills, but it also showed John and Heidi that dairy farming was something they were willing to try fulltime.

In fact, they were so serious about starting a farm business that in 2005 Heidi quit her job. "Then my job was to figure out how to write a business plan," she says.

They also spent several years looking for a farm via the Internet as well as through newspaper advertisements and word-of-mouth. Heidi and John were picky, and although they didn't visit every one, seriously considered over 100 different farms over the years. Such a thorough search can become overwhelming and wracked by emotion, so the Wises developed a "criteria sheet" they used when considering farms. Listed on the sheet were such elements as "community," "condition of the land and house," "reason it was being sold," etc. They then graded each farm based on these criteria.

"It really helped—instead of always going with the gut feeling," says Heidi. "I think the highest score ever was 75 out of 135. None of them were perfect."

In the midst of their search, the Wises' son Peter was born, giving the family a sense that some decisions about the future needed to be made relatively soon.

"We didn't expect it to take this long," says John. "We did say if we don't find anything by the time I'm 50, we'd give up."

Power of networking

In a sense, the Wise farming operation is a blend of two opposing strategies when it comes to the day-to-day, as well as long-term, operation of a business.

Before launching their farming enterprise, Heidi worked in corporate communications, where she learned the value of planning ahead. Posted above their kitchen table is a 120-day planner that notes everything from calving dates and feed deliveries to doctor appointments and family visits.

Before he started farming, John had managed a Japanese garden at a community college in the Twin Cities, a specialized job that had him working solo much of the time.

"My whole adult life I worked alone. I didn't want anyone touching anything," he says with a laugh. "I'm the kind of person

Fresh Faces, *see page 15…*

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Pig power

Early one September morning, I opened the door of my grower to observe the pigs. One of the pens was covered with fresh blood. Their stress levels had built to the cannibal stage. I could take no more. I announced with a bit of profanity that my slat floor days were about to end that day!

The finished hoop building was bedded with fresh straw. I moved 160 pigs from the grower into the hoop building. Boy did those pigs have fun! In the new hoop building, they had 2,160 square feet of room to run, straw to chew and lots of bedding to nest in. They ran around all day and into the night. The next morning, I ran out to check on them.

I will never forget what I found.

As I walked up to the open door, it was quiet, very quiet. I peeked into the hoop house to see 160 pigs in one massive straw nest; snoring with great content. I laughed until I cried. Their stress was gone, and so was mine.—**Tom Frantzen, Jan/Feb/March 1999** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

Plugging the leaks

The thing is that corn and beans is not a very complex rotation. It's a real leaky system. It's annual, warm season row crops, and it's the middle of June before the roots start picking much up. Before you know it, your drainage tile lines are running full of nutrients the whole months of April, May and June.

The system of agriculture where you've got livestock eating the crops that grow on the farm is way more efficient at recycling those nutrients.—**Dan Specht, Sept/Oct 1999** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

…Fresh Faces, *from page 14*

where nobody does anything good enough for me. Peter will learn that as he grows up, and we'll have that typical farmer-to-son hate-each-other dichotomy going on."

This "go it alone" attitude has served the Wise farm well on those long days and nights when elbow grease and grit are the only options for keeping things going. But John has also learned the value of networking with others in troubleshooting a fledgling business.

Soon after they bought the farm, a local University of Wisconsin Extension educator helped set up an advisory team for the Wises. Besides the Extension agent, the team consists of a grazing consultant, a nutritionist from the local feed mill (who also happens to dairy farm) and the Wises' banker. The Benruds also belong to the advisory team. The advisory group meets with the Wises every-other-month (the Benruds join the meetings via telephone) to discuss where the farm is at and to go over options for dealing with issues that have come up.

Heidi says the advisory team can offer a third-party "neutral" perspective on issues she and John are locking horns over as spouses who happen to be business partners.

"I think in some ways the advisory team saved our operation, because we were so mired in the day-to-day that we weren't spending the time thinking about where we were going to go with our business," she says. "These guys never pressure us, but we do have to defend our decisions."

One thing John was finding increasingly hard to defend last year was his commitment to do his own fencing work when the new cows made a mockery of their rotational grazing system.

"I can do this—just get off my back," was John's reaction to suggestions from Heidi that he didn't have time to manage the farm and get the new fencing up in a timely manner.

But the advisory group pointed out that delaying action on this problem was costing the farm money and the wire-stringing needed to be hired out.

"They said you have to get your fencing set up, and you need to hire it done," recalls Heidi. "You are losing production because of this situation. That really helped to have a third-party tell us that."

Now that the fencing is done and the grazing system is back on track, John admits his do-it-yourself attitude was in the end financially and emotionally taxing.

"Sometimes the advisory team says something you don't want to hear, but usually they are right," he says.

And he concedes another point when it comes to the shortcomings related to just working day-to-day without looking up: developing a business plan, something emphasized in the Farm Beginnings course, has helped them look past short-term financial shortfalls and keep their eye on long-term goals.

"We have not been making money yet, but we're doing pretty close to what we projected, and without knowing that things will get better financially, I don't know what we'd be doing," John says while providing a tour of the farm. "Without financial projections showing us where we're going we'd be thinking about pulling the plug before we lost everything."

Now or never

There are still some hard days, but the Wises have been able to catch their breath enough lately to think about the future. One idea is to start a "farmstay" business. A few yards from the house is a former machine shop that was made into a small residence for the mother of the farm's former owner. The Wises see this as a perfect place for people to stay on the weekends and get a "real farm experience" while enjoying the other recreational offerings in the area—they farm a few miles from the town of Chetek, which is located on the popular Big Six Chain of Lakes.

True to her passion for planning ahead, in preparation for the day when the farmstay enterprise is off the ground—sometime around 2014, they hope—Heidi has put her communications background to good use and already launched a website for "A Wise Choice Dairy and Farmstay." She also chronicles the farm's weekly activities on Facebook (www.facebook.com/awisechoicedairyandfarmstay).

It's no surprise Heidi has the farmstay enterprise all planned out. But in a nod to John's philosophy of jumping now and asking questions later, she concedes they wouldn't be where they are at today if their farm dream had been all plan, and no action. Sometimes one must be willing to jump in with both feet—even if they land you in a bit of a pit.

"You've got to prepare yourself to go through some tough stuff, but if you prepare for everything, you'll never step up," says Heidi as she, John and three-year-old Peter stand outside their dairy barn with the cattle in the pastures behind them. "Eventually you have to step off the cliff." ❐

Give it a listen

John and Heidi Wise talk about facing the "pit of despair" on episode 124 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

Farm Beginnings profiles

To read more profiles of Farm Beginnings graduates, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/meetourgraduates.

Living the dream

I feel very blessed that I can continue to live my dream and be a full-time family farmer. I have known many people who have had to give up their dream or perhaps only farm on the weekends and in the dark while holding down a job in town.

…I am a big supporter of an agriculture that is characterized by caring, independent, small family farms. I believe in my heart that it is possible. I said earlier that it is a gut-wrenching experience for a farmer to quit. But I also believe all of society loses when a family leaves the land. The urban and suburban people I talk to say they like the kind of farming that relies on independent owner-operators like myself. They tell me that's the kind of agriculture they want producing their food and caring for the land across Minnesota. This isn't a pipe dream: there are many other families like mine out on the land producing food and feeling positive about the future.

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But we face many difficult barriers. For example, I've crunched the numbers and I know I can produce quality hogs just as efficiently as the big guys. All that means nothing if I don't have a market for those animals. It's very frustrating to see packers pay more for hogs raised on mega-sized factory farms based on volume, not superior quality.

We need policies that target the type of farm that society says it wants and needs: family owned and operated, as well as economically and biologically diverse. We need to keep markets open for family farms. Believe it or not, there are many young farmers just champing at the bit to get established on the land. We need low-cost, viable ways of getting them started. We need organizations like LSP, which is bringing farmers like myself together with non-farmers to work toward making family-sized operations the foundation of our food system.**—Dave Serfling, Dec 1999 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland in the Upper Midwest? Or are you an established farmer/landowner in the Upper Midwest who is seeking a beginning farmer to purchase or rent your land, or to work with in a partnership/employee situation? Then consider having your information circulated via LSP's *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse*. To fill out an on-line form and for more information, see www.landstewardshipproject.org. You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Parker Forsell at parker@landstewardshipproject.org, or by calling him at 507-523-3366. Below are excerpts of recent listings. For the full listings, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/lspfarmernetwork/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse.

Seeking Land: Southern Minnesota

• Mathias Gregor is seeking up to 100 acres of tillable and pastured farmland in southern Minnesota's Waseca, Steele or Rice County. Contact: Mathias Gregor, 507-461-5046, mathiasgregor@yahoo.com.

• Melissa Gasner is seeking to rent or purchase 50 acres or more of farmland in southeast Minnesota's Olmsted, Fillmore or Winona County. Contact: Melissa Gasner, 507-696-2340, Runt2585@hotmail.com.

• Leonard Jacobs is seeking to rent or buy 40 to 100 acres of farmland in south-central or southeast Minnesota, within one hour of the Twin Cities. Contact: Leonard Jacobs, 612-282-2193, ljacobs@tds.net.

• John Middleton and Lidia Dungue are seeking to rent or purchase 10+ acres of farmland in southeast Minnesota's Dakota, Rice, Scott or Goodhue County. Contact: John Middleton and Lidia Dungue, 952-469-2278, farmers@fbt.ag.

Seeking Land: Minnesota

• James Klosterbuer is seeking tillable and pastured land somewhere in Minnesota. Contact: James Klosterbuer, 605-759-0351.

• Nick Hacker is seeking to rent 20 to 200 acres of tillable land in Minnesota. Contact: Nick Hacker, 763-662-2087, nickhackerconst@aol.com.

Seeking Land: Twin Cities Region

• Kelsey D. is seeking to buy approximately a quarter-acre of tillable land in the Twin Cities Metro Area. Contact: Kelsey D., 320-221-3378, durkenk@gmail.com.

