

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

37 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

Volume 37

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LSP Photo

In dogged pursuit of the next generation of farmers (page 20).

—*The Myth of the Mega-Dairy Benefit*—

—*Innovative Marketing*—

—*Moving Forward on the Farm Crisis*—

—*The Power of Words*—

—*A Tough Conversation About Conservation*—

—*New Research for a New Ag Reality*—

—*A Sneak Peak into the Karst*—



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

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The Seeds of Sustainable Ag Policy

Oral History Project Provides a Glimpse at the Past & Hope for the Future

Perhaps there's no one better suited than Ron Kroese to undertake something like the National Sustainable Agriculture Oral History Project. Kroese has been present for much of the history of the so-called sustainable agriculture movement, from the time he co-founded the Land Stewardship Project with the late Victor Ray in 1982 to his more recent work helping fund innovative farming systems while working at the McKnight Foundation. And as a former journalist, Ron knows how to ask the kind of questions that not only provide insights into the back story behind certain points in history, but also what inspired people to do such pioneering work at a time when the term "sustainable agriculture" was barely acknowledged.

A few years ago, after wrapping up an extremely productive career working to promote and support a type of agriculture that is sustainable for the land, our communities, and people, Kroese undertook the oral history project while serving as the endowed chair in agricultural systems at the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, which is part of the University of Minnesota. He crisscrossed the country conducting an impressive number of interviews with the women and men who were there from the beginning advocating for the laws and government programs that continue to undergird efforts to achieve a regenerative farm and food system in the U.S.

In the end, he did 37 interviews with individuals, and recorded three roundtable discussions. Anyone who has followed the sustainable agriculture movement will recognize some of the people featured, including LSP's Dana Jackson, George Boody, Sister Mary Tacheny, and Mark Schultz. Kroese makes it clear that this archive, which is housed on the website of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, is by no means exhaustive. There are plenty of sustainable ag influencers he would have liked to have interviewed, given more time and resources.

However, these recordings provide excellent documentation of the development and evolution of public policies advancing sustainable and organic agriculture. History going all the way back to 1970 is represented here. The recordings provide the inside story on federal policy reforms achieved through seven Farm Bills. The interviewees also discuss the development of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, which advocates for policy on the national level. Featured are discussions of where the efforts of sustainable and organic farming advocates came up short, as well as an exploration of further policy changes needed to advance a regenerative farm and food system far into the future.

Kroese recently talked about the project on an episode of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast. The interview (episode 223) is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1170. This page includes a few brief excerpts of that discussion.

Why Policy is Needed

"With farmers having been pushed in the 70s to get big or get out, we were seeing the 'get out' part in spades by the mid-1980s.... We came to realize that the reason we didn't have land stewardship on the land the way we wanted it wasn't so much a human frailty, it was the fact that policies were driving people in the other direction. All the incentives coming out of government were pushing people to get bigger, to concentrate on just one or two crops, and the idea of just the general, diversified farm was sort of falling out of fashion, and really almost out of economic possibility.

"I'm still convinced policy work is key to bringing about reform in our food and farm system. And one of the things we talk about

in the oral history project is what policies do we need *now* at this stage? I tried to ask that in every interview I did to get insights from those people who had worked much of their lives on this. What do we do now? For example, how do we redirect the subsidies in ways that it makes it possible for them to do that?"

Why is History Important?

"When I started my interviews, I'd say, 'Let's pretend it's 50 years ahead or 75 years ahead, and sustainable agriculture has come out as really dominating now. How did this all get going? Who did this? Why did this start? What was motivating these people who were clearly rowing against the tide? What got them going?'"

"...I'm also thinking of the George Santayana phrase: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' It's a cliché almost, but you've got to look back so you don't make some of the same mistakes. That's another thing I thought we could accomplish with the interviews."

...Then You Win

"Mahatma Gandhi was quoted as saying: 'First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win.' And I always want to add one more thing to Gandhi's great quote: 'Then they fight you in sustainable ag, then they try to co-opt you.' And that's the struggle too, that okay, right now there's some fashionable aspects to organic farming and sustainability and obviously some corporate interest in it, for their own profits and benefits—with some good intentions, I think, as well. But that whole situation of co-optation coming into the picture too, is part of it.

"I think we are in the co-opting state right now. I also think to say that we're winning is very optimistic and maybe a little pollyannaish, because at the end of the interviews almost invariably everyone talked about their disappointment that the deeper issues of reforming the structure of agriculture really have not been addressed."

Not a Fad

"The people I interviewed really did feel good about what has been accomplished and the role they played in it. I did find that part of the reason there is this humbleness among people involved in the development of sustainable ag policy is that what change they did accomplish just took so long to be implemented. Change doesn't happen overnight. For example, consider that the Organic Food Production Act was passed in 1990 and then it took, I think, 12 years of work before it finally took hold. There is frustration about how long change takes.

"And then dealing with what feels like is the constant effort to *undo* things that get done—that's frustrating as well. But I think people realize we really do have a thriving organic food movement that 35 years ago wasn't there hardly at all. And there is now this movement around soil health.... I think that's a solid thing and people talked about how it's not going to be a passing fad." □

View the Interviews

The National Sustainable Agriculture Oral History Project's video interviews and written transcripts are at www.misa.umn.edu/publications/sustainableagoralhistoryarchive.

Myth Buster Box

An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

→ Myth: Myth: Mega-Dairies = Mega-Benefits for Rural Communities

→ Fact:

When, in September, the nation's top agriculture official, Sonny Perdue, pronounced that, "In America, the big get bigger and the small go out," he was bolstering an argument that the current trend in dairying—fewer, bigger farms—is the result of the "invisible hand" of economic efficiency. As Land Stewardship Project organizer Johanna Rupperecht makes clear on page 13, Perdue's philosophy is actually part of a long term strategy on the part of the government and agribusiness to push small- and moderate-sized dairies out.

One way to make the destruction of the family-sized dairy farm more palatable to local communities is to argue that mega-dairies—operations that house thousands and even tens of thousands of cows at one location—are better for the economy. The "bigger is better" school of thought permeates agriculture, and in dairying it has been boiled down to a basic equation: more cows = more local economic activity.

The cold hard "facts" of such mathematics helps local and state officials justify looking the other way when it comes to enforcing environmental regulation of the large operations, or making them adhere to certain rules before expanding. For example, in southeastern Minnesota's Winona County, supporters of an expansion of the Daley operation, which would create one of the biggest dairy farms in the state, have pushed the message that opposing this project is anti-agriculture and, of course, anti-economic activity. This expansion faces a major hurdle: it would blow by the 1,500-head animal unit cap Winona County has in place (see page 14). As a result, the Daleys and their supporters in agribusiness, politics, and the media are pushing for a lifting of the cap, arguing that adding 2,700 more milk-producing cows to the Daley farm will help make up for the fact that Winona County lost over 4,400 cows between 2012 and 2017, according to the latest U.S. Census of Agriculture.

Dairy Farming's Financial Boost

There is little doubt that dairy farming represents a significant economic boost to

a community—a boost that row-cropping, for example, just can't match. Dairy farms draw on a myriad of services—nutritionists, veterinarians, feed mills, milk-hauling services, hoof trimmers. The list goes on. According to University of Wisconsin Extension, the average dairy cow in that state can generate \$34,000 a year in economic activity, which is then circulated back into the community through local schools, roads, and retail activities, among other things.

But by equating more cows with more economic activity, promoters of mega-farms are missing an important point: the local economic value of milk produced on one factory farm is not the same as if it was produced on several small- and medium-sized operations. Milking 4,000 cows on 25 different farms spreads out the economic benefits much more than having all of those animals concentrated on one operation.

Can we make up for all those lost dairy farms by simply replacing them with cows concentrated on a handful of CAFOs? If your goal is to produce the same amount, or more, of milk, then yes (the U.S. is producing 60 percent more milk from 30 percent fewer cows than it did in 1967). If we want to produce healthier communities overall, the answer is no. Not every cash cow is created equal.

A University of Minnesota study conducted in 1995 used economic statistics, census figures and interviews with residents of the Green Isle, Minn., area to examine the impact of dairy farming on a local community. The study showed that between the 1970s and 1990s, the number of farmers serving the local creamery dropped from 1,400 to 960. The larger dairy farms that started dominating the area bypassed local suppliers, reducing the need for Main Street businesses. Cash cropping came to dominate the agricultural economy.

"Meanwhile, economic and social activity in Green Isle declined, retail sales dropped by 81 percent between 1979 and 1989, the public dance hall closed, and the grade school adjourned permanently. Today, a collection of main street stores, feed mills, and a manufacturing plant remain idle," reported the study's author, Patricia Weir Love.

Richard Levins, a professor emeritus of applied economics at the U of M, points out that as dairy farms get larger, the number of

communities with *no* dairies of any size is increasing at a phenomenal rate.

"...if all dairies were 10,000 cows, only 900 such dairies would remain in the United States," he wrote in a paper for the National Farmers Organization. "Very few rural communities would have even one dairy under such a scenario."

A 2011 *Journal of Dairy Science* study of the top 100 dairy counties in the U.S. found that having more dairy farms is associated with a more positive economic and socio-economic environment than higher dairy sales. Part of the reason, as other studies have shown, is that larger operations tend to not buy as many of their inputs locally. As Levins points out, one striking thing that comes out of the scientific literature around the economics of dairy farming is that the larger operations are much less able to draw back production during times of low prices—they simply have too much money invested in a high-output system.

"There is considerable evidence for a general conclusion that communities that see fewer, larger dairy farms will experience reduced economic vitality, and virtually no evidence that larger farms improve community vitality," concludes Levins in his National Farmers Organization paper. "Family-sized dairies not only provide special advantages over their very large counterparts—they also assure that more rural communities will enjoy the economic benefits of dairy farming on any scale."

Subsidizing Dairy's Death

It's particularly ironic that the chief of the USDA is calling the demise of small dairies inevitable, given the significant role government policy has played in creating the current situation. For example, mega-dairies receive a significant "subsidy" in the form of environmental regulations that allow them to treat liquid manure as less a source of fertility and more as a waste product to be gotten rid of. CAFOs don't have to pay the full price of disposing that waste. Instead, that cost is externalized, forcing local communities and the general public to foot the bill in the form of polluted water and air.

Myth Buster, see page 5...

...Myth Buster, from page 4

Not only is liquid manure from large dairy CAFOs threatening water quality across the country, but it is a major source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Methane emissions related to manure management rose 66 percent between 1990 and 2017, according to the Environmental Protection Agency's recent Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks. The EPA has found that the majority of those manure-sourced emissions are coming from swine and dairy facilities, where methane releases have increased 29 and 134 percent, respectively. It turns out liquid manure produces more methane than the dry manure systems that are more typical on smaller operations. Thus, there is a direct link between the growth of livestock CAFOs and increased emissions of methane, as well as nitrous oxide, another potent greenhouse gas.

Public policy has other ways of clearing a path for the environmental and economic damage imposed by CAFOs. For example, in Minnesota there is a property tax exemption for manure lagoons. In addition, a USDA initiative called the Environmental Quality

Incentives Program (EQIP) is designed to provide cost-share and incentive payments to farmers so they can address natural resource concerns using innovative practices. Unfortunately, EQIP has become a gravy train for factory farms looking to build more liquid manure systems. In Iowa, EQIP spending on manure management practices used by CAFOs accounted for nearly 30 percent of total funding for the program from 2002 through 2015, according to data presented by the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment to a U.S. House climate committee. By hogging so many EQIP funds, factory farms are leaving much less money available to small- and medium-sized operations that may want to use the money to put in, for example, managed rotational grazing systems, which are a proven way to build the kind of soil that sequesters greenhouse gases while managing manure-based fertility.

Another major way the government subsidizes factory farms is through the USDA's Farm Service Agency. It turns out the majority of loans for new CAFO operations are guaranteed by that agency. These taxpayer-guaranteed loans have led to over-supply and low prices for independent family farm livestock producers, contributing to further

consolidation of the marketplace.

The Land Stewardship Project and other members of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment are calling on Congress to reform EQIP by placing a \$150,000 per-farm cap on spending, for example, and to make it so federal guaranteed loans can't be used to back CAFO expansion.

Such federal policy reforms would be a good start toward penciling out the true costs factory farms impose on the land and the people.

→ More Information

- Richard Levins's paper, "The Community Advantages of Family-Sized Dairies," is available at <https://bit.ly/33BITLC>.

- The EPA's Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks is at <https://bit.ly/2R3RQZK>.

- The Campaign for Family Farms recently submitted a letter to the U.S. House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis outlining needed policy reforms related to factory farms. It's at <https://bit.ly/2Pad0Tx>.

- More of LSP's *Myth Busters* are at www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/libraryresources/mythbusters.

LSP's Core Values: Stewardship, Justice, Democracy, Health, Community

In July, the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors approved the organization's long range plan for 2019-2024. This plan, which is the result of input from hundreds of LSP members, among others, will guide the organization's work for the next five years and beyond. The plan opens by presenting LSP's mission and core values:

Mission

The mission of the Land Stewardship Project is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture, and to develop healthy communities.

Core Values

→ **Stewardship** is the value of living in right relationship with the land and all that is connected to it: the soil, the water, the air, the plants, microorganisms, animals, and our climate. It means giving to the land and receiving from it, and caring about the entire biotic community. Conservation-minded farmers who live on the land, farm it, and care for it are essential to stewardship of farmland.

→ **Justice** means there is economic, racial, and gender equity for farmers, workers, and all those who are engaged in the food and agriculture system. It means the achievement of related rights like food sovereignty for all communities, and high-quality healthcare for everyone.

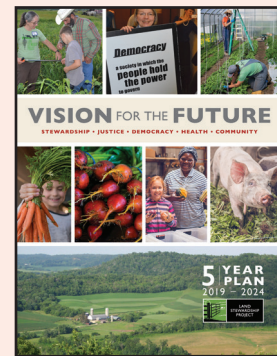
→ **Democracy** means a society in which the people hold the power to govern, in which those people directly impacted by issues name solutions, set priorities, and win change. It means the health and well-being of people and the land is put before corporate profits.

