



A Vision for Rural Minnesota

Values we share

We are rural Minnesotans. We love our communities and take pride in them, and we are stewards of the land and world around us. We also acknowledge the challenges we face, in our communities and across the state. We do not see our interests or struggles as separate from those of other Minnesotans, but connected by shared values and shared goals. We are hopeful and committed to building a strong future, working together within our communities and with people across the state.

When we think about the future we want, we start with our core values and beliefs:

- Every person has value that can't be earned or taken away. Similarly, there is inherent value in the land, water, and natural world that gives us life.
- Being part of a community brings meaning and richness to our lives.
- We depend on each other and on the world around us to survive and thrive.
- We are stronger when no one is left behind and everyone has opportunity to contribute fully. We all have something to offer.
- We care for each other, and we prioritize protecting and improving our surroundings, to leave things better for our children and grandchildren.

Challenges we face

When we look around the countryside, we see things we know are not right, and that do not fit with the future we want for ourselves and the generations to come. We know that our concerns are connected to those of people in all parts of the state, and we know we need to work together to solve them.

It is hard for us to look around our rural communities and see things that go against our values:

- We see the land and soil being degraded, rivers and lakes polluted, drinking water depleted, and extreme rains, temperatures and droughts becoming "normal."
- Huge companies controlling seeds and chemicals, buying grain and processing livestock are making large profits, while paying farmers less. This is making it harder for farmers to both succeed and take care of the land.
- High land prices drive more consolidation and block new farmers from changing the landscape.
- People in our communities are left out and left behind. We have seen before that times of economic uncertainty can fuel division, anti-immigrant sentiment, and racist acts and policies, and we see these threats again.
- Our local businesses struggle or close, while large corporations that are not invested in our communities take over, or abandon us if there is not enough profit to be made.
- Health insurance premiums and deductibles are unaffordable, while hospitals are closed and services cut in our communities.
- Young people are told that opportunity is somewhere else.

The communities we envision

It is clear that change is needed so that rural people and communities, and all of Minnesota, can succeed.

This is the rural Minnesota we are committed to building:

Vibrant communities that are a place of belonging and opportunity for everyone. We love living in small towns and rural areas. It should not be a sacrifice, or be viewed as one. Long-term and new residents, people of different races and from different backgrounds, young and old all have a place in our communities. Building a strong future will take all of us working together.

A countryside where the soil, water, air, and natural world are healthy. We are close to the land in rural communities, and caretakers of the world around us that nourishes us all. The soil and landscape, lakes and streams, plants and wildlife, and a stable climate all are critical, both because they sustain life and because they deserve respect on their own. Building soil and farming sustainably are part of tackling major challenges we face, including climate change. We must protect and improve the world around us for the future, not abuse and exploit it.

Strong local economies where all can succeed. We depend on each other, and we're invested in each other's success. Rural communities are stronger with more farmers making a living on the land, and with successful local businesses that are committed to the community. We need opportunities for meaningful work with pay that allows families to flourish, along with quality housing, services and infrastructure that connect us and allow for innovation. We envision stronger connection with people who live, work, and eat in urban and suburban communities to build a shared prosperity together.

A farming system that cares for farmers and the land and makes healthy food available to everyone. Minnesota is an agricultural state, where raising livestock and crops shapes the economy and our daily lives. Our health is connected to the health of the soil, the wellbeing of the land and the way we grow food. We need it to be possible for more farmers to access land, and for farmers to be able to succeed economically while caring for and healing the land. We must prioritize small and moderate-sized farms and invest in local and regional food systems in which healthy food is accessible for all people.

A high-quality healthcare system that takes care of everyone and frees us to pursue meaningful lives. Having the security of knowing that we can easily receive needed medical care when we are sick or hurt, and that we can afford it financially, would create new freedom for all of us. Removing worries about healthcare allows people to start new businesses, engage more deeply in our communities, and pursue happiness. We need health insurance coverage that is comprehensive, lifelong and available regardless of a person's work. This coverage must be available at a cost that each family can truly afford. We need quality medical care to be available close to home and when we need it.

Communities that grow our future by valuing families and children. Our current actions shape what is possible for our children and grandchildren. We want rural communities where young people can see and build a future and where families want to move. Families and children need excellent care and support throughout their lives, in our communities. This includes prenatal care, parental support, childcare, quality schools, and activities for families. We need strong public schools that provide opportunity for all of our kids, and access to higher education.

Where people have a say and shape our own future. We want engaged and active communities shaped by a diversity of voices. We need community leaders and elected representatives who take guidance from us, and who act courageously in the best interests of the people they serve. We are committed to building the communities and state we want to live in.

The Land Stewardship Project has 4,000 member families across Minnesota working for stewardship of the land, family farms, healthy food, and strong rural communities.

Join us in sharing this vision and making it a reality. For more information, contact Jonathan Maurer-Jones at jmaurer-jones@landstewardshipproject.org.