• Noua Vang is seeking to rent 10 to 15 acres of farmland within 30 miles of Ramsey County, Minn. Contact: Noua Vang, nvang1983@gmail.com, 651-206-7934.

• Emily Hanson and Klaus Zimmerman are seeking to buy 80-200 acres of farmland within a one-and-a-half hour drive east of Minnesota's Twin Cities. Contact: Emily Hanson, 651-323-0037, eehanson21@gmail.com.

Seeking Farm Experience: Minnesota Region

• Levi Wooden is seeking diverse farm work experience somewhere within the Minnesota region. Wooden has extensive experience as a farm worker and garden manager. He currently works at a garden shop. Contact: Levi Wooden, 317-362-5015, lddwooden@gmail.com.

• Danielle Kulzer is seeking an internship or employment on a diverse farm that includes livestock and vegetable production. Kulzer co-operated an organic farm in northern California from 2006 to 2010. Contact: Danielle Kulzer, 320-987-3125, newdaymovement@hotmail.com.

Seeking Land: Northeast Minnesota

• Katherine Disterhaft is seeking to rent or purchase 5+ acres of farmland in northeast Minnesota. Contact: Katherine Disterhaft, 715-340-7340, katdownunder@yahoo.com.

Farm for Rent: West-Central Minnesota

• Irene Seppanen has for rent a 100-acre farm in west-central Minnesota. Fifty acres are tillable and she is willing to seed it down for pasture in 2013. The farm currently includes 5 acres of pasture land (never been sprayed), and 3/4 of an acre garden space (never been sprayed) with raspberries and asparagus. There are two camp sites available on a good fishing and swimming lake. Contact: Irene Seppanen, 320-763-7736, iseppa@centurylink.net.

Seeking Land: Southwest Minnesota

• Jeremy Simonsen is seeking to rent tillable land near southwest Minnesota's Lincoln County. Contact: Jeremy Simonsen, 507-215-0746.

Seeking Land to Rent or Buy: SE Wisconsin

• Kevin McGraw is seeking to rent or purchase up to 15 acres of farmland in southeast Wisconsin's Dodge or Jefferson County. Contact: Kevin or Joni, 608-692-8691, kevmcgraw@yahoo.com.

Seeking Land: Northern Illinois

• Greg Fischer is seeking to rent tillable farmland in northern Illinois' Bureau, Lee or LaSalle County. No house is required. Contact: Greg Fischer, fischerfarm1@yahoo.com.

• Tyler Avery is seeking to purchase or rent 5-100 acres of farmland in northern Minnesota (from St. Cloud to Lake of the Woods). Avery is open to various arrangements, including rent-to- own. Contact: Tyler Avery, Tavery91@gmail.com.

• Brennen Bergstrom is seeking to purchase or rent tillable farmland in west-central Minnesota's Meeker or Kandiyohi County. Contact: Brennen Bergstrom, bbergstrom13@hotmail.com.

• Scott Treat is seeking to rent 20+ acres of farmland in northwestern Illinois' Knox, Warren or Fulton County. Contact: Scott Treat, streat@rio-express.net.

Seeking Land: Western Illinois

• James Martin is seeking to rent tillable land in western Illinois' Pike, Adams, Brown or Calhoun County. Contact: James Martin, 217-242-1342, jmartinfarm1@yahoo.com.

Streaming connections

Water is a great people-connecting tool, since we all share it, regardless of our work. With water making its own course according to topography rather than drawn boundaries, the watershed scale is the right approach to address water quality issues. And teams of diverse citizens seem like the best route to sustainable, watershed-wide solutions. …

But there are difficulties. For starters, citizens of all walks of life want to blame someone! Is it farm fertilizer that contaminates the Chippewa River and Sand Creek, or lawn care? Common solutions demand a collective vision. Yet when farmers mistrust government staff, developers won't even give conservationists the time of day, and hunters and graziers think they're competing for the same river, how do we get everyone to the table?

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Complicating the situation further is the question of money. It still flows according to political boundaries, not biological boundaries. For instance, a wetland might not qualify for restoration funding but is still listed in a critical watershed. This discourages a "watershed mindset" that would otherwise transcend the relegation of a water quality question to the political "round file."

Further, we think of our place on the map according to a county, a diocese, maybe a soil and water district. We don't think in terms of a watershed, although so much of our environment is dictated by that watershed.**—Caroline van Schaik, July/Aug 2000 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Community Based Food Systems

Getting at the root of the issue

By Caroline van Schaik

The Root River watershed is a beautiful area. It lies mostly within the Driftless Region of southeast Minnesota and is noted for its blufflands and river valleys. But its resources are under pressure, and these concerns are the target of much private and public work, including cost-share and technical assistance for farmers implementing conservation methods. But we need to look elsewhere for inspired change—not *instead* of the essentials of technical help and cost share opportunities, but in *addition* to them.

What does inspire us to make a change on the land? Farm tours and workshops might help; bird walks and pasture talks add up; newsletters, websites and press releases inform us to a degree. Yet we can be well informed but still not make a move.

The heart of the question is at the heart of the answer: what does stewardship of this land look like to people who live here, and what more shall we do together?

These questions frame the work ahead of us as Land Stewardship Project staff members in the Lewiston office take a personal approach to the personal decisions that go into the management of private land in the watershed. And we are looking for local hosts to work with us.

Specifically, if you have a kitchen table and a coffee pot to share with some of your neighbors for a 90-minute conversation about the land, farm programs, market opportunities and stewardship farming in all its bountiful shapes, we'd like to hear from you.

These kitchen conversations can be one of winter's pleasures, a time to think about the next growing season in the company of people with ideas. Could you have imagined that a neighbor dreams of prairie restoration or bringing cows back to the home farm? Is there an old grazing plan that could use a dusting off with a little technical help, or would a cost share program help nudge a dream into a plan? How valuable is bird habitat in calculating your bottom line? What happened to your own vision for your place and what do you need to make a change toward it?

Be it owned, rented out, or leased from a resident owner or one far away, the 1.06 million acres in the Root River watershed contribute gifts and challenges related to diversity, habitat, nutrients and aesthetics.

Those challenges present themselves as erosion, water contamination, poor soil, reduced wildlife, and other indicators of biodiversity in need of a thinking community. Kitchen conversations grant us intentional time together as we think—and act—on a land ethic that clears the way to root changes on our landscape.

We will spend the winter in conversation and active follow-up with grazing specialists, soil scientists, birders, nutrient and conservation planners, grass-fed beef marketers, and any other resource landowners ask for in their striving for change that makes sense.

LSP's partners in this endeavor include the Fillmore County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Nature Conservancy, along with the resource management offices in each of the seven counties that are touched by the Root River watershed. Funding is provided in part by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development.

For a map of the watershed and more information on LSP's upcoming work in the area, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/foodsystemslandstewardship/rootriverwatershed. ❐

Want to host a kitchen table conversation?

If you are interested in hosting a 90-minute conversation in your home this winter about the land, farm programs, market opportunities and stewardship farming in the Root River watershed, contact Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

Caroline van Schaik is an organizer with LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program. She coordinates LSP's work to develop more diverse farming systems in the Root River watershed. She can be contacted at 507-523-3366, caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

Hain serves internship

John Hain recently served an internship with the Land Stewardship Project's Community Based Food Systems Program.

Hain graduated last spring from the University of Minnesota-Duluth with a bachelors' degree in anthropology and a minor in biology. While at UMD, Hain worked on a project to design a high tunnel hoop house for the University's produce growing operation

During his LSP internship, Hain worked with the Big Stone Local Foods Initiative, which is focused on developing a local foods infrastructure in the region surrounding Big Stone County in western Minnesota (*see pages 18-19*). ❐

Feeding people, not the world

We must feed the world. This familiar expression has often been used by USDA officials, county extension agents, faculty of agricultural colleges, and even farmers, to give a noble purpose to their work. It has implied that without a large supply of cheap grains produced by American farmers, the world will go hungry. It has justified the focus on increasing crop yields and improving efficiency through large-scale operations at the expense of the environment, independent, family-sized farms and healthy rural communities.

Even worse, the expression is a sham. We don't feed the world; we sell commodities to those in the world who can afford to buy them. The hungry in developing countries aren't buying hams from Minnesota or even our corn and soybeans; most of those crops are exported for use as animal feed. Danish hams aren't found on the table of hungry Africans or Asians either. No one can deny that the world must be fed, but the system dominated by the likes of Archer Daniels Midland—"supermarket to the world"—won't do it.

30 Years of Letters from the Land

We must feed the region. Think what it would mean if farmers and other people in the agricultural sector found a noble mission in that expression, instead of "We must feed the world."… I'm not suggesting total cessation of imports and exports. But people should buy a larger percentage of their food from family farms near them.

—Dana Jackson, Sept/Oct 2000 *Land Stewardship Letter*

Community Based Foods

Q & A: An oasis in the food desert

EDITOR'S NOTE: Land Stewardship Project staff members Anna Cioffi and Rebecca Terk recently discussed the opportunities and challenges involved with increasing the availability of fresh produce and frozen meats at affordable prices in rural and urban "food deserts" during the 2012 Food Access Summit: Expanding Opportunities for Low-Income Minnesotans, held in Duluth, Minn.

Cioffi and Terk, who are organizers in LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program, both work in areas where residents have limited access to fresh, healthy food at affordable prices. For the past few years, Terk has been working in rural western Minnesota with people in the Big Stone County region. Cioffi is working with Hope Community in the Phillips Neighborhood of Minneapolis on the "Growing Neighborhood Access to Healthy Food" initiative. Among other things, Cioffi is helping Hope residents operate a community garden.

The Food Access Summit was sponsored by, among others, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. Cioffi and Terk recent talked to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about LSP's work on the food desert issue.

LSL: *What specifically is a food desert?*

Terk: The USDA definition is it's a community with a lot of low-income residents who have limited access to a supermarket or large food store.

Cioffi: People talk about food deserts in urban areas, but in reality there's plenty of food there, there's food everywhere you look. It's just that many of the choices are not healthy. Right now the choices are fast food places and convenience stores stocked with little produce and lots of chips and sodas.