Read the Long Range Plan

The plan is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org. Free paper copies are available by calling LSP's Minneapolis office at 612-722-6377. To comment on the plan, contact LSP executive director Mark Schultz at 612-722-6377 or marks@landstewardshipproject.org.

→ **Health** is the value of nourishing the beauty, function, and vitality of an ecosystem made up of people, landscapes, plants, animals, soil, and water. The health of the land is a gift that current generations are obligated to provide for future generations.

→ **Community** is the value of understanding our interdependence and caring for the relationships that sustain each of us. Living in community we are more resilient, creative, resourceful, and powerful — we have greater ability to be the change we seek in the world.





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LSP News

LSP Board Welcomes New Members

Paula Williams, Jon Jovaag, and Dan McGrath have joined the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors.

Williams lives in rural Carlton County in east-central Minnesota with her partner, Patti, and their son. She works as a life coach and serves



Paula Williams

on LSP's Healthcare Organizing Committee. Williams participated in the process to develop LSP's new long-range plan, *Vision for the Future*, which was passed by the board earlier this year (see page 5).

Jovaag farms with his wife, Ruth, and their



Jon Jovaag

children in southern Minnesota's Mower County. They raise crops and livestock, and have been involved in utilizing cover cropping and other methods to build soil health. Jon has been involved with LSP's Soil Builders' Network (see page 27) and also worked to help create LSP's new long-range plan.

McGrath served as executive director of TakeAction Minnesota, an LSP ally, for 12 years. TakeAction is a statewide network of people working on racial and economic equity issues. McGrath left TakeAction in 2018 and he is currently working as a consultant on national progressive efforts. McGrath lives in Saint Paul, Minn., with his wife, Teresa, and their children.



Dan McGrath

New LSP Farm Crisis Organizer Hired

Matthew Sheets has joined the Land Stewardship Project's Policy and Organizing Program team. Sheets grew up near Alexandria, Minn., and his family farms around Morris in the west-central part of the state.

He has a degree in studio arts from the University of Minnesota-Morris and attended the Hurdal Verk Folkehøgskole in Norway. Sheets has worked as the central Minnesota organizer for Service Employees International Union



Matthew Sheets

Healthcare, as well as the Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG). Sheets has also worked as a direct support professional for Prairie Community Services, which provides care for adults and children with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities living in foster care facilities. He

was the 2018 recipient of the John Brian Becker Memorial Student Activist Award.

At LSP, Sheets is organizing around farm crisis issues. He can be contacted at msheets@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Loretta Jaus and **Charlie Kersey** recently stepped off LSP's board after serving their terms. **Jaus** and her husband, Martin, have an organic dairy operation in west-central Minnesota's Sibley County. **Kersey** and his wife, Tzeitel, farm in Panama. □

Get Current With

LIVE  WIRE

Sign up for the **LIVE-WIRE** e-letter to get monthly updates from the Land Stewardship Project sent straight to your inbox. Details are at www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup. □

CSA Farmers: Time to Sign-up for the Directory

If you are a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmer operating in Minnesota or western Wisconsin, the Land Stewardship Project invites you to be listed in the 2020 edition of LSP's *Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory*.

An online version of the *CSA Farm Directory* will be available by Feb. 1 at www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/csa. On that web page, you will find an online form for submitting information about your farm.

The deadline for submitting listings is **Monday, Jan. 20**. The listing fee is \$15 for LSP members and \$20 for non-members. There is a 250-word limit for listings.

For more information on having your farm listed, contact LSP's Brian DeVore at bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.

CSA Farm Directory 2020



2020 Edition of the Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Directory



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A Land Stewardship Project Publication

A Panoramic View of Grazing



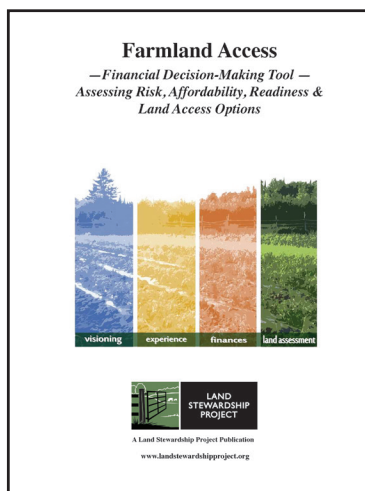
In October, Tom and Sue Hunter hosted a Land Stewardship Project pasture walk on their farm near Wabasha in southeastern Minnesota. Topics covered included how to manage dormancy in the fall to maintain productive spring pastures, and a system for reseeding pastures where cows have overwintered. This was part of a series of pasture walks LSP's Soil Builders' Network hosted during the summer and fall. Check out LSP's new Grazing and Soil Health web page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders/grazing. More information on LSP's soil health work is on pages 24-27. Got grazing questions? Check out LSP's grazing helpline at 1-888-664-7293 (1-888-MNGRAZE) or www.landstewardshipproject.org/grazinghelpline. (Photo by Liana Nichols)

LSP Farmland Access Resource

Farmland Access—Financial Decision-Making Tool: Assessing Risk, Affordability, Readiness & Land Access Options is a Land Stewardship Project resource that covers four critical areas of decision-making beginning farmers should consider when it comes to obtaining farmland: 1) Visioning, 2) Experience, 3) Finances, and 4) Land Assessment.

Considering these critical areas of decision-making will not only help with land access, but will also increase knowledge and skills that farmers can apply to other critical decisions.

A free copy is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmlandaccessfinancialcetool or by contacting LSP's Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366, stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.



New Financial Skills Resource Available

Farm Beginnings: Improving Financial Skills for Beginning Farmers shares the strategy behind the approach members of the Farm Beginnings Collaborative take to building financial planning skills with beginning farmers. The publication offers educators hands-on tools, including sample curriculum, along with recommendations that apply to the field of beginning farmer training as a whole.

Through peer-to-peer learning, the Farm Beginnings Collaborative members have been able to innovate and improve financial skills education for beginning farmers across the country.

To download a free copy of this publication, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/improvingfinancialskills. For paper copies, contact the Land Stewardship Project's Amy Bacigalupo at amyb@landstewardshipproject.org or 320-269-2105.

LSP is a founding member of the Farm Beginnings Collaborative, which is a coalition of community-based organizations that offer Farm Beginnings classes in various states. For more information on the Collaborative, see page 18. □

Farm Beginnings:
Improving Financial
Skills for Beginning
Farmers



Membership Questions?

If you have questions about the status of your Land Stewardship Project membership, give us a call at 612-722-6377, or e-mail Clara Sanders Marcus at cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org. To renew, mail in the envelope included with this *Land Stewardship Letter*, or see www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate. □

Land Stewardship Talk

The Land Stewardship Project's award winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast features over 230 episodes. Check them out at www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/

podcast. *Ear to the Ground* is also available on iTunes and Stitcher. □

LSP Fact Sheets

Want a quick primer on everything from regenerative farming techniques and the negative repercussions of factory farming to how to write a letter-to-the-editor and make sure a lease agreement meets your stewardship goals?

Check out LSP's collection of fact sheets at www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/libraryresources/factsheets. For information on obtaining paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Partners on the Marketing Front

Farmers & Buyers Discuss the Opportunities & Challenges of Local Food

Earlier this year, the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Viability Steering Committee held an "Innovative Market Forum" in Saint Paul, Minn. The forum featured a panel consisting of four farmer-buyer pairs who described innovative marketing partnerships they have developed in recent years and the successes, as well as challenges, involved. On these two pages are excerpts of the comments made by the panel participants. Audio of the entire forum is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/innovativemarketing. There you will find a print version of the Innovative Market Forum program, in Spanish and English.

Farm Viability Committee

The Farm Viability Committee is a group of LSP members who set priorities for the organization's work to help beginning farmers develop viable and sustainable farm businesses. For more on the Farm Viability Steering Committee, contact LSP's Amy Bacigalupo at amyb@landstewardshipproject.org or 320-269-2105.

A New Model

Annelie Livingston-Anderson owns and operates Good Turn Farm near Stockholm, Wis., with her husband Kevin, and works as an organizer for the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program (see page 18). Good Turn Farm grows produce on less than two acres, and sells everything within a 20-mile radius. They are participants in the Wabasha Market Share, which is an aggregated Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program operated through the Wabasha Farmers' Market. Good Turn Farm is also part of the Lake Pepin Local Food Group, an online sales platform where farmers and buyers can connect.

Sara George is a farmer in Pepin, Wis. (D & S Gardens), a market manager for the Wabasha Farmers' Market, and is the vice president of the Minnesota Farmers' Market Association. She also works at a restaurant that serves locally sourced food. She helped

start the Wabasha Market Share, as well as the Lake Pepin Local Food Group. With the assistance of Renewing the Countryside, George has helped launch a version of Wabasha Market Share at 10 farmers' markets across Minnesota.

Annelie Livingston-Anderson

"Because we're beginning farmers, I'd say we're sort of throwing darts at a board right now, and just trying to figure out what will work marketing-wise.

"...For us, the biggest issue probably has been just getting farmers in our area to buy into what we're trying. Lake Pepin Local Food Group is a new market model and we're beginning farmers, so we're looking for new markets. But a lot of the farmers in our area already have established markets, so they're not really interested in taking the extra time to list what they have available on the platform. We're just trying to get more farmers to buy-in, because the value of the online sales platform is in the aggregation and being able to buy from multiple farmers at one time. So if you only have a couple farmers, or a few farmers, selling at any given time, the value is not really there for the buyers to go that route."

Sara George

"In having so many hats, I started seeing obstacles pop up for farmers selling into institutions, for institutions buying from

farmers, for vendors selling at farmers' markets. And I started thinking, 'How can we improve this system? What can we do?' We realized one of the complications was the communication back and forth from the farmer and the buyer, so we started the online sales platform that Annelie was talking about."

• • •

Economic Realities

Rodrigo Cala grew up in Mexico City and arrived in the U.S. in 2004. He and his brother, Juan Carlos, raise produce on Cala Farm in Turtle Lake, Wis. Cala started out marketing via the CSA model but switched to raising broccoli, cauliflower, heirloom tomatoes, and garlic for wholesale markets. Through the Latino Economic Development Center, Cala has trained farmers in Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Florida. Cala belongs to Shared Ground Farmers Co-op, which was founded in 2014 to help non-white farmers connect with customers. The co-op has seven farmer-owners and they work with roughly 30 partner farms to meet the demand for produce.

Aaron Blyth is the director of finance and procurement for the Shared Ground Farmers Co-op. The co-op markets its produce through the CSA model, restaur-



Rodrigo Cala and Aaron Blyth. (LSP Photo)

ants, and wholesale markets, including the school districts in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Shared Ground also sells through food co-ops.

Rodrigo Cala

"We can talk really, really poetic about farming, and the reason we do this is because we love this. But we need to make a living doing this. I see the same problem on every farm. We can buy tractors. We can buy land. We can find workers. But the hard thing for farmers, no matter what, is to find markets. If you don't have enough markets to keep doing this, you are done. So every day we try to find a way to make



Annelie Livingston-Anderson and Sara George. (LSP Photo)

Marketing Forum, see page 9...

some money. When I work with beginning farmers, I have the goal of training them to be business people.”

Aaron Blyth

“This co-op was started to open doors into high-end markets in the Twin Cities that have traditionally been closed to farmers of color, black and brown farmers.

“...I think there are a lot of barriers, but one major challenge is finding farmers who are willing to scale to a size where they’re actually bringing in consistent quantity of, at a minimum, 20 cases a week, and more like 50 to 150 cases a week.

“What’s incredibly difficult but important to our mission is working with the smaller growers who just don’t have that consistency yet, or that same scale. And I know in the last couple years we’ve unfortunately lost a couple growers who were at that scale, and I think they were finding financially that it wasn’t working for them to be at that scale.

“The one thing that’s hindering scaling is the markets that pay really well are small,

realized doing everything was unsustainable from a lifestyle perspective. Today, TC Farm does not produce meat directly. Instead, it is what McCann calls a “vertically-integrated co-op” that sources meat from a dozen farms and markets to 700 families.

Keith Hartmann raises crops and pasture-based hogs and chickens near Gibbon, Minn., and markets through TC Farm.

Jack McCann

“I’d say the number one thing our customers are looking for is, ‘What’s the healthiest food for me?’ But there also are customers that don’t care about that — they just want the highest quality animal welfare. And there are other customers that just want the most environmentally-friendly choice. Some of them don’t care at all what chemicals are in it — they just want the best tasting steak. So we’re trying to say all of these things our producers emphasize — health, environmental sustainability, and good animal welfare — are symbiotic, and if you start cutting one corner, the other ones go down too, and that’s kind of our niche.

“...A big barrier to replicating this kind of model is the infrastructure issue, from processing capacity to cold storage to finding a courier to do the deliveries.”

Keith Hartmann

“In my area, it is all highly productive corn and soybean ground, and I can’t put animals on pasture profitably without having a niche market for them. And Jack

believed in that market, so it was a good partnership for Jack and I to begin with. As his business grew, I grew with him, and it worked as a very good partnership.

“...If I needed to market all my animals on my own, I couldn’t be at the scale that I’m at. So, it works great where Jack can tell me how many animals he needs that year and we plan for it, and I can focus on the production side and find the best animals for him, get them to the butcher shop, and then he takes it from there.”

Awareness & Relationships

Trent Taher’s father started Taher, Inc., in 1981 after immigrating to Minnesota from Iran. Taher supplies food to



Mike Lenz and Trent Taher. (LSP Photo)

schools, corporate cafeterias, and government institutions in Minnesota and 18 other states across the country.

Mike and Jody Lenz own and operate Threshing Table Farm in Star Prairie, Wis. Threshing Table produces 230 CSA vegetable shares annually, and currently 130 of those go to Taher.

