Who Benefits from these Divisions?
Here’s Why LSP Sees a Connection Between Soil Stewardship & Social Justice

By Doug Nopar

One outgrowth of the 2016 campaign for the Presidency of the United States was that there is now a lot of talk about people being divided in this country: rural vs. urban, white vs. black, immigrants vs. native-born. For the benefit of all farming communities, must we be divided? Or can we unite across all these supposed boundaries? That’s a key question the Land Stewardship Project is grappling with these days.

This winter, we set aside a bit more time at meetings in rural southeastern Minnesota to explain why LSP takes the positions (occasionally controversial) we take and why we work the way we do, particularly in the arena of fighting excessive corporate power and working for racial justice.

As an organization, we’re not going along with all the divisions that supposedly are inevitable in rural America. Instead, we see tremendous concern among a wide spectrum of people of all backgrounds about the kinds of things that LSP cares about, like:

➔ The amount of excessive corporate power and control there is in the country, and that everyone but farmers makes money off agriculture. (Cargill scored record profits in 2016 at the same time that grain, dairy and cattle prices were in the dumps.)

➔ The lack of affordable health care and health insurance for farm and working class families, and the fact that young people want to come home to farm but can’t leave behind the health insurance that comes with their urban jobs.

➔ Misguided federal policy, which for so long has not been good for the soil and water, the majority of farmers or farmworkers, nor small town life.

➔ Longtime Minnesota farmers growing tired of Farm Bill benefits going disproportionately to the largest farms, and distorting planting decisions away from what’s good for the land.

➔ Immigrant farmworkers, most of whom are farm and rural people displaced from their own farms and villages in Mexico by U.S. farm and trade policy.

➔ Refugees from rural southeast Asia highly skilled at raising produce having trouble finding land to farm.

➔ Native Americans taking back control of their own food supply, something they call “food sovereignty.”

➔ Descendants of black slaves and African immigrants starting urban farms for their communities.

In truth, as farm and rural people, we can’t develop the reforms we want on our own. And to fundamentally change the system, we’re going to need the grassroots participation of all kinds of people, regardless of race, or what country we were born in. Everyone in, no one left out. It could take us a long time to get there, but we’re going to keep working for it, and not allow ourselves to be artificially divided from one another by powerful interests and giant corporations that would prefer we were fighting with each other, rather than challenging them as a united front.

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