Terk: Yeah, the food desert concept as it applies to Big Stone County is a little misleading as well. We are in a very rural area with a very low population and so many people are 10 miles or more from a store. However, there is food out there, it's just that a lot of it is being produced in gardens, orchards and pastures. Getting that food from point A to point B is the issue.

LSL: *How is this lack of access to healthy food affecting people in these communities?*

Cioffi: The main impact we're seeing is the health impact. Most of the gardeners I'm working with have chronic health conditions: diabetes, heart disease, etc. A lot of people are on disability. The sicker people get, the less money they have to spend on food because of their health care costs.

That's too bad because the management of diabetes is 99 percent individual—you spend 99 percent of your time managing it yourself as opposed to health care professionals managing it. But the attitude is you've lost control of your body, and you are not in control of managing it. A complete lifestyle change such as eating healthier is far more overwhelming than just taking a prescription, especially if access to healthy food is limited.

LSL: *Are you seeing any progress dealing with these food deserts?*

Cioffi: One of the biggest positive changes I've seen is that the people we're working with are starting to see the advantages of producing their own food—it's become a point of pride and a way to gain healthier options. But they are also seeing other community benefits to gardening: they are doing things together, producing food together, cooking and preserving together. You can troubleshoot together and gain the confidence to do it better next time.

Terk: In Big Stone County through LSP's Blue Cross and Blue Shield Healthy Eating grant, LSP was able to buy food preparation equipment for a local school and elderly care center. In the case of the school, we got a steamer so they could feed kids fresh vegetables, and for the care center we got a food processor so that residents could have fresh fruit smoothies. We were also able to buy a refrigerated display case for a local grocery store so it could offer more fresh options to its customers. In addition, we got freezers for a local emergency food shelf and a food co-op.

We've started two farmers' markets, and during the past year or so we've been offering food preservation workshops in the area. This is all about rebuilding that infrastructure for not only raising, but transporting, storing and preparing the fresh food we know is being produced on farms in the region.

We are also trying to adjust the logistics so that supply and demand match each other better in the community. For example, one thing we've discovered is the demand for produce is very high at the beginning of the season. So for the people who are doing season extension in the spring, the demand is huge. But everyone's home garden starts

Food Deserts, *see page 19…*

A woman's place

About 20 years ago, I went with my husband to a seed dealers' meeting. While the men discussed sales techniques for varieties of #2 yellow corn, the women were led through a craft project: stitching with acrylic yarn on plastic-gridded crosses. For most of America's agricultural history, a woman's place has been in the kitchen (readying to feed the threshing crew) or in the garden or in the chicken coop, making her egg money to afford luxuries like silverware or a camera.

The number of women-owned businesses in agriculture has doubled since 1980. In recent agricultural history, we women have, for the most part, been positioned along the status quo in a post-war food production system designed by men with the tools left over from making war. We have been the Rosie-the-Riveters of the prairies, driving the farm machines alongside men.

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Now with new awareness we are all beginning to understand the implications of a food production system that is hugely reliant on fossil fuels, fast burning up what author Thom Hartmann calls "the last hours of ancient sunlight." It prompts me to think about how we fed ourselves before oil, and even…before agriculture. What is there to learn from the gatherers and hunters?…

As women in the New Agriculture, we are recognizing that we are in the practice of harvesting sunlight. By effectively capturing sunlight with the unique capacity of photosynthesizing plants, we are co-creators of food and fiber and generators of wealth.**—Audrey Arner, Dec 2000** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

Weighing the benefits of record keeping

Record keeping in any language is no more the cup of tea for Winona's Hmong farmers than it is for anyone else, as this fall's workshop coordinated by the Land Stewardship Project with Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG) illustrated.

That said, farmers try, and FLAG's Xli Xyooj and Jennifer Kalyuzhny made it worth their while in presenting reasons and practical worksheets for collecting useful data on their operations. This was a follow-up to a workshop held last April to introduce a crop insurance program and the records needed to participate as vegetable growers. At that workshop, participants learned how (and why) to measure and calculate their rows into fractions of an acre, among other data typically collected at the start of a growing season.

At the fall workshop, participants returned to the topic by working out calculations and then progressed to discussions about harvest and sales data, filing taxes, using a scale and micro-lending programs.

The workshop was part of LSP's commitment to the food community of the Driftless Region. Other recent workshops have focused on transportation options, new markets, a hoop house field trip, and land searches. It was funded in part by a grant from USDA's Risk Management Agency. The record keeping worksheets (in English) are now available from FLAG at http://flaginc.org/topics/pubs/record keeping/RecordkeepingToolkit2012.pdf. (*photo by Caroline van Schaik*)

…Food Deserts, *from page 18*

producing in July, so you really need to adjust the amount of produce you are ordering into your local co-op or grocery store at that time.

LSL: *For people who don't live in a food desert, why should they pay attention to and care about this issue?*

Cioffi: The cost of health care for one thing. People would use a lot less services if they were healthy enough to work and not be on Medicaid. I've heard from a lot of people at Hope that they've learned a lot more from working at the garden and hanging out at the garden with others than they learned from diabetes educators.

Terk: I would also say that good healthy access to food for everyone is reflected in the landscape. Where the food comes from has an impact on our air, our land and our water. That message resonates for people who care about the impacts of an industrialized food and farming system on our landscape.

For more on LSP's work in Big Stone County and the Hope Community see www.landstewardshipproject.org and look under the ***Stewardship & Food*** *section.*

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Reclaiming public research

Family farm pork producers took a step forward on Jan. 11 when their victory in voting down the mandatory pork checkoff was announced by then U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman. Hog farmers voted to end the pork tax 15,951 to 14,396.…

Now we all (hog farmers, other farmers, rural and urban citizens together) must push our land grant universities to conduct the research and education that family farmers need. Everyone must recognize that commodity groups push a research agenda that moves industrial agriculture and factory farms forward. We need to reclaim our public educational institutions. The mission of land grant universities is to serve the people of the state. The social, economic and environmental health of our states rely on prosperous family farms and vital rural communities. It is in everyone's interest to get our state universities off the corporate agenda and onto the people's agenda. **— Mark Schultz & Mike McMahon, Jan/Feb/March 2001** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

Creative countryside

There's a lot of bad news in agriculture these days, but I'm actually very optimistic about my ability to produce food using low-cost, sustainable methods that are good for the environment. I'm optimistic because of all the other innovative farmers I see making a go of it across the country. I sit on a USDA committee that reviews grant proposals for on-farm research, and the creativity that exists in farm country is inspiring.**—Dan Specht, April/May/June 2001** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

Profits from Perennials

Teaming with microbes

It's not just about the bugs beneath the surface—it's also the people above

EDITOR's NOTE: The No. 3, 2012, edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter* described innovative work being done in Burleigh County, N. Dak., to create farming systems that integrate soil health with environmental and economic sustainability. In this issue, we look at how a team effort involving farmers, conservationists and scientists is helping perfect those systems while pushing the envelope further.

By Brian DeVore

Talking about the importance of feeding soil microbes is fine. Speaking with your feet is even better.

"Take a closer look—anything you tramp down is just carbon in the soil," quips soil conservationist Jay Fuhrer on a Friday afternoon in early September. As he says this, he's beckoning some 120 farmers and others to follow him into an impressively diverse, chest-high stand of warm season plants: cowpea, soybean, sorghum sudan, pearl millet, graza radish, rape and sunflower.

This was the first stop on the Soil Health Tour, an event that brings farmers, scientists, students and conservationists from across the Midwest to south-central North Dakota's Burleigh County at the end of each summer. As the name of the tour implies, they come to see thriving soil, and the land does not disappoint on this particular day. Spadefuls of fragrant humus are unearthed, the results of impressive biological and chemical tests are shared, and crop fields and pastures thriving on that soil are put on display. At one stop at a cornfield, a large jar of water sits next to a six-foot deep soil profile trench. Suspended at the top of the jar in a wire cage is a fist-sized clump of soil that came from the cornfield. Even though it's been immersed in the water as part of this "slaking" test for several hours, the clump is intact and the water remains free of dissolved sediment—a sign that the soil's quality is so high that it's able to engineer its own stability. All of this points to a clear-cut conclusion: the farms on this tour are home to some mighty healthy soil.

2nd of 2 parts

What makes this tour special is how this soil got this way. A combination of cover crops, livestock grazing and no-till planting techniques has created soil that not only cooks up its own fertility, but naturally resists erosion and makes better use of available moisture. This means healthy crops and grasses even in an area with a short growing season and an average annual precipitation level of just 16 inches.

What this tour showcases is a farming system that puts soil health at the center. Such a system works with the soil's natural ability to maintain a healthy balance, rather than just treating the symptoms of degraded quality with an ever-revolving array of petroleum-based fertilizers and chemicals.

And by the last stop of the day, it's clear that putting soil at the center of farming is about more than which combination of methods will create the healthiest humus—it's also about blending the ideas and goals of farmers, natural resource professionals and scientists who are breaking new ground in sustainable agriculture. The farming innovations being generated by this group are noteworthy, but just as exciting is the team effort that's arisen in Burleigh County. New farming techniques come and go, but Burleigh County's Soil Health Team is a model for creating the kind of environment needed to ensure the roots for creating innovations in the future will always be deep and thriving.

A team effort

To understand why this team effort is so important, one needs to consider Gabe Brown, a Burleigh County farmer whose success with building soil health has been so significant that one would be forgiven for thinking he's an anomaly.

During the past decade or so on his 5,400 acres, Brown has put in place an innovative system for building soil health utilizing extremely diverse mixes of cover crops—as many as 20 species at times—no-till cropping, and a type of rotational grazing, called mob grazing, where cattle are put in pasture paddocks for short bursts of intense feeding.

Brown has more than doubled the organic matter in some of his fields, raising it from less than 2 percent to nearly 5 percent. He

Teaming, *see page 21…*

Manure's modest proposal

Granted, burgers composed completely of manure may be off-putting for even the hungriest of scribes. Thus, I propose, that the manure be mixed with real meat and other constituents in proportions that are practical. If we assume a modest goal of 25 percent manure in our burgers, we have a total of 128 burgers per year, or a little over two burgers per week per person. For all parties concerned, an almost ideal rate of consumption.