Mike Lenz

“One of the things that’s nice about Taher is they will bring chefs out to our farm. One of the first times they came out, the garlic scapes were out. We picked garlic scapes and some of the chefs had never tasted garlic scapes. They asked, ‘How do we use these?’ And the teaching aspect of where their product is actually coming from and the freshness of it, is one of those things that I enjoy a lot.

“We’ll sit around the table a couple of times a year. Trent will come out with a couple of chefs and we’ll see what’s working, what’s not. It really is just problem-solving and listening to each other’s needs and being willing to do a little change here and there to make it work for all of us.”

Trent Taher

“We really do like to bring people out to the farm and close that gap so people know where their food comes from. Any chance to get the chefs out there and communicate and get their hands in the dirt is really cool.

“...How do we get more connections like this? Maybe simplify it with one word: awareness, to be brutally honest. There’s no doubt that there is some really, really cool stuff that people are doing that we don’t know. So some of that might be just talking more, getting in front of people you wouldn’t traditionally think to get in front of to sell your food to. I don’t think people know all of this stuff is out there, and what to do once they do know about it.” □



Keith Hartmann and Jack McCann. (LSP Photo)

so it takes a lot more communication to sell the same amount, instead of going to one big place. If I am going to only one big grower to fill the 150 cases of broccoli that I need for a week, that’s one phone call and one relationship. Whereas with small growers, that can be three to five growers to get that same amount of product.”

• • •

Growing Together

Jack McCann started TC Farm because his family wanted better tasting, healthier meat. Originally, he and his wife, Betsy, tried to do everything themselves — from raising and processing the meat to delivering it to customers in the Twin Cities and outstate Minnesota. They eventually

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Pulling Together, Moving Forward

A Land Stewardship Project Statement on the Current Farm Crisis

On September 7, 37 Land Stewardship Project member-farmers and leaders came together in Saint Peter, Minn., to discuss direct ways of addressing the current farm economic crisis. Here is the statement these members developed as a guideline on how to move forward to address this crisis.

A Real Farm Crisis

Farmers are facing an economic crisis that is entering its sixth year. Farm families are often unable to even earn back what it took to plant a crop, to raise the livestock, or to produce the milk that is their source of income. This unsustainable situation is severely undermining the foundation of independent farming and the communities it supports, as well as overall stewardship, fairness, and justice.

Some root causes of this farm crisis are clear and agreed upon:

- ◆ **Farmers not getting a fair price** for what they produce or a fair share of the food dollar.
- ◆ **Corporate monopolies** exercising their extractive nature on both sides of the farm produce/input equation, along with the USDA's disregard for fulfilling its role as enforcer of farm economic fairness.
- ◆ **Cooperatives asserting power** over their members rather than power for them.
- ◆ **Unaffordable cost of healthcare** for farmers and other self-employed people.

The pain of this crisis is not being felt by agribusiness and corporate interests that continue to make profits at the expense of farmers and rural communities. The fact is that there is money in agriculture, but farmers are not getting anywhere close to a fair share of the economic benefits being generated by the food they labor to produce on the land.

Failure to address the destruction of farm-level profitability is not acceptable and is producing devastating results. The combined impact of these structural forces — left to play out without intervention from our

elected representatives, our public officials, and farmers themselves — may very well lead to the *extinction* of the next wave of the kinds of small- to mid-sized farm operations, particularly family dairy farmers, that are the source of vitality for rural communities. Long-term food security and environmental stewardship require more farmers, not less, and stronger rural communities, not weaker ones.

Farmers & Allies Must Unify & Speak Out

It is time farmers receive a fair price for the products they produce, and commodity groups and farm organizations need to refocus their policy initiatives on the importance of keeping family farmers on the land.

To bring about such initiatives, farmers and their allies must unify and amplify their voices. Solutions to the farm crisis must start

on the farm.

Farmers must start listening to each other, rather than agribusiness leaders, whose interest is not the interest of farmers or the communities they support. Farmers and their allies must unite around a common cause, and work to advance their own personal and community self-economic interest, as well as further the interest of farmers beyond their own communities who represent a diversity of farming approaches and a diversity of backgrounds. LSP believes that racial justice is deeply connected to economic justice for farmers and rural people, which is why we're committed to engaging in racial justice work, alongside our allies, as we address the ongoing farm crisis. This is the source of our strength, our resilience, our solutions, and our power.

From Our Minnesota Governor, Legislature & Attorney General We Demand:

1) State officials must strengthen our Minnesota Farm Advocates program so farmers know their rights. Minnesota needs to double the number of farm advocates to meet Minnesota farmers' needs. This program puts farmers first and lets farmers know their rights when the bankers come for the farm and farm equipment. In addition, The Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG) needs funding to support the training of farm advocates and provide legal resources to farmers in financial trouble.

2) The Minnesota Attorney General's Office must use its authority to investigate farmer-owned cooperatives that have turned their backs on the farmers who created them. The Attorney General's Office, in its investigation or in its recommendation for legislation, should address these immediate needs of family farmers:

- Farm cooperatives must return to their original purpose that all family farmers be treated equally in the buying of farm inputs and the selling of farm products.
- No special deals for large producers.
- No cooperative mergers or acquisitions should be allowed without all farmer-members being allowed to vote.

3) Farmers need accessible opportunities to restructure loans. The Minnesota Legislature should pass policy that covers the origination fee required of small- and mid-sized farmers who are in severe financial stress and thus are refinancing farm debt and obtaining guaranteed loans through the USDA Farm Service Agency.

4) A moratorium on massive dairies over 1,000 animal units. The Governor must instruct the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to pass a moratorium in the state on issuing permits for

Some Stark Facts:

- The 2018 median farm income for U.S. farm households was *negative \$1,533*.
- For six years, more than **half of farmers and ranchers have lost money** on their crops or herds.
- 70 percent of the total income of farm families comes from **off-farm sources**.

Farm Crisis, see page 11...

construction of any dairy over 1,000 animal units until the water pollution threat posed by these large operations and the price-depressing effects of overproduction are both addressed.

5) Affordable healthcare for farmers and rural communities. The Governor and Legislature must take bold and immediate steps to expand public healthcare coverage and directly help people facing unaffordable costs, poor coverage, and high deductibles on the private market.

From Our Federal Leaders We Demand:

1) End corporate mega-mergers. All of our representatives in the U.S. Congress, and especially the ones who serve on the House and Senate agriculture committees, must take a stand and pass a moratorium on any pending corporate ag mergers, and address economic fairness within the Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA), and the broader regulatory authority related to anti-trust in agriculture.

2) Establish a supply management system for grain, with a loan rate at 95 percent of production costs.

3) Implement short-term dairy relief and a long-term structural solution for small- and mid-sized dairies as proposed during the “Dairy Together” Roadshow in Greenwald, Minn., on April 29, 2019 (hosted by the National Farmers Organization and the Wisconsin Farmers Union, and co-hosted by the Minnesota Farmers Union).

4) Federal farm subsidies should have payment limits and should be tied to stewardship. We should not have a system where 80 percent of farm payments go to 5 percent of the farmers.

5) Enact Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), which is missing in the current draft of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

6) The USDA’s Farm Service Agency must offer 40-year fixed farmland loans with below-market interest rates to those groups of beginning farmers who are at a significant competitive disadvantage when it comes to accessing land — women, farmers of color, veterans, and farmers with limited capital resources.



LSP members went over the organization’s Farm Crisis Statement and discussed ways of addressing the issue during a gathering in the southeastern Minnesota community of Lewiston in November. More farm crisis meetings are planned for this winter — check the calendar on page 32 and at www.landstewardshipproject.org for details. (LSP Photo)

We Must Take Action Together

Addressing the disaster that is decimating farming communities will require an increasing number of community meetings and actions, small and large. We must build the power of farmer and rural community voices to the level required to make effective demands of our elected representatives and public officials, and get the concrete actions

required to meet the severity of this current economic crisis. The Land Stewardship Project is prepared, along with our allies, to lead and support the groundswell of action needed to bring about an equitable farm economy grounded in family farm viability, land stewardship, and community — both in this immediate time of farm crisis, and as a foundation for the future. □

Sign the Petition to Public Officials Today!

Please, let us know you stand with us and are prepared to act. Sign and share LSP’s Farm Crisis Petition online: www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmcrisispetition.

Or, sign below, clip, and return this form in the envelope that is included with this *Land Stewardship Letter*. We will be in touch with you on how we can move forward.

Yes, I agree with LSP’s Farm Crisis Statement and stand with the Land Stewardship Project in demanding bold action on the farm crisis from our elected leaders.

Name: _____

Full Address: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (C) _____

E-mail: _____

Do You Farm? _____ If So, What Do You Raise? _____

LSP & the Farm Crisis

For more information on LSP’s farm crisis work, contact LSP organizer Tom Nuessmeier at tomn@landstewardshipproject.org or 507-995-3541; LSP organizer Paul Sobocinski can be contacted at sobopaul@landstewardshipproject.org or 507-342-2323.

Farm Crisis Resources

Feeling stressed or know someone who is? Check out LSP’s list of hotlines, websites, and other resources at www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmcrisis.

Creating Narrative Power from the Ground Up

World Views Influence Not Only What's Right, but What's Doable

By Johanna Rupprecht

At a Land Stewardship Project Policy and Organizing Program staff meeting in January 2016, I had a deeply moving experience that will stay with me for a long time. My fellow organizers and I read aloud an early draft of a document entitled, “A Transformational Narrative for LSP Policy & Organizing: A Work in Progress.” I had never seen so many of my own core values and beliefs laid out in front of me on a single piece of paper. The most powerful part of the experience was knowing that these values and beliefs were not mine alone, but shared among the 50 or more LSP member-leaders and staff who had taken part in developing this narrative.

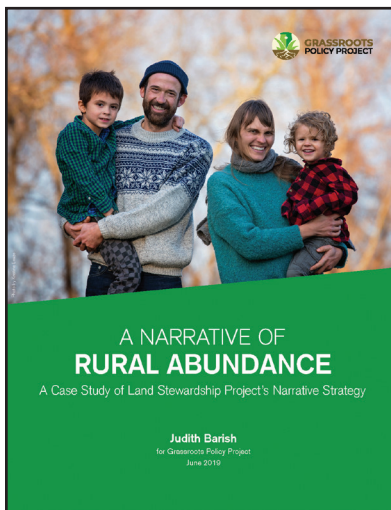
I saw what I learned from my parents about why they farm in a way that values the health of the land, and from my grandfather who was an outspoken advocate for the water, land, and wildlife throughout his life along the Wisconsin River, reflected in ideas so many others had contributed from their own backgrounds as well. By the time we finished reading it I couldn't help crying, and I had the same reaction the next several times I heard the narrative read aloud.

I can't overstate the importance of the creation and use of this tool in shaping my understanding of organizing, power, and the work LSP has before us. Our Policy and Organizing Program, consulting with Dave Mann of the Grassroots Policy Project (GPP), convened member-leaders in 2015 out of the growing recognition that in order to achieve the change we seek, we must intentionally contend for power in the arena of narrative.

A “narrative,” as we use the term in this work, is a way of expressing a worldview, or set of values and beliefs, that shape how people see the world. Narrative shapes what people believe is right and even possible; so, what narrative holds the most sway with the most people shapes what is possible. A prime example of a negative narrative at work is the “get big or get out” message I write about on page 13.

LSP has recognized that in so many ways, we are up against a dominant narrative based in values contrary to ours — one that sees the land as a commodity, corporate

profits as more important than people's lives, small- and moderate-scale farming as an inefficient thing of the past, and so on. To get serious about breaking this narrative's hold on our society and democracy, we needed to start by clearly articulating what we actually believe instead. Initially, in the summer of 2015 I saw value in doing this kind of work. But I worried about the time commitment



involved, since I was staffing the just-launched campaign to win a frac sand ban in southeastern Minnesota's Winona County. But by the time we completed the narrative development process, I understood how essential it was not only for the success of that campaign, but for everything LSP seeks to achieve.

This past summer, GPP produced *A Narrative of Rural Abundance: A Case Study of Land Stewardship Project's Narrative Strategy*. This report tells more of the story of our narrative development work and contains insights from members, staff, and allies on the value of this process and the tools created. For me, taking part in that work at the same time as the Winona County frac sand ban campaign turned out to be a valuable learning opportunity. I could directly see the truth of the assertion that, in order to win our goals, we cannot limit ourselves to playing on the other side's turf; we cannot simply try to frame our issues within the context of the dominant narrative.

If the only narrative that holds sway says that property rights trump all other rights,

that economic factors should determine all decisions, and that government must not limit the ability of corporations to do business, then something like a frac sand ban is unthinkable. But if we can build power around a different narrative that says the land has inherent value, the health of the land and of people are interconnected, and the role of government is to act boldly to protect the common good for people and the land, then we can win. And that is what we did in Winona County. We won passage of the frac sand ban in November 2016, in large part because we changed the nature of the public conversation by framing it in our own narrative. And the narrative power we built continues to be effective long after the end of the campaign. Working for narrative change is more than a way to win any particular campaign; the point is to make more possible across the board.

Our narrative development work in the Policy and Organizing Program is one of several threads that have brought LSP to its current level of understanding of narrative as an arena of power. Narrative work has been undertaken in other programs, as well. And in a sense, part of LSP's mission since its founding has been to operate in the arena of narrative, values, and beliefs: “To foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland.”

Now we recognize a need to unite these threads and move forward even more powerfully. We are embarking on a new, organization-wide narrative development process. This will engage many more members and staff; make sure our developing understandings of racial, gender, and economic justice and the inherent value of the land are all centered; and set us up in a stronger position to build narrative power throughout all of LSP's work into the future. Stay tuned to learn more. □

LSP policy organizer Johanna Rupprecht is based in the organization's Lewiston, Minn., office.

Want to Get Involved?

If you are interested in learning more about or being involved in the Land Stewardship Project's narrative development work, contact staff members Amanda Madison at 612-722-6377 (amadison@landstewardshipproject.org), or Johanna Rupprecht at 507-523-3366 (jrupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org).

You can read the Grassroots Policy Project report, *A Narrative of Rural Abundance: A Case Study of Land Stewardship Project's Narrative Strategy*, at <https://bit.ly/2LICbRL>.

'Get Big or Get Out' Message is Harmful...& Wrong

By Repeating a Well-Worn Myth, the Ag Secretary is Trying to Make the Unsustainable Seem Inevitable

By Johanna Rupprecht

At this fall's World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wis., U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue made the following remarks in regard to the economic crisis facing many small- and mid-sized farmers, especially dairy farmers: "In America, the big get bigger and the small go out. I don't think in America we, for any small business, have a guaranteed income or guaranteed profitability."

He also said, "It's very difficult on an economy of scale with the capital needs and all the environmental regulations and everything else today to survive milking 40, 50, or 60 or even 100 cows."

Perdue's comments are infuriating (after I read them I spent a good chunk of the afternoon mad enough to throw things), and unconscionable words for anyone, let alone a public official, to offer to people in pain. They're also an example of powerful narrative strategy at work—it's important to pay attention to that.

For decades, the message of corporate ag and its various supporters and figureheads has been, "get big or get out." Perdue's statements echo the words of Nixon administration agriculture secretary Earl Butz, who even more bluntly presented the same message. They also echo the 2018 comments of University of Minnesota economist Marin Bozic, when he told a state legislative committee that 80 percent of Minnesota's dairy farms were doomed to go out of business and should not be offered help. Bozic praised the factory farm model of River-view, LLP, with thousands of cows per site, as the future of dairy.

The big getting bigger and pushing out the small has been sold to farmers and the general public as the inevitable destiny of U.S. agriculture for a long, long time. It's often even been presented as a sign of progress or a good thing; it's always been presented

as unstoppable — there's nothing you could do about it even if you wanted to. It's no wonder many well-meaning people, especially those not connected to farming, but also many farmers, now believe this. That's exactly how dominant narratives work. What is repeated most often (with all the weight of corporate money behind it) is what people are most likely to believe; it shapes what people see as true, right, and possible. It buries, smothers, other beliefs and values people also hold. This is a concrete way in



Secretary Perdue's remarks that the demise of small- and mid-sized dairy farmers is an inevitable example of "progress" in America was no accident—it's part of a long-standing strategy to advance a corporate, industrialized model that's harmful to the land, its people, and our communities. (LSP Photo)

which power is taken from people.

Perdue's choice to frame his remarks with "in America" ties in American exceptionalism, another strain of the dominant narrative, in a particularly nasty twist. What he's doing is using people's feelings of

patriotism as yet another way to stop them from questioning the harm that's being done to them, to hold them back from thinking other ways are possible. The message is: this

is inevitable, you're over, there's nothing you can do about it, this is just how it is in America. And you're an American, right, so how can you complain about that? Perdue blaming "environmental regulations" for a crisis that is actually caused by corporate

power is an example of yet another narrative element frequently and effectively used to distract from the heart of the real problems facing farmers.

The most important thing to remember, of course, is that the message isn't true. Nothing is inevitable about factory farm dairies. Nothing is inevitable about the current course of U.S. agriculture. We've gotten to the point we're at because of deliberate choices that have not only allowed, but have heavily subsidized and supported, the big to get bigger and the pushing out of the small.

Corporate-driven public policy choices have led to the results they were designed for, to the massive benefit of those interests who designed and advocated for them. And through it all, agribusiness and its figureheads like Perdue have been telling farmers, essentially, "If you can't make it, it's your fault — get with the program." The strategy has been to destroy people's livelihoods and then blame them for it. Create the factory farm system and then tell dairy farmers, "Well, too bad, but it sure is tough to make it milking 50 or 100 cows anymore, what with all these big farms with their economies of scale."

We can make different choices. Different policies create different results! We can have any kind of food and farming system we want.

It's going to require people organizing to take control of our government away from corporate interests. Small- and moderate-sized farmers deserve a government that goes to bat for them. We can have that. Together we can choose to support farming at the scale that feeds the lifeblood of countless rural communities instead of sucking them dry.

Nothing is inevitable; so much more is possible than most of us have been led to believe. An enormous amount of corporate ag's power is rooted in the mere fact that it's gotten so many people to buy into the myth that the corporate way is the only way. That can be changed. It's past time to change it. Time to fight back. ☐

LSP organizer Johanna Rupprecht grew up on her family's livestock and crop farm in southeastern Minnesota.

An enormous amount of corporate ag's power is rooted in the mere fact that it's gotten so many people to buy into the myth that the corporate way is the only way.

Court Orders Factory Farm Permit Review

By Barbara Sogn-Frank

A decision by the Minnesota Court of Appeals would require a reevaluation of a permit that could create one of the largest factory dairy farms in the state. On Oct. 14, the court ordered the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to put a permit on hold for an expansion proposed by Daley Farms of Lewiston, Minn.

The court ruled that the agency did not consider the effects of greenhouse gas emissions when it failed in January to require an in-depth Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Daley expansion, which would increase the number of dairy cows it houses by 2,900, making for a total of over 4,600 cows, or 5,967 animal units. This would make Daley Farms one of the largest dairy operations in the state; over 96 percent of dairy farms in Minnesota are 500 cows or fewer.

Such an expansion requires a variance from Winona County in order to exceed its animal unit cap of 1,500. However, the county has denied the request for a variance because it did not meet the legal requirements for such an exemption. Without this variance, the project cannot proceed.

This proposal has been highly controversial since it was announced. Land Stewardship Project members, other Winona County rural residents, and scientific experts have expressed strong concerns about the impact it would have on water, soil, and air quality. The proposed factory dairy expansion's use of 92 million gallons of the area's groundwater per year would be three times the annual average water consumption of the nearby city of Lewiston. The proposed expansion's generation of 46 million gallons of liquid manure annually threatens groundwater in Minnesota's vulnerable karst area, which is composed of porous limestone that creates sinkholes and disappearing springs. This geology can allow surface pollution to enter the groundwater in a matter of hours. As a result, this part of the state has long had problems with groundwater pollution.

The Land Stewardship Project, represented by the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) which also represented itself, appealed the MPCA's decision to not require an EIS and to issue a permit. LSP and MCEA argued that numerous legal and procedural errors were made by the MPCA during its environmental review process. When the Minnesota Court of Appeals overturned the MPCA's negative declaration for an EIS, it was recognizing

that a public agency must hold factory farms accountable to the land and rural communities. It is also recognizing the climate change implications of concentrating thousands of cows in one place, where the manure they produce would be stored in an earthen-sided lagoon. If Daley Farms was allowed to go ahead with its expansion, it would be the 43rd largest greenhouse-gas emitter in the state, according to court documents filed by the MCEA. The court was correct in noting that the MPCA was remiss in not considering greenhouse-gas emissions when it conducted its environmental review. As the court noted, the MPCA routinely considers greenhouse-gas emissions in its environmental reviews of other projects.

Finally, the court's decision shines the spotlight on a critical issue: MPCA staff have never recommended an EIS on a large factory farm. One was ordered by the now disbanded MPCA Citizens' Board over staff objections, and two have been ordered through court orders. The testimony and documentation related to the review of Daley Farms' proposal yet again proves that not only did the MPCA fail to fulfill its mission as an environmental agency when it did not consider greenhouse-gas emissions, but it also failed to serve the public good when it declined, yet again, to order an EIS on a major producer of liquid manure in an environmentally fragile area. ▢

LSP policy organizer Barbara Sogn-Frank works on factory farms issues and local democracy. She can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or via bsognfrank@landstewardshipproject.org.

Standing Up to a Factory Farm & Asking Tough Questions

By Barbara Sogn-Frank

It's early November, and Grass Lake in Stearns County's Crow Lake Township is peaceful, lined with cattails bending in the breeze and a few ducks and geese watching for winter's arrival. But if things had gone differently a few months previous, neighbors in this central Minnesota community could have been seeing, hearing, smelling, and feeling the effects of a newly built 2,174-sow factory farm with an almost four-million-gallon liquid manure pit and a dead-animal compost site, just up the slope from the lake.

If Land Stewardship Project members Renee and Mike Bjork, along with neighbors like Frank Karels who live across the highway from the lake (and some LSP organizers), hadn't acted fast, the proposed permit

to build the large hog factory may have been rubber-stamped into existence by the Stearns County Board of Commissioners in July.

Coming together to organize and stand up for their community, Karels and the Bjorks gathered 160 petition signatures from rural residents within a six-mile radius of the proposed building site. The petition was addressed to the Minnesota's Environmental Quality Board (EQB) and it called for environmental review of the proposed factory farm. With only a few days available over the Independence Day holiday to collect the needed signatures, they delivered their petition to the EQB on Monday, July 8. The EQB agreed that review of the matter by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) was in order, and called Stearns County officials immediately, halting the county board's approval of the CAFO permit, which was set to take place the next

day, July 9.

The petition highlighted the fact that the proposers' permit application was for 959.6 animal units (2,174 hogs). However, the blueprints, when compared to other Minnesota sow facilities, appeared to be designed to hold more than 1,000 animal units. Factory farms that have the capacity to house over 1,000 animal units must undergo environmental review, according to state law.

Grass Lake is a protected wetland that is part of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resource's Bonanza Valley long-term water research study. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's 2014 summary of Stearns County private well testing showed that 99 percent of Crow Lake Township's land is considered "vulnerable geology" when it comes to nitrate contamination. If there is

Tough Questions, see page 15...

any “good” place to build a huge hog factory, this isn’t it.

Karels, the Bjorks, and LSP staff met with the MPCA officials responsible for environmental review of feedlots. They gave the officials firsthand accounts of the potential impacts neighbors would face and showed them photos of the area, current manure storage violations on the land in question, and the soil composition of the area they call home. Neighbors and LSP members from the surrounding community

met to gather research, work on communication with the community and their township and county representatives, and to write letters-to-the-editor.

The MPCA reviewed the application documents and determined that the proposal was in fact designed to house over 1,000 animal units and declared that an environmental review must be conducted, starting with the completion of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet by the proposer and the MPCA’s feedlot division.

Since then, the proposers have not pursued the EAW process. They contacted the Bjorks and Karels to say that they are not

planning to build at the Grass Lake site at this point.

The stakes are too high not to organize and say “no” when faced with the possibility of an industrial-scale animal confinement moving in nearby. The national and international hog confinement industry makes a lot of big promises to rural communities. But its promises are empty and its effects on land, water, air, health, and quality-of-life are dire.

This is a prime example of how critical it is to stand up, ask questions, and push for answers. After all, those answers could determine your community’s future. □

LSP Member-Farmers Travel to DC to Talk Trade, Farm Crisis

Proposed NAFTA Replacement Benefits Corporate Ag at the Expense of Family Farmers

Farm country is in the midst of an economic crisis and a proposed trade deal poses the risk of making things even worse. That was one of the key messages Minnesota farmers took to Washington, D.C., in October during meetings with policymakers, including staffers with the U.S. House Agriculture Committee.

“I really think we need to turn this crisis around and turn it around quickly,” says James Kanne, a Renville County dairy farmer and Land Stewardship Project member. “Otherwise, we will lose the backbone of rural America—our family farmers.”

Kanne, along with Alan Perish, joined other farmers from Iowa, Missouri, and South Dakota in Washington as part of a Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment fly-in. LSP is a member organization of the Campaign. One focus of the discussions they had with Congressional staffers was the trade initiative that is being proposed in Congress as a replacement for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Called the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, this proposal does not address the core issues

causing the farm crisis, and in fact could worsen the situation, said the members of the farmer-delegation. For example, it does not include a provision that would require country of origin labeling (COOL) for meat and other farm products. Also, it could worsen the healthcare crisis in rural America by locking in patents for drugs.

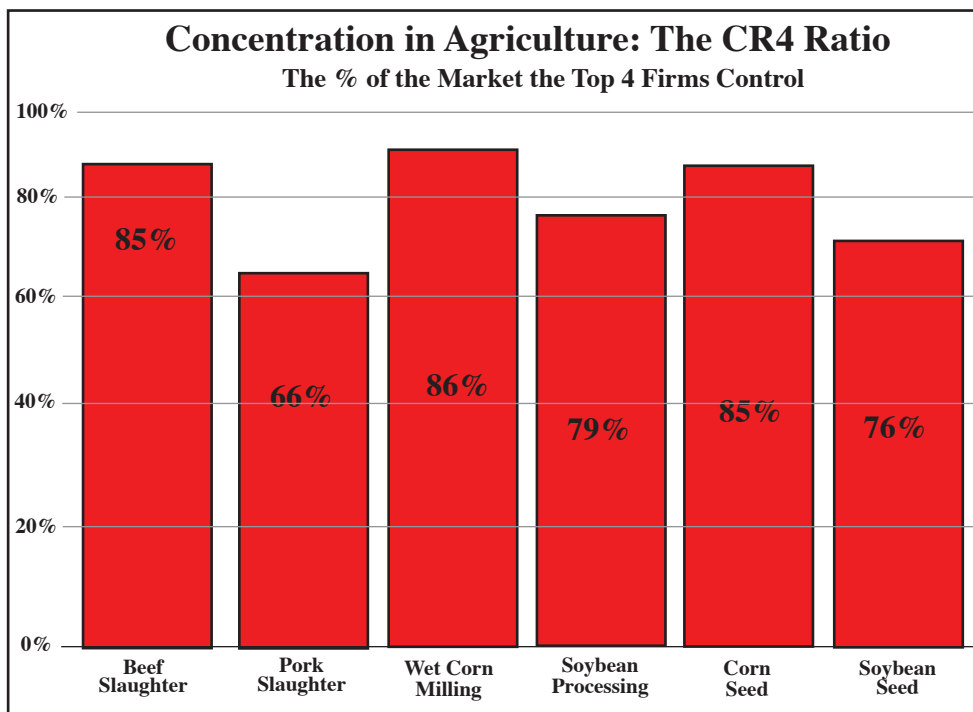
“The trade war and tariffs have been devastating for farmers and rural communities that are already struggling with low markets

and bad weather,” says Perish, a retired farmer from Todd County who serves on LSP’s state policy committee. “Policymakers need to get that message loud and clear.”