And certainly I draw here on the work of others who have proposed central processing solutions of one sort or the other. Already food corporations in the land are mixing lean, foreign meats with fatty, domestic meats to create burgers à la mode. It would require little retrofitting to include a nutrient rich third stream of manure in the mix.**—Ray Kirsch, May/June 2002** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Multiple goods

U.S. farm policy has its foundation in a narrowly focused philosophy that sees commodities as the overriding benefit to come from farming. Such thinking produces policy that, no matter how much it is modified, will still produce more cheap grain at the expense of the agroecosystems. Best management practices, and land retirement to a certain extent, provide a handy crutch for row crop production to continue. Farmers and others interested in creating agroecosystems that are more resilient say policy must be developed that recognizes the multiple benefits or public "goods" farms can provide beyond bulging grain bins.

There are plenty of goods that don't appear on any label but that people value all the same: aesthetic landscapes, songbird and waterfowl habitat, carbon capture, and community jobs. But how do we create incentives to provide these goods?
—George Boody, April/May/June 2003 ***Land Stewardship Letter***

…Teaming, *from page 20*

has also improved the health of his water cycle, meaning water infiltrates the soil profile instead of running off the surface.

And it's paying off financially. Brown's use of commercial fertilizer has dropped by over 90 percent, and herbicide use by 75 percent. At today's fertilizer prices, each 1 percent of organic matter contains $751 worth of nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, sulfur and carbon, Brown estimates. That's the main reason his 2011 return to labor, management and land was an impressive $5.38 per bushel of corn.

Brown has arrived at his current system through a combination of trial and error and consulting with scientists and experts like Fuhrer. He's not afraid to get ideas from people far from Burleigh County who are working on soil health. Brown recalls with excitement when he and Fuhrer were both at a conference and saw a presentation about intense cover cropping systems given by a Brazilian scientist.

"I turned to Jay and said, 'That's the next step,' " Brown says.

Walking Gabe Brown's farm or viewing one of his PowerPoint presentations on soil health and profitability can generate a lot of excitement about the potential for linking long-term financial sustainability and soil health. But Brown knows it means little in the bigger picture if farms like his are seen as isolated examples.

"There are people all over doing this. They just don't have the mouth I have," he says with a laugh while giving a tour of his crop fields and pastures. "Now most of my cover crops are close to 20 mixes. I wouldn't recommend a real diverse mix right off the bat—it can be overwhelming. The longer I'm in this, the more questions I have."

That's why Burleigh County is focusing on helping show soil-minded farmers they are not alone in questioning agriculture's conventional wisdom that the land is just a plant stand for the next crop.

Teaming, *see page 22…*

Give it a listen

Farmers, conservationists and a scientist talk about improving soil health on episode 121 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

Burleigh County's annual Soil Health Tour in south-central North Dakota attracts farmers, natural resource professionals and students from across the Upper Midwest who are seeking information on how to combine sustainable soil management and profitability. (*LSP photo*)

30 Years of Letters from the Land

The core of community

Townships are an established foundation for democracy in America—local government through which people meet to discuss and act on community concerns. Organized towns are the primary local government unit for unincorporated areas in Minnesota. They exist in every county in Minnesota, and have provided what some consider the purest form of democracy where soft money and party politics have been all but absent. Town boards and town meetings consist of community residents taking care of township issues at the local level. The power and rights of townships to make decisions to protect and enhance the quality of life of local citizens, while adhering to appropriate state or federal standards, has been coined "local control."

Yet, there is a battle being waged across America to reduce and strip away the rights and powers of citizens to take civic action through their local governments, starting with townships. The attack is coming from factory farm proponents in government, corporate agribusinesses and commodity groups.

In Minnesota, the attempt to make factory farming the dominant model of livestock production is running into organized citizens, who are using local control and democratic principles to promote guidelines for communities that are safe, fair and reasonable.

— Adam Warthesen, Oct/Nov 2003 *Land Stewardship Letter*

Don't fear democracy

As an independent hog farmer, I'm not afraid of local democracy. I am not afraid to work with members of the community. Who better to decide about what their community, township or county looks like than local residents who then have to live with their decision? Who better to decide about the structure of agriculture and economic development in their community?

— Paul Sobocinski, April/May/June 2004 *Land Stewardship Letter*

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New thinking

"Soil biology is like us—it has to eat," says Fuhrer as he churns up a spadeful of North Dakota earth and holds it up for the participants in the September tour to see. And one way to feed it is to allow cover crops to be stamped into the soil while cattle are feeding on them, or while participants in a field tour are taking a closer look.

That plants can serve an important role as food for microbes and aren't only useful if they can be harvested by machines or animals is just one of the counter-intuitive messages emphasized by the Burleigh County Soil Health Team. There are other head-scratchers: planting corn may not always be the best bet financially and agronomically; cattle don't need to spend a long time in grazing paddocks; you don't need as much moisture as you once thought to raise a decent crop; no-till cropping systems alone don't save soil; fields with more varieties of plants, not less, are more resilient in the face of drought.

Fuhrer says he identifies with farmers and others who may have to change their worldview to comprehend a farming system that puts soil health at the center. Fuhrer is the district conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Burleigh County, and by the 1990s it was becoming clear to him and some farmers that conventional conservation "fixes" weren't the ultimate answer to saving soil.

The Burleigh County Soil Conservation District's supervisors eventually formed a team that consisted of farmers and conservationists. Over the years, this team has promoted no-till, crop diversification and simple cover crop mixtures. It has also worked to get farmers to replace the traditional technique of turning cattle out into large pastures all season long with rotational grazing systems. These farming techniques have been a vast improvement over intense tillage, monocropping and overgrazing. And thanks in part to the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District's soil health work, 70 percent of the county's farmers are now using no-till cropping systems. But Fuhrer and others were finding that even with these conservation improvements, soil was still lost, precious water ran off of increasingly compacted fields, and the quality of crops and grasses being grown kept deteriorating.

What was needed was a way to test out new approaches to building soil health while spreading that information among farmers as quickly and effectively as possible.

One way the District does that is through experiments at Menoken Farm, a 150-acre educational site started in 2009. Replicated trials on cropping and grazing practices that build soil health are done at Menoken and the District shares the results through field days, workshops and a website (www.bcscd.com). It was this kind of research, for example, that helped show that diverse cover-cropping mixes were more drought tolerant than monocrops because of all the biological diversity created below ground.

Sanford Williams says it's hard to plant cover crops in a field that he knows would grow a good stand of high-priced corn, but that diversifying gives him more flexibility in dealing with issues like drought. (*LSP photo*)

But Fuhrer and others know that farmers need to see these practices put into action on real working farms, ones that share the same soil type, geography, weather and even economic conditions. So a few years ago the District promoted "25-acre grants" for seed. The farmers used the grants to establish cover crops, which are generally plantings of low-value species such as small grains. In general, these plantings protect the soil between the growing seasons for more high-value crops like corn. In return for receiving the free seed, the farmers would serve as one of the stops on the annual Soil Health Tour. Those 25-acre test plots were popular, with the District overseeing 30 to 40 a year from 2006 to 2008. With the price of cover crop seed being between $30 to $35 an acre, it was a bargain in terms of the harvest of real-world results it produced.

"So part of the bargain was a willingness to speak at the tour stop—what worked, maybe what didn't work, their observations," says Fuhrer while going over test plot results in his Bismarck office. "And then at the same time it gave people like myself the opportunity to take a look at those soils, maybe do a slake and infiltration test on them. It allowed us to kind of ride along and monitor that and really kind of look at the benefits."

That created a whole lot of on-the-ground results with a relatively small financial risk on the part of the farmer. It also developed an environment where farmers were comfortable sharing their experiences—both

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Dust-up in farm country

30 Years of Letters from the Land

The voice of one woman, a fictional woman named Annie, took the mission of the Land Stewardship Project to thousands of people and over 500 audiences across the United States between 1984 and 1991 through presentations of the half-hour, dramatic monologue *Planting in the Dust*.

…This play was one of the first attempts to address the land stewardship issue from a woman's point of view. It drew women to the meetings and they embraced its message that soil conservation was their responsibility too. Someone representing LSP or a sponsoring organization would introduce the play and lead a discussion following the performance. It was performed across the U.S. and Canada in churches, museums, libraries, schools and even outdoors; it had a long run into the 1990s.

From time to time, someone at LSP has suggested a revival of the play. That would require some significant updating—a farmer like Jordan likely would have built a large-scale hog confinement operation by now, and dust from spring planting could be laced with the stench of liquid hog manure.

—Dana Jackson, July/Aug/Sept 2005 *Land Stewardship Letter*

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good and bad.

A combination of results from the Menoken Farm and the fields planted using the 25-acre grants showed that cover cropping could build soil health year-round, not just during the spring and fall. The Soil Conservation District and the farmers also learned that diverse seed mixes that went beyond the traditional cover crop plantings of small grains such as rye built up an impressive amount of carbon while feeding microbes. This makes soil naturally fertile and less reliant on chemical inputs. It is also increasingly erosion and drought proof. In other words, the soil is more resilient. And this resiliency can be attained relatively cheaply by seeding cover crops—plants that, by the way, can serve double duty as livestock forage.

Cattle and crop farmer Darrell Oswald: "Raising annual crops is exciting for us now." (*LSP photo*)

"This isn't a situation where someone is trying to sell a concept," says Fuhrer. "It's based on information and education. And as we share that with each other, we've learned how to build that soil back. You can't help but become excited."

That excitement was on display during the recent Soil Health Tour. The first stop was a field owned by Sanford Williams, who, along with his son Seth, operates a crop and livestock operation. The 68-acre field grew alfalfa from 2006 to 2012. One cutting was taken earlier this year and then on June 22 it was seeded to an eight-species mix of warm season plants. Timely rains before drought set in during the summer helped produce a good stand, which has resulted in a huge amount of biomass and a build-up of fertility. The Williamses plan on letting their cows calve in the small pasture next to the field, and then turning the animals out to graze—and stamp biomass.