Kanne, Perish, and the other farmers also called for policies that would control the increased power large agribusiness firms have over markets and agriculture policy (see chart). The meat, grain, and seed sectors of agriculture are controlled by a handful of firms, creating an anti-competitive situation

that is putting farmers out of business at record levels. This comes at a time when U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue has made it clear that the Trump Administration supports a business-as-usual approach that prioritizes increased control of the food and farm system by a handful of firms (see page 13).

“This attitude that the elimination of the independent family farmer is inevitable is both wrong and harmful,” says Kanne. “Our public officials, including Congress, can play a key role in supporting a farming system that’s good for the land, our communities, and our economy. They can start by not rubber-stamping a trade agreement that was basically drafted in the boardrooms of corporate America.” □



“CR4” is a situation where the top four firms in a given industry control 40 percent of the market. Economists believe that when CR4 exists, competition is threatened and market abuses are more likely to occur — the higher the number, the bigger the threat. Almost every sector in agriculture is well above the CR4 level.

Sources: “Consolidation and Competition in Agribusiness: USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum, Feb. 23, 2018,” by James MacDonald, USDA Economic Research Service, <https://bit.ly/2O9qLSS>; “Power, Food, and Agriculture: Implications for Farmers, Consumers and Communities,” by Mary K. Hendrickson, Philip H. Howard, and Douglas H. Constance, University of Missouri, Nov. 1, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2pHHV0x>

Sometimes the Answer is 'No'

Conversations About Conservation are Not Always Easy

In some ways, it should have just been a routine annual check-in with a farmer who had been leasing some of Jeannie Hill's land in southeastern Minnesota for over half-a-dozen years. They would go over a tax form, and then renew the rental agreement for yet another year. But Hill had noticed some serious erosion on those 32 acres the renter was row-cropping. Even worse, there had been eroded soil in the same spots the year before.

"I told him, 'I could see erosion, again. It washed down and under the fence,'" recalls Hill. "And I said, 'You didn't do no-till.'"

The renter responded that his equipment wasn't compatible with no-tilling and that it couldn't be done in this part of southeastern Minnesota. He also disagreed that there was bad erosion on those acres. But one of Hill's sons had confirmed that the erosion was beyond routine levels, and when the lease had been renewed the year before, Hill had stipulated that no-till would be practiced on the land.

"So, when he said, 'Are we good to go on the lease for next year?' I said, 'No, we're not.' He looked at me kind of funny, but I just told him, 'Well, we see that you did not follow the terms that we had established. I can't keep going like that.'"

Such an interaction can be one of the toughest conversations a landowner has with her renter, particularly when the sudden death of a spouse has left that landowner in charge. But Hill had come to that conversation equipped with expert advice and some information on conservation production systems that help protect the land. And as a result of connections she had made at a Land Stewardship Project meeting on conservation leases, she already had a new, stewardship-minded renter in mind. Perhaps most importantly, Hill brought into that meeting a strong, lifelong conviction that the land must be stewarded.

"I think conservation is a given," she says one recent October day while sitting in

her farmhouse. "That was the way we had always done it, and we always assumed that it would carry on. But you don't have to go very far to see where people would plow right down into the ditches, and you'd see after a rain it was washing right down into the roads sometimes. And I'm always thinking, 'What don't they get?'"



Jeannie Hill's advice to landowners who need to have a discussion with renters about land management practices is to do your homework. "Go to somebody who knows about conservation," she says. "If they can't help, they'll probably suggest somebody who can." (LSP Photo)

A Land Stewardship Legacy

When Hill was growing up during the 1940s and 1950s in southeastern Minnesota, repeated flooding in the Whitewater River Valley made it difficult for her family and their neighbors to make a living farming. It not only destroyed crops, buildings, and bridges, but covered the area with countless tons of eroded soil.

One year alone, the town of Beaver was swamped more than two-dozen times by waters carrying soil loosened from the surrounding hills. Basements were filled with muck and bridges were raised three times in 25 years to keep ahead of growing piles of sediment. Eventually, Beaver was abandoned, and became known after that as the "Buried Town of Beaver."

Give it a Listen

On episode 232 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Jeannie Hill talks about how she did her homework before having a difficult discussion with a renter: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1235.

On episode 230, Robin Moore talks about how the Land Stewardship Project is using soil health to forge stewardship partnerships between non-operating landowners and the farmers who rent from them: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1222.

The flooding was the result of decades of land abuse—hillsides had been denuded of trees and other perennial plant cover, and the moldboard plow exposed the soil to the ravages of nature. There was simply nothing to keep torrential rains from sending water, and whatever was along for the ride, straight into the valley.

Like many other farmers and other residents in the area, Jeannie's family eventually moved out of the Whitewater Valley to escape nature's wrath.

"I lived a lot of that," Jeannie, who is now 80, says of this infamous chapter in soil erosion history.

That's one reason she is so adamant about taking care of the soil. In 1974, Jeannie and her husband Everett purchased from a family member 130 acres that sits near the top of a ridge overlooking the Whitewater Valley. For the next few decades, they milked cows, as well as

raised beef, corn, soybeans, and hay. Jeannie also worked as a teacher and ran an on-farm greenhouse business. The land is extremely steep, and from the beginning the Hills emphasized conservation in their farming methods. They put in place contour strips, grassed waterways, and a pond to manage runoff. In addition, Everett was one of the first farmers in the region to adopt no-till production.

"Actually, I went out to see how it worked and Everett showed me," Jeannie recalls of when they first used no-till. "It just makes sense, because you don't have to make as many trips across the field, it will save fuel, it's going to save time, and you don't have all of the erosion issues. It's pretty clever."

Renting It Out Right, see page 17...

After years of hard work making a living on the land, the Hills began renting out their crop fields and pastureland. In 2017, Everett was killed in a farming accident, leaving Jeannie to manage the leases. She soon noticed significant erosion on 32 acres of cropland they were renting out, and set out to correct the situation. Jeannie was concerned that the renter wouldn't listen to her as a woman who had not been actively farming the land.

How can one make sure the soil is being farmed in a way that supports one's stewardship goals while meeting the practical, day-to-day challenges a renting farmer faces?

Hill knew she needed to meet with the renter armed with information about why soil stewardship was important and what methods would work in her region. In 2018, she attended an LSP workshop for landowners who want to figure out ways of encouraging renters to adopt soil-friendly production methods. The workshop included presentations by farmers as well as soil health experts on ways to build soil health in the long term, tips for communicating with renters, as well as strategies for developing leases that place on paper specific stewardship expectations.

Jeannie then contacted Lance Klessig, a resource specialist with the Winona County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and invited him to a meeting involving her and the renter. Klessig works with numerous farmers in the area who are utilizing soil-friendly practices like cover cropping and no-till. He often features these farmers in short YouTube videos that highlight practical, economical ways of building soil health.

Klessig came to the farm and explained to the renter Hill's concern about soil ero-

Leases That Fit Your Stewardship Values

The Land Stewardship Project and the League of Women Voters have assembled a "toolkit" for people seeking to utilize leases that emphasize building soil health and other conservation practices. Tools include: tips on how to hold conversations with renters, lease examples, guides on setting rental rates for soil building practices, and background materials on soil health. For free copies of the Conservation Leases Toolkit, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/conservationleases. Information and one-to-one guidance is also available by contacting Robin Moore at 320-269-2105 or rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org.

sion and ways of utilizing methods such as no-till to protect the fields and build long-term resiliency. He also recommended to Hill that she change the rental agreement from a three-year lease to a one-year contract. Jeannie then specified in the new lease that no-till production would be used on those 32 acres during the following growing season.

Speaking the Same Language

A year later, after Jeannie declined to renew the lease, she called Lisa and Eric Klein, area farmers and Farm Beginnings graduates (see page 18) who she had seen speak at the LSP meeting. They had given a presentation on the soil-friendly methods — cover cropping, crop rotations, and managed rotational grazing — that they use to produce crops and livestock. The Kleins came over to Hill's farm and she explained her concerns about erosion and what had happened before. The Kleins went over the paperwork, explained what kind of farming they'd be doing and that they'd instruct their sons, who farm with them, on how Hill's land should be taken care of. The Kleins recently wrapped up their first growing season renting those 32 acres, and, despite a year of intense, record breaking rainstorms, Jeannie is happy to report that erosion is no longer a problem on that field.

Her advice for other landowners facing

a similar tricky situation with a renter is to go to somebody who knows about conservation, like a local SWCD or Natural Resources Conservation Service staffer. They can provide expert advice on what practices will work as well as reinforce what the landowner already knows.

"If they can't help, they'll probably suggest somebody who can," says Hill. "You know, it's a step at a time."

Long-term leases are beneficial to a farmer who is taking extra steps to build soil and needs some stability around land access. But there are times when a year-to-year lease can help keep a renter accountable. That's especially valuable when certain specifications about how the land should be farmed, such as what Hill had outlined, are included in writing.

Jeannie says another reason to do the research required to keep a renter accountable was that when she heard other farmers like the Kleins talking about the methods they use, it resonated with her and gave her confidence she could rent to someone who was speaking her language.

"I knew what I was saying and they knew what they were saying and we recognized that we were on the same page," says Jeannie as she heads out into a blustery October afternoon to check on her farm. "And it was a relief to get someone with that kind of knowledge to take over and rent the land." □

Tips for Courageous Conservation Conversations*

→ **Project humility.** Validate what the renter is saying. They aren't just proud of how cheaply they can do things. They are also proud of how innovative they can be.

→ **Start with what's working and what's working well.** For example, "Thanks for clearing the snow from my mother's driveway." Feel free to tell the farmer that they do certain things very well, like cover cropping, crop rotations, etc. Don't just dwell on what the farmer is doing wrong.

→ **Take opportunities to use positive reinforcement.** "I admire the practice you use on your land, can you use it on mine? What are you most proud of about the way the farmland you own is cared for?"

→ **Respond to negativity with "Conservation is an opportunity—it's not a negative thing."** If you are going to have a long-term relationship with the renter, it is to the renter's benefit to build soil health, since they will have less fertilizer and soil washing away.

→ **Start the conversation about soil health and stewardship.** "As a landowner, I want to approach this like owning a car. If I don't take care of my car, it will wear out. I've been thinking about my farmland and how I would like it cared for. Here is what is important to me: _____. I also like to think about how it could be even better cared for (or phrase as appropriate to circumstance). One (or more) thing I've heard about is _____."

→ **Recognize that conservation methods could entail extra time and at least initial additional costs.** Say, "What would you need from me to take these additional steps?" or "Here is what I am offering." Some practices farmers get reimbursed for, some not. Find out what might be reimbursed and negotiate who will cover the other expenses. Perhaps offer to split the cost-share that is the farmer's responsibility.

**Excerpted from the Conservation Leases Toolkit. For more information on tips and other resources related to developing conservation leases, see the sidebar at the top of the page.*

Applications Open for 2020-2021 FB Course

The Land Stewardship Project's Minnesota-Wisconsin region Farm Beginnings Program is accepting applications for its 2020-2021 class session. The location of the class is yet to be determined.

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course is marking its second decade of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farm management. The course is for people just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers looking to make changes in their operations. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial and enterprise planning, and innovative marketing techniques.

This 12-month course provides training and hands-on learning opportunities in the

form of nine classroom sessions, as well as farm tours, field days, workshops, and access to an extensive farmer network. Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the region. The

Farm Beginnings in Other Regions

Besides Minnesota and Wisconsin, Farm Beginnings classes have been held in Illinois, Nebraska, and North Dakota. Local community-based organizations have also launched Farm Beginnings courses in South Dakota, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, New York, and Maine.

For information on Farm Beginnings courses in other parts of the country, see the Farm Beginnings Collaborative website at www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org. More information is also available by contacting LSP's Amy Bacigalupo at 320-269-2105 or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org.

classes, which meet on Saturdays beginning in late October 2020, run until March 2021, followed by an on-farm component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 850 people have graduated from the Minnesota-

Wisconsin region Farm Beginnings course. Graduates are involved in a wide-range of agricultural enterprises, including grass-based livestock, organic vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture, and specialty products.

The Farm Beginnings class fee is \$1,500, which covers one "farm unit"—either one farmer or two farming partners who are on the same farm. A \$200 deposit is required with an application and will be put toward the final fee. Payment plans are available, as well as a limited number of scholarships.

Completion of the course fulfills the educational requirements needed for Farm Service Agency loans and the Minnesota Beginning Farmer Tax Credit (www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/beginningfarmertax-credit).

For application materials or more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org.

You can also get details from the Land Stewardship Project's Annelie Livingston-Anderson at 507-523-3366 or annelie@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Farm Dreams Can Help You Figure Out if Farming is in Your Future

Farm Dreams is an entry level, four-hour, exploratory Land Stewardship Project workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether farming is the next step for them. This is a great workshop to attend if you are considering farming as a career and are not

sure where to start. Farm Dreams is a good prerequisite for LSP's Farm Beginnings course (*see above*).

LSP holds Farm Dreams workshops at locations throughout the Minnesota-Wisconsin region over the course of a year. The cost is \$20 for LSP members and \$40 for non-members.

For more information, see the **Farm Dreams** page at www.farmbeginnings.org. Details are also available by contacting LSP's Annelie Livingston-Anderson at 507-523-3366 or by e-mailing her at annelie@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Class in Session

Caleb Langworthy led a class discussion during a recent session of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course, which is being held this winter in Menomonie in western Wisconsin. Caleb and Lauren Langworthy, who are Farm Beginnings graduates, own and operate Blue Ox Farm, a grass-based livestock operation near Wheeler, Wis.

Farmers and other agricultural professionals lead Farm Beginnings classes, which are supplemented by farm tours, field days, workshops, and access to an extensive farmer network.