The farmers on the tour seem to be aware that this is a long-term investment in their land's, and farm's, overall health—a tough sale at a time when a quick applications of fertilizers and chemicals can produce an extremely profitable crop in short order.

"I want to plant corn—you can probably guess why," says Sanford while standing in the mix of cover crops. "Seth wanted to plant cover crops. With crop commodity prices where they are, I'm probably the hard one to convince to do that."

But even the elder Williams concedes that this investment is paying off in ways high corn prices never could—tests show organic matter and fertility are being built up to impressive levels in the field, all without adding extra fertilizer. Later in the tour the father and son show off pastures that have been mob grazed. Sanford explains that a lot of his pastures had been full of unpalatable gumweed before.

"Now I can't believe the grass that's growing there," he says. "I'm not a guy who knows his grasses, but I'm seeing species that are producing more feed. But it didn't turn around right away."

Fuhrer backs up that last point by talking about how although diverse cover cropping and mob grazing can rev up the biology of the soil considerably, farmers must take the long view.

"We didn't get poor soils in one year and we won't solve this in one year," he tells the tour participants.

Out of the lab

To Kristine Nichols, the fact that farmers are having a positive impact on such things as organic matter at all is a major triumph, given that when she was a grad student studying soil science such changes were talked about in terms of geological time—not something that could be impacted in a matter of years.

Nichols is a soil microbiologist at the USDA's Northern Plains Research Station in Mandan, just across the Missouri River from Bismarck. For a scientist in a specialized field, Nichols has a refreshing attitude that appeals to practical-minded farmers

"I'm less concerned about what soil organisms are, and more about what they do," she says. "We could really learn a lot more about functionality of these organisms."

Sitting in her basement office, Nichols is noticeably energized by the fact that farmers in Burleigh County are, for example, creating soil aggregates that engineer their own stability. This kind of self-perpetuating health maintenance is an exciting field of study in microbiology—and now it's being used in the real world.

What these farmers are doing is also causing Nichols to "go back to the text-

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A fresh look at 'local'

Because of this understanding of an increasingly interconnected global community, I've often struggled with the idea of "buying locally." Of course, I completely understand purchasing my food closer to home so that transportation costs are reduced, so that produce is fresher and better tasting, so that my dollars are more likely to be reinvested back into my community.

But perhaps because of the various places I've lived, my loyalties extend beyond my hometown, beyond my state, beyond even my country. I want the people of South Dakota and Florida and Honduras to have good jobs too. And from a purely selfish perspective, I want to keep eating bananas, oranges, chocolate, and, of course, drinking coffee each morning—all things we cannot produce here in Minnesota.

I think the answer lies in guiding our buying decisions with our values. To think of the unknown woman who sewed our T-shirt or the unknown man that picked our bananas as our neighbor—someone that we care for, someone that we want the best for. And to push ourselves to learn more about how our purchase impacts their lives. To quote Frances Moore Lappé: "Every time that you and I shop, save, invest, we are either creating the world in decline or the emerging world that reflects our values."

—Cathy Eberhart, Oct/Nov/Dec 2005 *Land Stewardship Letter*

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books" when questions come up on the land that she's never confronted before. For example, farmers like Brown seem to be able to raise a good crop of corn with less rainfall than one would expect. Why? Nichols has been poring over plant physiology texts looking for clues. Situations like this make it difficult to determine who is pushing who in terms of cutting-edge innovations in building soil health.

"Just like they challenge me to ask questions, I challenge them," says Nichols. "These guys are so innovative, and they so have the desire for challenge that I don't want them to stop, and I don't want them to allow me to stop. Innovations on the part of farmers are forcing us to come at this from a systems approach and ask deeper questions."

Something for everybody

And that's another key to success here—everybody gets something out of this team effort. People involved in the Burleigh County Soil Health Team like to say that if you put soil at the middle, then everything else will follow. It's like giving control over to a powerful, somewhat mysterious force. And ideally, under the general umbrella of improving the life in our land's basement, everyone gets a takeaway.

In simple terms, Fuhrer and his colleagues can say they are reducing erosion and Nichols gets to see scientific theory and research put into practice while she is given new questions to ponder. But just as importantly, farmers who are involved in improving soil health also benefit in some very significant ways. In a sense, it's a very community-based approach to an issue that touches on everything from environmental protection and economic viability to the future of rural communities and quality of life.

A lot of the impetus for this team approach comes from the popularity of Holistic Management in the region. Developed by Allan Savory over three decades ago, this is a decision-making framework that has helped farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs and natural resource managers from around the world achieve a "triple bottom line" of sustainable economic, environmental and social benefits. This framework is built upon the idea that all human goals are fundamentally dependent upon the proper functioning of the ecosystem processes that support life on this planet—water cycling, energy flow (conversion of solar energy) and community dynamics (biological diversity).

Holistic Management's emphasis on "community dynamics" plays a big part in how the Soil Health Team operates.

"The Holistic model has helped get family members and business team members on the same page, helping them all pull in the same direction," says Joshua Dukart, a Holistic Management certified educator who also works as a technician for the Burleigh County Soil and Water Conservation District. He is also a field representative for the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition.

"Slaking" tests involving clumps of soil and jars of water help farmers see firsthand the benefits of building healthy, stable soil. (*LSP photo*)

Another important fringe benefit to Holistic Management is that it puts producers in the driver's seat, providing more, for want of a better phrase, creative control, over what they do out on the land.

"When you look at it from the approach of restoring the soil, it's a whole different thing for the farmer," says Fuhrer. "It's a much more positive approach."

Flex farming

What's striking about the farmers who are working on soil health in Burleigh County is that in a way doing things in service of microbes has given them a type of flexibility not present on conventional farms. At each tour stop, host farmers were invariably asked about future plans for this crop field or that pasture. The majority were not set on one concrete choice. They were open-minded—willing to see what nature throws their way before deciding.

For example, Seth and Sanford Williams talked about the future of their cover-cropped field. After the cattle mob graze it, then what?

"We don't have a definite plan," says Sanford, adding that it depends on how much moisture the area receives in the next several months—adequate precipitation may mean corn will be a good fit for the field next spring, while droughty conditions could call for a small grain like wheat. Either way they've gotten cheap cattle (and microbe) feed out of the current stand of cover crops at a time when dry weather has made forage dear.

A version of that think-on-your-feet attitude about the next planting season is heard

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King corn

It would be very interesting to add up the total annual subsidies our state and federal governments provide to make corn ethanol cheap, and then to think how better we could have spent it towards revitalizing our rural communities. The idea that farms will be able to provide an endless supply of energy for a wasteful culture that demands more and more makes no sense. There is nothing "renewable" about it. It will take us back to more of what we have already seen—soil degradation, pesticides and nitrates in our drinking water. Live Green. Go Yellow. And Erode Brown.

Just like in coal mining company towns, questioning policy is not cool, and after awhile people begin to internalize it and believe it. Corn and ethanol are sacred in the Midwest, and few lawmakers would want to appear unsupportive.**—Kamyar Enshayan, April/May/June 2006** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Arriving together at a solution

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 production, 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 appreciations and action. **—Jody Dansingburg & Brian DeVore, Winter 2007** ***Land Stewardship Letter***

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more than once on the tour.

"It gives you flexibility when dealing with drought," says cattle producer Ron Hein while standing next to a 37-acre field that used to be all one pasture—in recent years he's broken it up into 20 grazing paddocks. He points out that while one paddock is being grazed, 19 others are resting and rejuvenating, which is particularly important when moisture is short. "It keeps me from having to sell cows."

Fuhrer says farmers who are actively building soil health don't so much look at specific crops as much as they do at the four major crop *types*—warm season broadleaf, warm season grass, cool season grass and cool season broadleaf—needed in a given year to keep the soil covered and biologically active as much as possible. Within those types there can be dozens of choices.

Such flexibility cannot only pay off agronomically and economically, it can make farming more interesting.

The last stop of the Soil Health Tour is the Darrell and Jody Oswald farm near the tiny town of Wing. Using a combination of cover crops, no-till and mob grazing, the organic matter on the Oswald operation has been raised to a respectable 4 percent. Darrell, a long-time cattleman, talks about how working on soil health has made something he never really enjoyed—cropping—interesting for his family.

New LSP 'Soil Health, Profits & Resiliency' web page

On Sept. 21, the Land Stewardship Project helped bring the "Soil Health, Profits & Resiliency" video conference to over 270 farmers, crop consultants and resource conservationists from across Minnesota. Participants heard about new cover crop and livestock management practices, as well as ways of connecting soil health with profitability. Featured presenters were people involved in Burleigh County's soil health improvement initiative.

LSP's new **Soil Health, Profits & Resiliency** web page features video and presentations from that conference, as well as other resources related to soil quality on the farm. It's at www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/foodsystemslandstewardship/chippewa10/soilquality.

"Pretty much everything we do and the decisions we make are based on improving the resource," he says while standing near one of his cornfields, just across the fence from the farm's pastures. "Raising annual crops is exciting for us now."

The next generation

Farmers are results-oriented, and during the tour many mention it's exciting, and even fun, to see positive changes on the land and in the bank account as a result of focusing more on "the resource," as they refer to soil.

That positive energy is infectious and can help attract and keep a younger generation in farming. Gabe and his wife Shelly are thrilled that their son Paul recently joined the farming operation after finishing college. He's helping perfect their integration of crops and livestock while experimenting with enterprises of his own, such as a pastured poultry business.

Seth Williams likes machinery and raising crops, skills integral to his family's goal of improving soil health through diversity. After attending a grazing conference, he became convinced animals play a key role in building healthy soil, and he talked his dad into sharing their cattle enterprise with Ron Hein, who is a cousin

Dukart, the Holistic Management educator, says this kind of teamwork has allowed the Williams and Hein families to concentrate on individual strengths and interests, while contributing to the overall goal of improving the base resource: soil.

"Any given acre, Seth would like to crop it, Sanford would like to hay it, and Ron would like to graze it," says Dukart. "But they are able to concentrate on their interests and talents and abilities in certain areas and they're able to complement each other with

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30 Years of Letters from the Land

The (un)comfort zone

Change is not created by comfortable people. If you are a comfortable person with the world around you, you will not be an agent of change. Who creates change? Uncomfortable people create change.**—Tom Frantzen, Spring 2008 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Lessons from a coyote

We've all heard the figures: 65 percent of the cost of food is fossil fuel, and our system expends about nine calories of energy to put one calorie of food on the plate. In some measure, the success of any population depends on its ability to efficiently use the energy available. A coyote will not be successful for long if it expends 2,000 calories of energy catching a 220-calorie rabbit. A coyote knows that. We, on the other hand, have been able to fool ourselves into thinking that does not apply to people by tapping into that ancient stored energy, fossil fuel. **—Terry Van Der Pol, Summer 2008 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Racism's toxic legacy

It really goes back to slavery days, where people were oppressed and today people still reflect on those days. And so to really inspire people of color to go back into food production is much more difficult.

We want to create a situation where regardless of what color you are, you can work in any community and be treated with dignity and respect. Everybody has a right to the same food, the same good food, and unless we make that happen, we can't have sustainable communities or a sustainable country. It's to everybody's benefit that all of our citizens have an opportunity to be successful.**—Will Allen, Summer 2009 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Channeling water quality

There had been three inches of rain in a couple of hours time. Martin charged into the house and says, "You gotta see this!" He took me to the beginning of the drainage ditch a half-mile down the road.

The heavy rain flowed across the neighboring row-cropped field and carried with it its load of topsoil. The water gushing out of the tile outlet was brown and frothy. We proceeded 200 yards farther along the ditch and found the second tile outlet that drained the adjacent field, spewing its load into the already brown water. There was the beginning of a river of thick chocolate-covered paste.

The deterioration in water quality in just 200 yards was startling. I wondered just how many of these tiles were emptying into this ditch system between here and the Minnesota River, 25 miles away—how many more along the banks of the Minnesota as it flows into the Mississippi where how much more sediment with its load of fertilizers and toxic chemicals was pouring into the river? So in 200-yard increments of sickly brown slop, my mental canoe trip down the Big River had carried me away…all the way…to the DEAD ZONE!!!!**—Loretta Jaus, Winter 2010 *Land Stewardship Letter***

'Farming for Soil Health' class this winter in west-central Minn.

The Land Stewardship Project is helping coordinate a two-part "Farming for Soil Health: Setting the Foundation for Success and Profitability" class this winter in Glenwood, Minn.

The first part of the class will be held Jan. 15-17; the second part is Feb. 5-6. All sessions will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The instructor will be Joshua Dukart (*pictured*), a Holistic Management certified educator who also works for the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District in North Dakota and is a field representative for the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition.

For more information, including details on fees, class location and registering, see www.landstewardshipproject.org or contact LSP's Julia Ahlers Ness at 320-269-2105, janess@landstewardshipproject.org. (*LSP photo*)

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those. They don't segregate themselves from any other parts of the operation and still stay very involved with the decision making as a whole, but basically take the leadership in one area or another."

A word for the resource

Burleigh County is far from having the ultimate soil-friendly farming system finalized. Nichols, the soil microbiologist, is constantly challenging farmers to push things even further and shoot for organic matter levels that rival native grasslands in the area.

Brown thinks a lot of these practices will stay limited in scope until farmers learn to observe the land closely and not rely on cookie-cutter solutions such as chemicals.

"One of the problems I see is a lot of the farmers and ranchers today —and I'll just be blunt—they're disconnected from the land. They oftentimes hire crop consultants, and the farms are so large and the equipment so big they don't get off the tractor and feel the soil and see what's happening," he says while holding a handful of his own soil.

Fuhrer says a lot of progress has been made—he estimates the NRCS field office in Bismarck works with 200 to 300 farmers on various conservation projects that support soil health one way or the other. But more needs to be done to provide as many options as possible for farmers. The day after the tour, which is one of dozens of soil health-related events put on in the county each year, Fuhrer was back in his office going over the results of Menoken Farm trials involving 98 varieties of cowpea, a warm-season, drought-tolerant legume. Six varieties were chosen for further planting.

Fuhrer is also seeking ways to get the "soil health is important" message out to the non-farming public. After all, non-farmers also benefit from healthy soil in terms of a more resilient food system and a cleaner environment. Getting the average citizen to talk about dirt in a positive way may sound far-fetched, but Fuhrer points out that a number of farmers "spoke for the resource" in a passionate way during the September field tour, something they may not have been so comfortable doing just few years ago.

"It was a good day for the resource," says the conservationist as he and other participants enjoy barbecued sandwiches at a park after the tour.

He was referring to the soil, but he could just have easily been talking about the people who work it. ❐

More on Burleigh County & soil health

For more information on efforts in Burleigh County to improve soil health, see www.bcscd.com or call 701-250-4518, extension 3. The Burleigh County Soil Conservation District is sponsoring a soil health workshop Jan. 8 in Bismarck.

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Sustainable ag's fringe benefits

One day I was making hay and I had four raptors strike mice within 20 feet of the tractor. It was two red-tails, a swainson's and a kestrel. A lot of people don't get to see that. I grew up on the farm and I always loved wildlife. We've done a lot of little things. Somehow it's all come together.**—Martin Jaus, Winter 2010 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Dreams of our ancestors

One aspect of sustainability is just treatment of laborers. If we as employers and communities rely on these immigrants to provide products and services we need, I believe we certainly are called to help them live in dignity. Even more, because we are one in the great web of life, I want to be among those who encourage our national leaders and ourselves to create immigration reform that allows others to seek the dreams our ancestors had and that have benefited us.**—Sister Kathleen Mary Kiemen, Spring 2010 *Land Stewardship Project***

Challenging immigrant myths

I have to admit that, for many years, I have had some real myths in my mind about immigrants—myths that I never really challenged. I probably have been a bit prejudiced, too. But I remember being at a legislative hearing awhile back and the issue of immigration came up. I saw emerge in the room the side of America that is totally prejudiced, and it made me very uncomfortable.

All of these negative myths about Mexican immigrants, for example, have become part of our national psyche, and it's a real shame. As a farmer, it's been interesting to realize that many of the immigrant workers here in southern Minnesota are farmers too. They come from the farms and farming villages of Mexico.**—Dwight Ault, Spring 2010 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Cover cropping in western Minnesota

By Julia Ahlers Ness

The Chippewa 10% Project— a joint initiative of the Land Stewardship Project and the Chippewa River Watershed Project—hosted a cover crop field day in late October at the farms of Dan Jenniges and Jess Berge near the western Minnesota communities of Glenwood and Sunburg. Both are livestock farmers whose interest in cover crops comes from their desire to provide high-quality, low-cost feed to their animals. As the article on pages 20 to 26 show, cover crops can do that and so much more.

Upon first arrival at Jenniges' field, the three-dozen attendees might have been a little confused. There wasn't much green cover crop to see at first glance. As the participants' followed Jenniges into the field, however, they started to see green shoots of turnip and rape here and there under or poking through the corn residue. A careful glance across the field revealed other spots with definite green cover crop growing. The reason for the lack of much green cover across the field: the drought.

Jenniges' seeded the cover crop mix into standing corn at the end of June. In a normal rainfall year, the turnips and rape would have gotten established enough to keep them alive until the corn canopy started to lessen in late summer or early fall, when they could start to grow again and then take off after harvest to provide additional green forage for Jenniges' beef cattle.

Despite the challenges Jenniges experienced in trying to establish a cover crop in standing corn during a drought year, he is willing to try again next year.

"If I can postpone having to feed stored feed even by just a couple of weeks or even a month, it's worth the effort and investment," he said.

At the Berge farm, the tour participants saw— and smelled— a successful establishment of a cover crop of turnips and rape on a 40-acre field, which Berge had seeded in July after harvesting a stand of oats and field peas for silage. The abundant, high-quality forage of the cover crop is providing the Berges with inexpensive feed for their 300-head ewe flock and eventually for their cow-calf pairs. "This is ideal feed for those calves," Berge told the mixed group of farmers and natural resource agency staff.

Dan Jenniges (*right*) helps attendees of a cover crop field day at his farm hunt for green growing plants in the corn residue. Jenniges seeded turnip and rape in the standing corn in late June. (*photo by Julia Ahlers Ness*)

In addition to providing the farmers with low-cost, quality animal feed, cover crops fit with the overall goals of the Chippewa 10% Project. Our belief is that there are economically viable ways for farmers and landowners to get diversity and more living cover on acres in the watershed. That diversity is what will make our soils more resilient and our water cleaner while putting more money into the pockets of farmers. ❐

Julia Ahlers Ness coordinates the Chippewa 10% Project out of LSP's office in western Minnesota. She can be contacted at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org. Details on the initiative are at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

30 Years of Letters from the Land

In the shadow of giants

When you first get started and say you're going to have an organic vegetable CSA, people say, "What's that?" Now three years into it, corn and soybean farmers are asking us about crop rotations. We've kind of proven ourselves to the skeptics here that this is a viable farm. It might only be 40 acres, but if we're making a living, isn't that a farm?**—Josh Reinitz, No. 1 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Learning from history

In the depths of the Great Depression, when soil erosion was declared a national menace and skies blackened with the Dust Bowl, the president and agriculture secretary did not say to the nation, "Things are really bad. We've got to cut back. I know soil erosion is bad, but we can't do anything about it. We need to do less."

No. They said that we are a great nation, and that our health and our strength depend on the soil, on our productive land, on our farmers and our conservationists.