For more information on future classes, see the story at the top of this page. (Photo by Annelie Livingston-Anderson)



Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland in the Midwest? Or are you an established farmer/landowner in the 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 the Land Stewardship Project's *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse*. To fill out an online form and for more information, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse. You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Karen Stettler at stettler@landstewardshipproject.org or by calling her at 507-523-3366. For the latest listings, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse.

Seeking Farmland

◆ Forrest Heussner is seeking to purchase 1-5 tillable acres of farmland in **Wisconsin**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Forrest Heussner, 920-479-4467, forrest.heussner@yahoo.com.

◆ Brandee Howell is seeking to rent 500 acres of farmland in **Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Nebraska, or North Dakota**. Land with 200 pasture acres, 200 tillable acres, and 100 forest acres is preferred. Fencing, water, stockyard, shop, barn, and a house is preferred. Contact: Brandee Howell, 406-778-2153, brandeehowell@gmail.com.

◆ Judy Bahar is seeking to rent 1-10 acres of farmland in **Illinois** (she would consider states in the South as well). Bahar would also accept donated land to open a nonprofit organization for foster and homeless sustainability. Land with water, fencing, and road access is preferred. A house is required. Contact: Judy Bahar, 480-310-6662, 480-203-6176, info@candoassociates.com.

◆ Tessa Foster is seeking to purchase at least 5 tillable acres of farmland in **Minnesota, Wisconsin, or Illinois** (Michigan, Vermont, or Maine would be considered). Land with water and fencing is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Tessa Foster, tessa.foster32@gmail.com.

◆ Barry Schlecht is seeking to rent 5-100 acres of hay or pasture ground in **Minnesota**. No house is required. Contact: Barry Schlecht, e-mail, 360-518-6168, barryschlecht@outlook.com.

◆ Jacob Wolf is seeking to purchase 500 acres of farmland in **Iowa**. Land with 50 pasture acres and 50 forest acres is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Jacob Wolf, 641-777-8631, jacobwof2016@gmail.com.

◆ Emily Stevens is seeking to rent 1 acre of tillable farmland in **Minnesota or Wisconsin (Pierce, St. Croix, Washington, or Dakota County)**. Stevens is looking to grow produce and a small building to store equipment in is preferred. Land that has not

been sprayed for several years is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Emily Stevens, 312-523-6084, emily.stevens@sbcglobal.net.

◆ Kristen Todd is seeking to purchase 40 acres of farmland in **Minnesota**. Land with 10 tillable acres and 10 forest acres, as well as a house, is preferred. Contact: Kristen Todd, 612-839-4125, toddfamily@fastmail.com.

◆ Emily Canfield is seeking to purchase farmland in **Michigan** for organic fruit, vegetable, and livestock production. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that consists of 3 pasture acres, 3 tillable acres, and 2-5 forest acres is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Emily Canfield, 989-977-0084, emcanfield95@gmail.com.

◆ Annamarie Staples is seeking to rent 2 acres of tillable farmland near West Bend in **southeastern Wisconsin**. No house or outbuildings are required; water is required. Contact: Annamarie Staples, 262-365-4691, newyork_333@hotmail.com.

◆ Randall Rote is seeking to rent 20-40 acres of farmland in **Illinois**. Contact: Randall Rote, 563-249-3176, truckguy18@gmail.com.

Farmland Available

◆ Judy and Steve Harder have for sale 20 acres of farmland in **southwestern Minnesota's Cottonwood County (near Mountain Lake)**. Fifteen acres are tillable, and it has not been sprayed for 10 years. There are established asparagus, rhubarb, raspberry, gooseberry, currant, aronia berry, and hazelnut beds. Grazing animals is permitted. Outbuildings include a farm market, restaurant, greenhouse, barn, two sheds, and two high tunnels. There is an in-ground watering system fed from two cisterns. A house is available. Contact: Judy or Steve Harder, 507-360-3293, jubilee@mtlake.org.

◆ Laura Dimler has for rent approximately 1 acre of farmland in the **Twin Cities, Minn., region (near Norwood Young America in Carver County)**. There is tillable and forest land and it has not been sprayed for several years. There is a barn with a small hayloft, a

house, and a well for irrigation. The rental price is \$1,250 per month. Contact: Laura Dimler, 612-747-0319, lauradimler@gmail.com.

◆ Realtor Jenny Menning has for sale 7 acres of farmland in **northeastern Wisconsin's Green Lake County (near Ripon)**. The land consists of 1 acre of pasture and 4.5 tillable acres. There is a barn (with event area on the second level), a milk house, smaller barn, a Harvestore silo, tool shed, granary, combine shed, corn crib, hog pen, horse shed, two garages, and a 3,796-square-foot house. The asking price is \$375,000. Contact: Jenny Menning, 920-585-4849, jenny@beiserRealty.com.

◆ Ken Saucke has for sale 40 acres of farmland in **Dakota County south of Minnesota's Twin Cities (near Northfield)**. There are 28 tillable acres; 12 acres were enrolled in a Conservation Reserve Program contract, which ended in 2019. No house is available. The asking price is \$247,300. Contact: Ken Saucke, 360-943-6607, kensaucke@gmail.com.

◆ Ellen Parker has for sale an urban farm in **Saint Paul, Minn.** It is a city lot and it has had laying hens, a greenhouse, meat and fur rabbits, and other enterprises in a supportive neighborhood. Orchard, berries, grapes, mushrooms, and vegetable beds are all producing. The land has not been sprayed for several years. There is a three-bedroom house. The asking price is \$189,000. Contact: Ellen Parker, 952-454-8967, skymon-keyellen@gmail.com.

◆ Karen Clindaniel has for sale 40 acres of farmland in **northeastern Wisconsin's Door County**. The land consists of 26 tillable acres, forest, and a house. It was previously certified organic, and it has been managed organically for 18 years. There are asparagus beds and 30 fruit trees (apple, pear, cherry, and plum). There is access to farmers' markets and multiple restaurants. Contact: Karen Clindaniel, doorcty40forsale@gmail.com.

A High-Value Apprenticeship

How One Family Launched Their Farm Transition with a Few Trial Runs

When Nathan Vergin applied to work as an apprentice on Polyface Farm in Virginia back in the mid-2000s, he had to undergo a three-day “working interview.” Vergin, who grew up helping out on a sheep dairy near Northfield, Minn., passed the trial by fire, and went on to serve a two-year apprenticeship with the farm’s owner, Joel Salatin, who is well-known within regenerative agriculture circles and the local food movement for his innovations related to raising and marketing pasture-based livestock. That apprenticeship paid off: Nathan eventually launched his own pasture-based meat, egg, and dairy operation on rented land in Virginia. At one point, he and his wife Amy were supplying raw milk to 200 customers a week through a milk share agreement. The hours could be long and grueling, but the knowledge gained about producing and marketing grass-based products was incalculable.

“It was some of the best years of my life,” Vergin says recently as he sits at the kitchen table of a farm near the southeastern Minnesota community of Saint Charles. Nathan reflects on the fact that in a sense, here in Minnesota he and Amy have wrapped up what amounts to a year-long version of a working interview. But instead of an apprenticeship being on the line, the stakes were even higher — the trial period helped determine whether the young couple — she’s 28 and he’s 31 — are the right candidates to eventually take over the dairy operation Arlene and Mel Hershey started on this farm 46-years-ago.

Mel and Arlene, sitting at their own kitchen table just a five-minute drive away, say not only have the Vergins passed the test, but have given them the confidence to move into the next phase of a multi-year plan to pass on the operation’s cattle, equipment, buildings, and land. This is not some-

thing the Hersheys take lightly — over the years they’ve had a handful of apprentices, in addition to their two sons, work these 240 acres of rolling land. In the end, everyone ended up moving on, and these days the older farmers — Mel is 78 and Arlene is 76 — are anxious to be done with apprentices and to hand the operation off to the next generation permanently.

So they’re delighted that during their one-year try-out, and in the 12 months since, the Vergins have proven they can weather a mercurial milk market while rebuilding the infrastructure of an aging dairy. They’ve also laid down roots in the community. Just as importantly, the younger farmers have



Nathan and Amy Vergin, shown here with their children, say the agricultural experience they gained before they met the Hersheys prepared them to take advantage of the opportunity to transition onto the southeastern Minnesota farm. “That experience puts you in a place where you are ready to walk through that door when the door presents itself,” says Nathan. (LSP Photo)

shown they are committed to caring for the land using managed rotational grazing and other techniques to build soil health.

As the Hersheys and the Vergins take the next steps toward passing on the farm, numerous financial, legal, and practical hurdles remain to be cleared. But both families feel a shared vision of sustaining the legacy of an organic dairy that contributes to the vitality of the local community while producing healthy food provides the foundation for

working to overcome those obstacles.

“We can’t always tell what the future has for us, but I feel positive we can do this,” says Arlene.

Refugees from the East

One thing this transition has going for it is that it’s built on a relationship between two families with similar backgrounds and interests. The Vergins moved from Virginia to Minnesota in 2017 to be closer to Nathan’s family. They were also looking for an opportunity to eventually own a farm, something that didn’t look like a possibility back in Virginia. Like the Hersheys, the Vergins are committed to producing organic food and have a strong Christian faith.

Back in the early 1970s, the Hersheys made their own trek from the Eastern U.S. to the Midwest. In their case, they were escaping sprawling development in Pennsylvania that had sent land prices into the stratosphere and was making it difficult to do even basic field work without disturbing neighbors. Back then, land was more affordable in places like southeastern Minnesota, and the Hersheys used tractor trailers to haul their 30-cow dairy herd and equipment to the farm they purchased near Saint Charles. Milk prices were low and these Easterners were new to the neighborhood — the situation didn’t exactly spark confidence amongst other members of the community.

“When we bought the farm, I know the guy we bought it from drove around it many-a-time gritting his teeth,” recalls Mel.

“He was really worried we were doing to go under,” adds Arlene. “When we moved out here, everybody said, ‘You’re never going to survive.’ And a lot of people thought we wouldn’t, but we did.”

Over the years, they built their milking herd up to 70 cows and toughed it out through difficult times, including the 1980s farm crisis, by refusing to take on

big debt loads to expand. At one point, Mel and Arlene were milking three-times-a-day, and an impressive display of Dairy Herd Improvement Association trophies sitting on top of their kitchen cabinets is a testament to the family’s ability to produce milk. But eventually, the focus on all-out production took a toll on the farmers, their animals, and the land.

“It was hard,” recalls Arlene. “Mel would

Apprenticeship, see page 21...

milk in the morning, and then he and I would milk in the afternoon, and then I and one of the kids would milk at night.”

The Hersheys began attending pasture walks led by rotational grazing pioneers like Minnesota’s Art and Jean Thicke. They liked that, although it produced less milk, forage-based production on perennial pastures could make the farm not as reliant on row crops like corn, which produced extreme erosion on the Hersheys’ rolling acres. Once they adopted managed rotational grazing, it seemed a natural to become certified organic, which the family did in the late 1990s.

“I could see that the cows were *so much* healthier organically,” says Arlene.

In the early 1990s, they took on an apprentice who had just graduated from high school. After three years, he left to start his own dairy using cows he had bought from the Hersheys. Mel and Arlene had received family assistance in launching their own dairy in Pennsylvania, and liked the idea of offering a helping hand to other beginning farmers via experience and herd-building.

So, over the years, they hosted a series of apprentices who stayed for varying lengths of time. As the Hersheys grew older, they began to become concerned about finding someone to pass the farm onto. They have two sons, both of whom tried running the farm briefly before moving on. They also have a daughter, who is doing mission work. The Hersheys have developed a living trust so their children will get a portion of their inheritance. But they won’t get the farm — Arlene and Mel have worked hard to find

someone who will continue its legacy as an organic, pasture-based operation.

Nothing to Hide

A few years ago, Arlene attended a Land Stewardship Project workshop on transitioning farms to the next generation (*see sidebar, below*). The workshop featured legal, financial, and estate experts. Just as importantly, it provided an opportunity to talk to other farmers who were also considering how to continue their land’s legacy by passing it on to beginning farmers. One thing the Hersheys learned was that no matter what the circumstances, a successful transition requires time — often years.

One idea the Hersheys came up with was to create a one-year trial period during which an apprentice would be paid a salary and get to live in the house (Arlene and Mel moved into a house near Saint Charles in 2007 when one of their sons was running the dairy) on the farm. After that year was up, if both parties agreed that it was a good fit, then steps would be taken to pass on the farm operation itself to the apprentice. With the help of a farm financial expert, a one-year contract was developed that specified wage amounts and what the apprentice was responsible for.

The Hersheys had a good candidate for passing on the farm in 2017 when a young couple from the area agreed to a one-year trial, moved onto the land, and began milking the cows. But six months into the test run, an employment opportunity emerged for the couple that they felt they couldn’t turn down. The couple agreed to stay working the farm the rest of the 12-month period, but made it clear that after that, they would

be moving back to town.

Fortunately, at about that time the Vergins had heard about the Hershey farm through a mutual acquaintance. Nathan had been managing a dairy herd near Northfield, and his family was ready to find a more permanent home for themselves and their farming aspirations. When he met Arlene, she was impressed that the young farmer had apprenticed with a leader in grass-based farming like Joel Salatin, and she liked that his family seemed committed to staying in the area. They agreed that the Vergins would begin a one-year trial period as employees of the farm as soon as the current apprentices wrapped up their commitment.

So, before the Vergins moved to the farm, Nathan started working with the current apprentice — both to learn the ropes of the system, but also to figure out if this was the right move. After all, why was the current apprentice leaving?

“I found out from talking to him it wasn’t that he wasn’t getting along with Mel and Arlene, or something like that — it was this employment offer he had,” recalls Nathan of his predecessor.

Arlene felt it was important that the Vergins interact with who they were taking over from.

“We left them alone to find out what the farm was like and who we were,” she says. “I think that’s key, just knowing what we are like to work with and why the current couple is leaving. And that’s fair, because people can cover things up.”

In January 2018 the Vergins moved onto the farm with their four young children —

Apprenticeship, see page 22...

LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop Planned for Winter 2020

Are you a farmer or a landowner starting to think about who will be farming your land in the future? The Land Stewardship Project is offering a **Farm Transition Planning Workshop** series this winter in southeastern Minnesota. Participants will hear from professionals regarding financial, tax, and legal implications of farm transitions. In addition, local farmers will tell their stories and share their farm transition experiences. The workshop will be held on Saturdays — **Feb. 1, Feb. 22, and March 14** — from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The series will be held in Red Wing, Minn., and the cost is \$200 per family.

Comments from past Farm Transition Planning Workshops:

- “I saved myself thousands of dollars by coming to this workshop.”
- “We need to consider our values at the same time, as it is not all about the money. The workshop made us really think about the legacy we want to leave behind.”
- “Although we had done some farm transition work prior to this workshop, we still have much to learn. Many farm families are in our same situation, and we were able to learn from the other participants in the program. Each family had a different approach to transition, and hearing these was very helpful. Every story and experience added something to our knowledge.”
- “Farm transition is about life transition. In the longer view, it is our lives that come and go—the farm stays. We pour body and soul into the farm while we are here. It feeds us and many other people and we work to leave the land better than we found it. We will leave it one day, we know that for sure. We hope to see someone else love it as much as we do. Living to see this happen in some form is, to me, the central issue of farm transition.”

Sign-up Today

For more information and to register for LSP’s Farm Transition Planning Workshop, contact LSP’s Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

Farm Transitions

...Apprenticeship, from page 21

Ezekiel, Elizabeth, Titus, and Abigail—and began their one-year trial. The try-out not only provided a good chance to see if the Vergins were cut out for dairying in south-eastern Minnesota, but if the community itself was right for their family.

“It took me awhile to adjust to things here,” says Amy, who grew up in Texas on a farm that at one time was a major honey distributor, and who has a sister who married into the Salatin family. “I didn’t know anybody. Those first five, six months, I was like, ‘Maybe we shouldn’t do this. Maybe we should leave.’ But about the time winter finally stopped in May, life was getting a lot better.”

Arlene treats the Vergin kids like her grandchildren, and the young family found a church to join. When summer finally did arrive, the pastures started to produce and the Vergins got acquainted with other farmers in the community, including a young couple with an organic dairy operation just up the road.

After the year trial, the Vergins decided they were ready to take the next step on the farm. The Hersheys were happy with how the probationary period had gone as well. Arlene was impressed with the family’s work ethic and how they managed the grazing paddocks.

“The pastures look a lot better than when we managed them, to be honest,” she says.

Phasing In

In the past year, the Hersheys and Vergins have begun taking concrete steps toward the eventual handing off of the farm. After an accountant appraised everything, a new five-year contract was drawn up that sets up a schedule for the Vergins to buy out the Hersheys’ cowherd and equipment. The young couple is still drawing a wage from the farm’s earnings, and using that income to pay for the buy-out. This allows the Vergins to build equity, and provides a retirement income for the Hersheys, who didn’t pay much into Social Security over the years.

“When you’re on the farm, guess what you do? You put your income back into the farm,” Arlene says. “I think farmers who are thinking of things like this need to doubly evaluate how much they need to live. That’s

one thing we didn’t think enough about.”

The next key step is transitioning the land itself between the two generations. To handle that, the Hersheys are in the process of setting up a Limited Liability Company (LLC), a structure whereby the owners are not personally liable for the company’s debts or liabilities. By investing in the LLC, the Vergins can begin gaining control of the land. The Hersheys, for their part, can still draw an income off the farm, while making plans to sell it at a discounted price to the beginning farmers. However, if something catastrophic should occur and the Hersheys were forced to sell the farm to, for example, pay for nursing home care, the Vergins would still get to keep what they’ve invested in the farm up until that point.

The Hersheys have also purchased nurs-

like the haying season, Arlene will help out by driving a tractor, which provides a chance to discuss things with Amy and Nathan. She tries to strike a balance of providing input on what worked and didn’t work when she and Mel were farming the land, and letting the Vergins figure things out for themselves. The Hersheys make it clear they know how important it is that farmers transitioning their operations step out of the picture and fade into the background, even though that’s sometimes easier said than done.

“Sometimes I say, ‘I’m going to voice my opinion, but you do what you want,’” Arlene says with a laugh.

At least once a month, Arlene will come to the farm and sit down and go over the bills. She and the Vergins pore over a spreadsheet together to figure out how much



The Hersheys and Vergins hosted a Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship pasture walk in September. The Hersheys say networking played a key role in helping their family transition to grazing, and eventually, organic milk production. Similar networking can help retiring farmers connect with each other and learn tips for passing on their operations to the next generation. “Retiring farmers can share with each other what’s working — or what’s not,” says Arlene. (LSP Photo)

ing home insurance to help cover the cost of care and to put off the time when the farm might have to be sold at top price to pay for healthcare services. If a farm is gifted or sold at a discount, nursing homes where the former owners reside can sometimes claim money they feel is owed because the land didn’t go for what it was valued at by the marketplace. The Hersheys feel that if young farmers like the Vergins are to make it, they need to get access to land at a lower price than what it’s often assessed at.

“I think the key to all this is we can’t sell the land for that outrageous price that a farm is valued at, and expect a farmer to survive,” says Arlene. “It just won’t work.”

All of this requires lots of clear communication — formal and informal — between the two generations. For little things, it’s over the telephone. In addition, during times

income milk checks are bringing in, and how much is available for inputs and other expenses related to daily and long-term operation. The Hersheys still have the farm accounts in their name, but there are plans to pass that on to the Vergins in the near future so they can pay bills directly.

“It’s really helpful to have people be very open on the finances and not going, ‘Oh yeah, everything’s fine,’ and then you go to look at the bills and, ‘Oh no, we’re in the red.’ If we’re in the red, we all know it and we all feel it,” says Amy.

Support Network

On a warm day in mid-September, a dozen or so farmers gather at the Hershey farm for a Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship, see page 23...

(DGA) pasture walk. DGA sets up beginning farmers as apprentices on grazing dairies, and Arlene serves as a master grazer for the initiative. While providing a tour of the paddocks, Nathan describes efforts to control fescue and increase forage production, and participants get a primer from the DGA's Jim Paulson on how to use a pasture stick to measure dry matter content.

The Vergins are milking 50 cows and grazing/haying around 200 acres. With a run of basement-level milk prices, even in the organic market, it's been a tough time to get started in dairying, but the Vergins feel they can keep their costs down via rotational grazing. They also haven't ruled out doing a version of what they did in Virginia: direct

marketing dairy products to consumers; Nathan once apprenticed as a cheesemaker.

It's also helpful to know that the farm's owners were able to gut it through tough times themselves.

"They came through the 80s when everyone was pulling out of farming," says Amy of the Hersheys. "And so I just hear their testimony of how they came through it. They're like, 'I think it's going to be better. You just hold on.'"

When the Hersheys first investigated rotational grazing as a management strategy, they benefited greatly from pasture walks and from the experiences of veteran graziers who had years of successes, and failures, under their belts.

Now that they are passing on the farm to the next generation, a similar support net-

work of retiring farmers is needed to discuss various transitions options, says Arlene, adding that for her, the beginnings of such a network took hold in LSP's Farm Transition Planning Workshop. With all the agricultural land that will become available in coming years, retiring farmers need to not only be talking to beginning farmers, but to each other. And those older farmers need to start while they can still make good decisions. Arlene reflects on how dairy farmers in New Zealand begin serious retirement planning while they are still in their 50s.

"I think you ought to go for that," Mel says to Arlene with a laugh.

Arlene responds: "We've been trying, Mel!" □

Transition Tips from Both Sides of the Fence

Every farm transition is unique, but a few best management practices can be gleaned from the hand-off currently in the process between the Arlene and Mel Hershey and Nathan and Amy Vergin families.

From the Retiring Farmer

→ Start Early

The Hersheys recommend that established farmers start thinking as early as possible about identifying a successor, as well as setting aside money for retirement. "Farmers need to start thinking about this sort of thing before they are so old that they can't think," says Arlene.

→ Seek Professional Help

In preparing contracts and to help with their general transition plans, the Hersheys have consulted a tax expert who specializes in farm businesses, as well as an attorney. In addition, a brother of Arlene's who is an estate planner helped them set up their living trust.

→ Get it in Writing

The Hersheys concede that over the years they've relied a lot on personal connections when it comes to working with apprentices, but that in the end, expectations around payment, responsibilities, and timelines need to be outlined in contracts. Again, they turned to legal and financial experts to help them put these contracts together. "Always do a written contract," says Arlene. "That saved us a lot of heartaches."

→ Do a Trial Period

The use of a one-year contract with paid

apprentices not only helped the Hersheys with labor on the farm, but, as in the case of the Vergins, it eventually identified a successor that wanted to stick around. Arlene makes it clear that she doesn't consider even the apprentices that moved on "misfires," so to speak. Some of them went on to farm elsewhere, and in all cases, she and Mel learned a lot about what does and doesn't work.

"In some cases, these are just people who felt it didn't work for them," says Arlene. "Maybe other people would have counted it as giving up, but I didn't see it that way. We always had a contract with every one of these people so you could separate with no hard feelings. I just counted it as a business thing rather than a hardship."

→ Talk to Other Retiring Farmers

Arlene says participating in the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Transition Planning Workshop (*see page 21*) and getting the insights of financial, legal, and estate planning experts was invaluable. But equally critical was that the workshop gave her an opportunity to hear the stories of other farmers looking to transition their operations. The successes, as well as the challenges, involved with these transitions are a great way to learn, she says. It also provides a basis for developing a network with retiring farmers that can serve as a sort of support group in the future.

From the Beginning Farmer

→ Get Experienced

Nathan and Amy Vergin's number one piece of advice is to get as much hands-on farming experience as possible. Admittedly, not everyone can apprentice on a renowned regenerative farm like Polyface, but they say

they benefited greatly from other farming experiences as well. That work not only gave them the nuts-and-bolts skills to raise livestock on pasture, but provided a sense of what kinds of farming they like and don't like. And such experience can sometimes put you in the right place at the right time to take a key step toward farm ownership or another prime opportunity.

"That experience puts you in a place where you are ready to walk through that door when the door presents itself," says Nathan.

→ Get it in Writing

The Vergins agree with the Hersheys that written contracts and other documentation are key to a good working relationship on a farm, even if a transition is not in the works. Nathan says he learned that early while working at Polyface, where expectations for the apprentice were written down.

"Even if you have a good working relationship, it's good to lay at least some of those things out in a formal document," he says.

→ Seek Out Retired Farmers Who Share Your Vision

Nathan says that it can be difficult to work with a retiring farmer if they don't have a clear vision for their operation's future, or at the least aren't willing to adopt your vision. And if it doesn't look like a particular opportunity is going to work out to your satisfaction, don't be afraid to move on.

"There's other people that are willing to work with you and say, 'Hey, if I see you are willing to put in the effort, then I'm willing to create an opportunity,'" he says.

The Science of Resiliency

The Benefits of WCROC's Ag Research Extend Beyond the Farm Field

As dairy scientist Dr. Brad Heins makes his way up a steep hill above the looping Pomme de Terre River near the town of Morris, dense, dark clouds promise to dump significant moisture in this part of west-central Minnesota. Wash. Soak. Repeat. Seemingly endless rains this spring, summer, and fall have broken records for precipitation amounts, and a cornfield across the fence from the pasture shows the results: between the rows that have been recently cut for silage, the black soil is a liquefied mess and rutted tire tracks are full of pooled water. One would risk losing a boot trekking across that field.

But as he approaches a group of dairy heifers in a paddock set up for rotational grazing, Heins notes how well the pasture is soaking up the excess water. In fact, it's thriving.

"It's amazing how these pastures manage water," says Heins. "Here it is October 1, and we could graze it again, even though we grazed it a few weeks ago. This wet cycle is good for pastures, but not good for crops."

Heins is a researcher at the University of Minnesota's West Central Research and Outreach Center, where these heifers, and that cornfield, are part of ongoing experiments that are examining ways farmers can, among other things, grapple with a climate situation that is challenging traditional ideas about what can be grown where economically and practically. WCROC, as it's known, is the only land grant experiment station in the U.S. where a certified organic dairy herd is being managed next to a conventional herd. In fact, with its 700 acres of chemical-free land, WCROC has more organic crop and pasture acres than any other university research facility in the country. And its work on rotational grazing of dairy cattle has been on the cutting edge since that research was launched in the 1990s by Dr. Dennis Johnson, Heins's predecessor.

But in recent years, it's become clear that the facility's value to agriculture goes beyond what it can contribute to insights on organics and grazing. Everything from

ways to integrate livestock and crops while producing healthier meat and milk, to creating a carbon-neutral farming operation are being investigated on the hilly grounds of WCROC. And as Heins was showing on a recent fall day, this also fits in with how to make farms more resilient in the face of extreme weather conditions brought on by



Dairy scientist Brad Heins says WCROC research shows integrating annual cover crops, perennial forages, and grazing can kick-start biological activity in old pastures. "It's coming back to life, it's thriving," he says of one rejuvenated pasture. (LSP Photo)

climate change. Such research takes the station's relevance beyond the agricultural community, and makes its experiments critical to the public at large. And that's important as Heins and other researchers eye future projects and the need for public funding to support more innovative research.

Crops & Cattle Combined

Back at his office, Heins describes a recent four-year WCROC study that highlighted the importance of developing systems that provide farmers more flexibility financially, agronomically, and climatologically. Researchers took a worn-out pasture and planted it to annual cover crops of rye, wheat, and hairy vetch, which were grazed by dairy cattle. It was then planted to corn one year and soybeans the next — both certified organic. Without adding any fertility other than what the cattle had spread in the form of their manure, the corn yielded 180 bushels per acre, and the soybeans 45 bushels. It was seeded back to perennial pasture, and the grass took off.