…Together, our political leadership did not permit the politics and financial troubles of the day to destroy the basis of our nation and our nation's security. They said that our nation would invest in conservation, because it is the right thing to do, the smart thing to do, and the wise thing to do. **—Mark Schultz, No. 2 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Reviews

Tomatoland

How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit

By Barry Estabrook
2011; 233 pages
Andrews McMeel Publishing
www.andrewsmcmeel.com

Reviewed by Brian DeVore

This winter, when you reach for a nice, perfectly-shaped tomato in the produce section of your local supermarket, think of Lucas Mariano Domingo. For two and a half years the Guatemalan lived in the back of a windowless box truck with three other men while he picked tomatoes in the fields surrounding the Florida community of Immokalee. The living quarters had no running water or toilet. His harvest crew supervisor charged Domingo for everything—he even had to pay $5 to stand naked in a yard with a garden hose to rinse sweat and pesticides off after a day in the fields.

Soon Domingo was hundreds of dollars in debt in a land far from his home. Some weeks he received no pay at all. Things got so bad, Domingo was beaten and locked up overnight to ensure he'd be available to pick tomatoes the next morning. He escaped, helping to launch an investigation that led to the crew supervisors being charged with violating the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which was adopted almost 150 years ago. That's the law that bans slavery.

This is just one of the horror stories food journalist Barry Estabrook tells in *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*. After providing a brief horticultural and culinary history of America's second most popular vegetable (behind lettuce), Estabrook dives into the meat of the matter: behind the modern tomato is a whole lot of misery.

From October to June, virtually every fresh-market, field-grown "love apple" sold in the U.S. and Canada comes from Florida, with its long growing season and good access to lucrative East Coast markets.

The author's description of how the tomato business became so industrialized will be familiar to anyone who has followed the overall trend in agriculture in recent decades. A combination of corporate control, government policy and the "McDonaldization" of consumer culture has conspired to create a business dominated by fewer and fewer players who are not producing food anymore, but a cheap commodity. The result is abuse of the land, communities, people—even our taste buds.

But as Estabrook points out, tomatoes are a particularly disheartening story. For one thing, almost everyone agrees that the end product of all this industrialization is a supper table disaster: tasteless, low in nutrient value, hard enough to withstand a smack from a Louisville Slugger. But demand remains strong as eaters with short memories either confuse that February slicer with the garden-fresh tomato eaten last summer, or simply seek out "something red to have in the salad," flavor be damned.

What makes the industrialization of tomatoes truly tragic are stories like Lucas Mariano Domingo's. Producing tomatoes is extremely labor intensive, meaning it relies on immigrant workers who, like Domingo, often find themselves in desperate straits. The Florida tomato industry is dominated by a few giant firms, which then subcontract their fieldwork to crew supervisors who are under immense pressure to put as many tomatoes on northbound trucks as possible.

This system makes it possible for labor abuses to take place out of the public eye in a way that gives the big tomato growers plausible deniability. Cases of slavery have been so common in Florida's tomato fields that a U.S. attorney for the state's Middle District told Estabrook that any American who has eaten a winter tomato has dined on a vegetable "picked by the hand of a slave."

To make things worse, it turns out that despite its long growing season, Florida is not a particularly good place to raise a crop of tomatoes. Its poor, sandy soil and high humidity make tomato production there extremely reliant on fertilizers and highly toxic pesticides. That means all those workers toiling in the fields are exposed to a terrifying mix of chemicals. In one region of Florida, the average incidence of birth defects among farm workers was at one point 13 percent, compared to 3 percent for the entire state.

In some cases, individual abuses in the industry have been addressed, thanks mostly to the efforts of groups like the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a scrappy grassroots group that has forced Big Tomato to do everything from crack down on labor abuses to provide basic pesticide training. The Coali-

Tomatoland, *see page 29…*

Wildly successful farms

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

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

Keeping all the cogs and wheels is the precaution of intelligent tinkering, Leopold

30 Years of Letters from the Land

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

These are truly "working lands," even though their owners or managers might not be paid to sustain them. These working wild lands represent the healing connective tissue that keeps the landscape as a whole from unraveling, deteriorating and taking livestock and crop production values down with it.**—Tex Hawkins, No. 3 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Urban Agriculture
Ideas & Designs for the New Food Revolution

By David Tracey
2011; 245 pages
New Society Publishers
www.newsociety.com

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

Urban Agriculture: Ideas and Designs for the New Food Revolution provides a personal account of Canadian environmental consultant David Tracey's experience working with food production in Vancouver. Tracey also provides a wider perspective with reports of urban agriculture in a number of other cities, including Montreal, Milwaukee and Havana, Cuba.

He discusses the complexities of attempting to create urban agriculture zones, especially the problems of land access and potential neighborhood opposition—opposition that is usually based on ignorance more then fact.

He also describes the many advantages to urban agriculture—not just the health benefits of local food or the quality of life benefits attributed to the open green spaces provided by urban agriculture plots, but the sense of community these programs provide. One specific example of this community building effect is Vancouver's Urban Agriculture program, which fostered connections between Vancouver's large immigrant community and native born Canadians.

In addition to examining the social and health benefits of urban agriculture, this book also serves as a guide in the development of urban agriculture programs. Tracey points out it can start with small amounts of food grown on city apartment porches and in neighborhood gardens, and evolve to hoop houses and full-fledged family farms in and near urban areas. Often all these disparate enterprises can be more fully developed when a community decides to support them through formal, and informal, urban agriculture programs.

The author provides inspiring profiles of such pioneering urban farmers as Arzeena Hamir, a professional agronomist who coordinates the Richmond Food Security Society in British Columbia. Hamir, along with some friends, was able to persuade other people in the greater Vancouver area to allow their yards to be used for food production. Tracey also tells the story of Cam McDonald, a Community Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) advocate who turned his front yard into a small urban farm. There is also Brent Mansfield, the school garden coordinator at the Grandview/Uuqinak Elementary School in inner city Vancouver, one of the few schools with this sort of educational program in North America.

This work also serves as a kind of how-to manual for budding urban farmers, and includes plans for hen houses and backyard farms, among other things. This work also lists websites for products and information useful to anyone interested in developing their own urban farm or planning a community urban agriculture program.

This book is a comprehensive, broad-based work in the area of urban agriculture that provides a large collection of resources as well as accounts of those who are currently involved in the field of urban agriculture, along with their experiences, successes and failures. It's a must read for anyone interested in local foods or urban agriculture. ❐

Dale Hadler, a frequent Land Stewardship Project volunteer, recently moved to Kentucky.

…Tomatoland, *from page 28*

tion has had impacts far and wide—the Land Stewardship Project recently participated in a campaign in Minnesota led by the Immokalee Workers to get the Chipotle Mexican Grill Company to sign an agreement ensuring better pay and working conditions for field workers.

But Estabrook points out that no matter how many smaller battles are won, this is an inherently dysfunctional industry. At one point, *Tomatoland* takes a side trip to a Pennsylvania farm where a highly-motivated entrepreneur produces tasty tomatoes for the New York market using fair labor practices and land-friendly methods. It's a good model and a reminder that eaters can do their part by buying produce such as tomatoes in-season and getting to know the source of their food as much as possible.

But the fact remains that there are a lot of Lucas Mariano Domingos out there, and we need to all get involved in reforming an industry that puts people like him at risk of being denied even those most basic of human needs: dignity and free will.

As one farmer advocate told Estabrook: "[We] have changed conditions for some workers, but we haven't changed agriculture." ❐

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.

Practice what you preach

I have discovered that people aren't practicing things in their everyday life, such as how they eat, that would match the goals they spend their lives working for. I can't stress enough the importance of people really knowing how their food is produced and supporting systems that they believe are healthy for the environment and their community.—**Mary Jo Forbord, No. 3 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Hair-raising opportunities

When I see these rolling hills around here with corn on them, the hair goes up on the back of my neck thinking about what you could do if you got a hold of this land and grazed it. Let's get it into production with grass, and healthy livestock. And let the young people get back on the land.—**Greg Judy, No. 4 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter***

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Sanity on the land

Farmers have contributed a lot to conservation and biodiversity, as well as putting food on our plate each day. Aldo Leopold spoke clearly that we have to make a living from the land, that we all need shelter, clothes and food. But he also realized that we need a great deal more if we are to lead sane and honorable lives; we need "spiritual relationships to things on the land." **—Nina Leopold Bradley, No. 3 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter***

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Membership Update

Reaching new depths (in a good way)

By Mike McMahon

It has been an incredible fall.

The scope and depth of work being carried forward by Land Stewardship Project members—for stewardship of the land, for democracy, for family farms and for rural communities—is like no other in our 30-year history.

In just the past few months, LSP has:

◆ Engaged thousands of farm and rural people who are committed to holding big money corporations accountable for the problems they create in our farm and food system, our health care system, our economy and our democracy. We've helped organize these people around actions they can take today while working toward a sustainable and just vision for tomorrow.

◆ Helped convene a statewide soil health workshop for more than 270 family farmers, soil scientists and agriculture experts to share exciting innovations in sustainable agriculture. Soil health is the basis of good land stewardship and has always been at the core of LSP's work. This training used cutting-edge networking tools to connect participants gathered at seven locations in Minnesota.

◆ Expanded LSP's new farmer training and education program. Farmers who have two to five years of experience are still new to farming, but their questions and training needs are different than people who are just starting out. LSP's new Journeyperson program is a continuing education initiative coordinated by our Farm Beginnings Program. It provides training, mentorship and support to help these new farmers get established successfully and sustainably.

◆ Won victories to stop the expansion of devastating frac sand mining operations at the township and county level. LSP members and others have led the charge to pass ordinances at the local level that prevent frac sand mines from moving ahead. The number of people concerned about the impacts of frac sand mining is growing, and momentum is building for a statewide moratorium on this hazardous, extractive process.

And there's much more, like LSP's organizing against the constitutional amendment to restrict voting in Minnesota and our participation in a successful farm worker-led campaign to get the Chipotle restaurant chain to sign an agreement for better pay and working conditions. We also launched a significantly re-designed website this year.

Land Stewardship Project members provide the organized power to get this important work done. So before I go on, I want to thank you for your membership.

LSP & social media

LSP is now in more places online. Connect with LSP through *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter*.

Direct any questions about LSP's social media initiatives to Abby Liesch at 612-722-6377 or aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org.

CCHD funding withdrawn

You may have heard about the recent decision of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), the social justice arm of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to withdraw a grant supporting LSP's work for family farms, stewardship of the land and rural justice.

The Bishops' threatened to pull the grant because of LSP's membership in two statewide organizations: the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and TakeAction Minnesota. The Bishops did not like that those organizations had stated positions against the constitutional amendment to limit marriage that was voted down in Minnesota on Nov. 6.

In other words, the Catholic Bishops threatened to pull their support of LSP's work, not because of anything we did—LSP has no position on the marriage amendment and did not work on it—but because the Bishops don't approve of the beliefs of some of the organizations LSP associates with.

After much consultation with LSP's board, as well as our staff, legal counsel and member-leaders, it was decided we could not in good conscience concede to such an unjust and unwarranted demand, and we informed CCHD of that decision. Thus the Bishops withdrew our grant.

In mid-October, a letter and e-mails were sent to LSP members informing them of the situation and asking them to step forward financially in a way that they may have never done before.

The response from LSP members and

Membership, *see page 31…*

30 Years of Letters from the Land

A parking spot for urban ag

What are the policies that get in the way of local food production on urban lots? What do we do for soil remediation in places where there's been contamination? How much local food do we want?

…We've made conscious decisions on the government level to support bike paths and open space and parks. I'm hoping we get to the point where government plays a role in securing land for a healthy food system. I'm not convinced the marketplace is going to be able to do that, just like the marketplace wouldn't build bike paths and the marketplace wouldn't preserve parks.**—Bud Markhart, No. 4 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter***

People power

I came away from a recent LSP meeting wondering why people, not corporations, are the ones feeling the effects of the recession.

People have power, too. Corporations have dominated our economy and our democracy for too long, and it's time that we come together to remind our elected officials that they work for us, not the corporations. How is it fair that insurance companies increase their profits every year while doing less to protect our health?

It's time we asked ourselves where our own power lies: only by organizing together can we reclaim control over our economy, our democracy and our lives.**—Betsy Allister, No. 2 2012 *Land Stewardship Letter***

In memory & in honor…

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gifts made to honor or remember loved ones, friends or special events:

In honor of Dana Jackson
◆ Joan Meierotto

In memory of Jilleen Johnson
◆ Friends of Jean Schilling at SPD/GSA

In honor of Phoebe Seigel Horne
◆ Anne Archbold

In honor of Mary Solberg & Soina Ramirez
◆ Lisa Heldke

In memory of Al Karding
◆ Mary Lou Stursa

In memory of Tony Allen
◆ Brian DeVore

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

…Membership, *from page 30*

supporters has been affirming, inspiring and humbling. The words of encouragement and generous donations have been a tremendous help. Thank you.

There is more to this story; see the box above for how you can learn more and help us out.

CCHD has been an important funder of LSP's work for the better part of 25 years. CCHD has supported LSP's efforts to: stop factory farms, protect local control, advance sustainable farm policy, fight excessive corporate power, improve health care for everyone, advance racial justice, and more.

Despite the loss of this grant, we should make one thing clear: LSP's work for family farms, care of the land and a more just, prosperous and democratic society must not and will not be stopped.

Because it is unlikely the U.S. Catholic Bishops will be supporting LSP's work in the foreseeable future, there is still a need to raise the resources to carry the work forward. If you are in a position to do so, I hope you will make a contribution using the envelope found in the center of this *Land Stewardship Letter*. Contributions you make today will help ensure that our work for people and the land goes forward now and for years to come. ❐

Mike McMahon is LSP's Director of Individual Giving.

CCHD funding

For information on the CCHD situation and how you can help LSP with this funding shortfall, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/importantmemberupdate or contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377, mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

Support LSP in your workplace

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

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

MINNESOTA Environmental Fund

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

30 Years of Letters from the Land

Passing it on

We didn't want to just sell the farm to the highest bidder. It's hard to pass on a farm. I think that's true of any farmer. They get pretty attached to the land, whether it be straight fences, the machinery of whatever. If it's a family member or not, the likelihood of the next generation being successful just increases the sooner you start that transition process.**—Dave Welsch, No. 2 2012 *Land Stewardship Letter***

Empowerment

Farm advocacy groups serve an important role in helping empower farmers and all rural people as they attempt to make a living from the land in a vocation where much of their prosperity is controlled by outside forces. **—Dale Hadler, No. 3 2012 *Land Stewardship Letter***

It's not for us

I see in our own members that they no longer look at a farm as a place to be developed. They look at a farm as a place to walk, to hunt, to fish, to bring their family. We love when children come to the farm and go running, screaming like they were in a school hallway. And that's the generation that's going to make a difference. Not mine, not ours, but the people who are coming behind us."**—Joe Adams, No. 3 2012 *Land Stewardship Letter***

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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

➔ *WINTER-JULY 28*— **"Dig It! The Secrets of the Soil" Smithsonian exhibit at the Bell Museum of Natural History**, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Contact: www.bellmuseum.umn.edu, 612-624-7083

➔ *DEC. 10*—**Webinar on Building the Base of Your CSA: Legal Best Practices for Member, Volunteer & Intern Agreements**, 6 p.m.-7:30 p.m.; Contact: www.farmcommons.org

➔ *DEC. 11*—**LSP Benefit Shopping Night at Ten Thousand Villages, Saint Paul, Minn.** (*see page 4*)

➔ *DEC. 12-13*—**Midwest Value Added Ag Conf., featuring Laura Jackson, John Ikerd & Francis Thicke**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: 715-579-5098, www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.html

➔ *DEC. 12-13*—**National Young Farmers Conference**, Pocantico Hills, New York; Contact: www.stonebarnscenter.org, 914-366-6200

➔ *DEC. 13-14*—**Cover Crops: Practical Strategies for Your Farm**, Altoona, Iowa; Contact: www.swcs.org/covercrops; 515-289-2331

➔ *WINTER*—**LSP workshops on farm transitions** (*details to be announced*); Contact: Karen Stettler, 507-523-3366, stettler@landstewardshipproject.org

➔ *WINTER*—**LSP kitchen table conversations on stewardship farming opportunities in southeast Minnesota's Root River watershed** (*see page 17*)

➔ *JAN. 4*—**Workshop on post-harvest handling & wholesale marketing of produce with Atina Diffley**, Bemidji, Minn.; Contact: Linda Kingery, 218-281-8697, www.misa.umn.edu

➔ *JAN. 5*—**Crow River Sustainable Farming Assoc., Annual Meeting**, Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn.; Contact: Jerry Ford, 320-543-3394, www.sfa-mn.org

➔ *JAN. 8*—**2013 session of Minnesota Legislature convenes**; Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 612-722-6377, bking@landstewardshipproject.org

➔ *JAN. 8*—**Burleigh County Soil Health Workshop**, Bismarck, N. Dak. (*see page 26*)

➔ *JAN. 10*—**Minnesota Organic Conf. pre-conference workshops**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic.aspx, Meg Moynihan, 651-201-6616

➔ *JAN. 10-11*—**Midwest CSA Farming Conference**, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (*see page 6*)

➔ *JAN. 10-12*—**Practical Farmers of Iowa Conf.**, Ames Iowa; Contact: www.practicalfarmers.org, 515-255-0882

➔ *JAN. 11*—**Deadline for submitting descriptions for the 2013 LSP *CSA Farm Directory for the Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region*** (*see page 6*)

➔ *JAN. 11*—**Application deadline for the 2013 Minn. Department of Ag Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant Program**; Contact: 651-201-6012, http://go.usa.gov/YBSj

➔ *JAN. 11-12*—**Minnesota Organic Conf.**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic.aspx, Meg Moynihan, 651-201-6616

➔ *JAN. 15-17*—**LSP class (part 1) on "Farming for Soil Health"**, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Glenwood, Minn. (*see page 26*)

➔ *JAN. 15*—**LSP Local Food Happy Hour**, Twin Cities; Contact: Anna Cioffi, LSP, 612-722-6377, annac@landstewardshipproject.org

➔ *JAN. 16*—**Beginning Producer Grower Workshops**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mfvga.org, 763-434-0400

➔ *JAN. 17-18*—**Upper Midwest Regional Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference & Trade Show**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: 763-434-0400, www.mfvga.org

➔ *JAN. 19*—**Application deadline for Minnesota Livestock Grants Program**; Contact: 651-201-6456, www.mda.state.mn.us/livestockinvestmentgrant

➔ *JAN. 24-26*—**Northern Plains Sustainable Ag Society Winter Conf.**, Aberdeen, S. Dak.; Contact: http://npsas.org/news-events/winter-conference.html, 701-883-4304

➔ *JAN. 26*—**Workshop on post-harvest handling & wholesale marketing of produce with Atina Diffley**, Northfield, Minn.; Contact: Kathy Zeman, 507-664-9446, www.misa.umn.edu

➔ *JAN. 29-30*—**Cover Crops: Practical Strategies for Your Farm**, Decatur, Ill.; Contact: www.swcs.org/covercrops; 515-289-2331

➔ *EARLY FEB.*—**8th Annual LSP Family Farm Breakfast & Day at the Capitol** (*see page 6*)

➔ *FEB. 2-3*—**8th Annual Immigrant & Minority Farmers Conference**, St. Paul, Minn.; Contact: www.mnfoodassociation.org, 651-433-3676

➔ *FEB. 5-6*—**LSP class (part 2) on "Farming for Soil Health"**, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Glenwood, Minn. (*see page 26*)

➔ *FEB. 7-9*—**Missouri Organic Association annual Conference**, Springfield, Mo.; Contact: www.missouriorganic.org

➔ *FEB. 15-16*—**Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Annual Conference**, Chaska, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org, 763-260-0209

➔ *FEB. 20*—**2013 Organic University**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org/conference.html, 715-778-5775

➔ *FEB. 21-23*—**MOSES Organic Farming Conf.**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org, 715-778-5775

➔ *AUG. 1*—**Deadline for LSP's 2013-2014 Farm Beginnings course** (*see page 12*)

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