"That's probably the best pasture we have here," says Heins, explaining that the combination of diverse crop rotations, manure spread by the rotationally grazed cattle, and the animals' hoof action helped build the biology of the field. "This was a field that we could grow corn and soybeans fulltime on if we wanted to, but it makes more sense to integrate livestock in it as part of a rotation. It's coming back to life, it's thriving."

And as intense rains and other extreme weather conditions make it so farmers can't consistently bank on getting a decent crop of corn and soybeans off a field they've counted on in the past, such flexibility of enterprises is becoming more critical.

With a 120-cow organic herd, and a 150-cow conventional herd, WCROC is also in a prime position to blur the lines between management of those two systems. For example, in a typical growing season, the organic herd can get as much as 90 percent of its dry matter intake from grazing — no surprise there, given organic dairying's reliance on pasture-based feed. But in 2019, the station's conventional herd got around 40 percent of its dry matter from grazing, a surprisingly high amount at a time when more dairies are reliant on total confinement systems that haul in all the cows' feed and haul out all the resulting manure. With the dairy industry in the midst of a financial crisis as a result of low milk prices, ways that all dairy farmers can lower feed costs with the help of, for example, good pasture management, could be key.

Heins says farmers across Minnesota, as well as Iowa and Wisconsin, visit the station looking for information on everything from what forage varieties to grow in pastures to the cattle breeds that do best on grass. That latter question is particularly timely, given that decades of breeding milk cows to do well in confinement has sent graziers looking for more traditional, pasture-friendly breeds. Besides the typical Holstein and Jersey lines, French breeds such as Normande and Montbéliarde, which do particularly well on pasture, are milked at WCROC.

Carrie Redden, who operates an organic dairy with her husband, Derek, 20 miles west of the experiment station, says they have benefited greatly from Heins's research into what pasture mixes to plant, as well as what dairy breeds do well in a grazing system and how wintering dairy cows outside can save costs. The Reddens rotationally graze perennial pastures as well as cover

WCROC, see page 25...

crops, and started shipping organic milk a year-and-a-half ago. Carrie says she'd like to see the station do more research on once-a-day milking and portable shade systems.

"We've modeled most of our system after what they are doing at WCROC," she says. The Reddens even built their organic herd by buying cattle from the station. "It's huge to have this research being done on the same soils under the same weather conditions we are farming under."

A recent twist in the area of grazing forage research is the station's trials related to a form of intermediate wheatgrass called Kernza. Research by the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative shows this plant can produce grain without being replanted for at least three years (*see the No. 2, 2019, Land Stewardship Letter*). And trials conducted by Heins and others show it can also be a good source of grazed forage during those years. For example, WCROC has done a trial where the Kernza grain is harvested in August, the straw baled up, and then the green re-growth is grazed in the fall. It is then allowed to come back as a grain the following growing season, where the cycle starts all over again. WCROC is experimenting with one stand that consists of Kernza interseeded with alfalfa to provide a source of fixed nitrogen.

"There's plenty of forage—far more than I expected," says Heins.

"We learned that mob grazing Kernza in the spring probably doesn't work, but rotationally grazing it in the fall is just wonderful. It provides lots of forage and doesn't set back yields at all."

Benefits Beyond the Farm

Much of WCROC's research related to organic dairying and grazing has roots in 2007 funding LSP members and staff, among others, pushed through the Minnesota Legislature. There was a precedent: LSP had already helped get legislative funding for alternative swine research at the station; that latter research is, for example, looking at ways to add cover crops such as camelina to swine feed rations.

As Carrie Redden points out, doing this kind of research at a public facility in the midst of farm country is key if farmers are to get results that match their local soil, climate, and even marketing conditions. That's the point of having land grant research stations spread throughout farm country, rather than in a couple of concentrated locations.

But such localized, cutting-edge research isn't just important to farmers — the non-farming public must see direct benefits as well if they are to support such research with their tax money. That's why WCROC's dairy research related to two areas of particular interest to the general public — health and climate change — is so exciting.

A few years ago, Heins worked with a team of scientists to collect over 1,000 samples of "grass milk" — milk produced using a 100 percent forage diet — from grazing dairies across the country. They found that no matter where the grass milk was produced, it had higher levels of omega-3, a heart healthy fatty acid, and lower levels of omega-6, which is an unhealthy fatty acid. And, according to the study, a full forage-based diet produces milk with elevated levels of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which



The experiment station is studying how grazing livestock under solar panels can use land efficiently while helping dairies reduce their carbon footprint. (LSP Photo)

is also good for human health.

Increasingly, consumers are also looking for a way to use their buying power to support land management systems that will mitigate the impacts of climate change, or at the least help make the land more resilient in the face of extreme weather. With that in mind, Heins is working with a graduate student to look at grazing dairy cattle under two sets of solar panels that have been set up on extra tall — six-to-eight-feet — pylons to allow for animal movement. The research is not only monitoring what species of forage grow under the panels, but is measuring, with the help of high-tech electronic devices the cows swallow, whether the panels provide enough shade to support herd health and thus good milk productivity.

The solar panels and wind chargers that are on the facility's grounds are part of a bigger plan to transition WCROC's milking parlor to being off the mainstream energy grid. Through such innovations as a reclamation system that removes heat from milk and stores it for the dairy's cleaning system,

Give it a Listen

On episode 233 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Dr. Brad Heins talks about research at the West Central Research and Outreach Center: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1242.

the parlor is already 80 percent toward being a zero-net user of electricity.

Public Investment

But to continue taking this research from the experiment station to the farm field (as well as the supper table) will require increased public support, something that's been in short supply when it comes to agricultural science as legislatures cut land grant budgets in Minnesota and across the country. Public agricultural science funding has been dropping steadily the past two decades. Agribusiness firms do their share of research, but there are concerns that private companies have a narrow, profit-driven research interest that does not necessarily serve the public good. The seed and biotech giant Bayer is not likely to fund research into rotational grazing, for example.

Upgrades are needed at WCROC to keep its current research relevant as well as to allow the station to take on new endeavors. For example, the 1970s-era milking parlor was originally designed for 80 cows. With over 250 animals moving through it a day, milking is an inefficient, time-consuming process and the facility is in need of an overhaul.

In addition, an organic feed mill at the station would allow researchers to experiment with processing and feeding livestock rations, such as Kernza, that go beyond the typical corn-soybean mix.

Heins estimates that a new feed mill and milking parlor would cost around \$8 million. The Land Stewardship Project plans on pushing for this funding in the 2020 legislative session.

To Heins, as economic, agronomic, and climatological conditions become more volatile, such an investment could bolster resiliency well beyond the farm field.

"It benefits all of society." □

The 2020 Legislative Session

The 2020 session of the Minnesota Legislature convenes Feb. 11. For details on the Land Stewardship Project's priorities for the session, contact Bobby King, LSP's Policy and Organizing Program director, at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

Delving Deep into Healthy Soil's Importance

Caves Reveal the Vulnerability of Our Drinking Water Below to Land Use Above

By Shona Snater

While living and working in rural southeastern Minnesota, I have long heard rumors about cavers risking their lives and sanity to discover caverns and underground streams, as well as to conduct general research on our unique “karst geology.”* While meeting farmer Martin Larsen during a Land Stewardship Project soil health one-to-one and learning of his caving experience, the rumors were verified. We exchanged stories of risky adventures beneath the surface. Although my personal experiences were limited to scuba diving in the ocean, Larsen’s outings consist of crawling through pitch-black passages that can be so tight a person has to strip off extra gear and shove it through a pinch point first before wriggling through themselves. It is a claustrophobic nightmare.

For a full year, Martin repeatedly offered me the opportunity to descend into a “wild” cave, one that has not been cleaned or shaped for commercial tours. After running out of excuses and enjoying a beginner-level training at the Spring Valley Caverns, which had been a commercial business at one point, I finally took up the offer to explore Holy Grail Cave near the Iowa border. This turned out to be a fascinating initiation to caving. Holy Grail was discovered in 2008 after a catastrophic supercell rainstorm collapsed the roof of a tall dome. Explorers rappelled 50 feet down into the cave and went on to discover possibly the largest underground system of rooms, passages, pits, and domes in the Minnesota-Iowa-Wisconsin region. It is thought that this cave is part of the huge York/Odesa underground drainage system that explorers have been attempting to enter since the 1800s.

My first descent into Holy Grail started off beautifully—it was sunny and warm with no sign of rain as I drove across a green field to the top of a hill where a few cars were parked next to a metal, human-sized pipe rising from the ground. Six of us got ready by dressing in thick woolen layers and muck boots. We donned helmets with bright lights and pulled on “grippy” gloves. We descended the 60-foot ladder into the darkness, rejecting the open air and sunlight for the tight, chill, quiet atmosphere of the cave.

A wild cave demands much in terms of physicality, psychology, and endurance. Experienced cavers develop a certain walk to navigate the muck-filled tunnels, cutting an edge into the mud with the side of the boot and balancing on the edge of the foot. While circumventing the many gaping, dark holes in the cave dropping into the unknown below, you realize the importance of balance, strength, and trust in your body. We do not often encounter situations of complete darkness and quiet above ground, and it is unnatural for the body to be under 60 feet of limestone. A subconscious panic starts to creep into the body (and eventually the mind) the longer you are literally encased in the crust of the earth. Stories of people “losing their cool” are shared during rest breaks and contribute to the awe and fear of the moment. It is not for the faint-of-heart. Breathing and determination propel you forward.



LSP recently sponsored a tour of Niagara Cave to give farmers and other rural residents a glimpse of how land use on the surface impacts water quality below. (LSP Photo)

Unearthing the Soil-Water Link

So why are we doing this? Yes, there is the adventure of it, but there is also important work to be done. Mapping the underground streams and where they connect to above-ground springs, bat counts (in places like Minnesota, white-nose syndrome has sent bat populations plummeting by up to 94 percent, according to the latest Department of Natural Resources survey), measuring nitrates entering our aquifers, identifying insect species that survive only in these extreme conditions, and age-dating “speleothems” (formations developed after a cave itself is formed) — these are all key tasks to perform in the subterranean world. Much of this information is due to the skill and gumption of citizen scientists like Larsen (see sidebar on page 27). A consistent message being conveyed by people who understand the karst geology is that the cave environment is changing. More sediment washes in with each large rain event, water flow is increasing, foam from liquid manure and other agricultural inputs seeps from the rock pores, and plastic bags, bottles, and other garbage wash in through sinkholes. A once pristine environment that holds and transports our fresh water is becoming increasingly toxic. That’s an important point to keep in mind as one considers that in southeastern Minnesota 100 percent of our drinking water is sourced from underground.

Soil acts as a buffer between earth’s geology and atmosphere. It is what makes our planet so unique and it is the foundation from which biological life, including our own, arises. The more I learn about soil health from our farmers in southeastern Minnesota, the more this message sinks in.

The connection between soil health on the surface and water quality below was hammered home this summer when dairy farmer Olaf Haugen shared his perspectives at a field day LSP hosted at Niagara Cave, a commercial cavern owned by the Bishop family near Harmony, Minn. The event highlighted the challenges of farming in karst country, and the practices that can make it ecologically and economically possible.

Haugen and his family farm 270 hilly acres near Canton, Minn. They milk approximately 150 cows, and raise 45 replacement heifers, along with 20 to 30 steers, annually. Like many farmers in the area, the Haugens grapple with numerous challenges posed by the rugged karst topography.

The farmer explained that the hilly terrain, which has sinkholes, freshwater springs, and other entry points for infiltration, makes him mindful of nutrient runoff in the form of manure and fertilizer, as well

Cave, see page 27...

as soil erosion.

“No matter what practice you’re in — cattle, cropping — that’s definitely a concern,” he said.

But the farmer is able to meet these challenges by producing milk via rotational grazing of perennial pastures, as well as rotational grazing of fields planted to annual cover crops. Such a system not only keeps the ground covered 365-days-a-year, but helps build the kind of root system and organic matter levels that manage water better.

“With these big rainfall events, it can handle a lot more than an unhealthy soil,” said Haugen of his biologically active fields.

Haugen tries to rotate the cows at least every 12 hours, which not only keeps the vegetation from getting overgrazed and speeds recovery, but spreads nutrients in a way that reduces his reliance on purchased fertilizers. He avoids tillage when seeding cover crops and uses as little herbicide as possible — no insecticides or fungicides are used on the Haugen farm.

A system where cows feed themselves

Join the Soil Builders' Network

The Land Stewardship Project invites crop and livestock farmers to join the Soil Builders' Network to get regular updates on workshops, field days, and on-farm demonstrations, as well as soil health and cover crop research. For more information, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders or call 507-523-3366.

and spread their own manure allows the Haugens to produce milk at lower cost than their counterparts who rely on expensive cropping equipment, as well as manure handling/ storage facilities and massive animal housing infrastructure.

It's all about vegetative cover: a field that's black and exposed is not doing its job, either ecologically or economically. “I don't want an acre out there that's bare at any time,” the farmer said.

That makes the landscape resilient at a time when extreme weather is dumping more precipitation in shorter bursts.

A Flood of Information

After exploring our natural plumbing system most of the day, I climbed the ladder back out of Holy Grail Cave with an increased appreciation of healthy soils and

our karst landscape. Farmers' words of soil wisdom ran through my mind as I considered the relationship between land, water, and climate change, especially as I surfaced to an unexpected, roaring thunderstorm which ended up dropping five inches of rain in two hours. The cave I just emerged from would be filled to the ceiling with sediment-laden water within the hour. □

Shona Snater co-directs LSP's Bridge to Soil Health Program. She can be contacted at 507-523-3366 or ssnater@landstewardshipproject.org.

** Karst is a system of limestone that is full of cracks, gaps, and holes through which water passes quickly and easily, often forming caverns and tunnels.*

Soil Health & Water: A Caver-Farmer's Point of View

Martin Larsen has waded through underground water that was full of manure, seen eroded soil cake cavern walls, watched as sinkholes are filled to the brim by rainstorms, and noted with alarm rising nitrate levels in groundwater beneath crop fields. As an avid caver who can spend as much as 500 hours a year poking around in the dark recesses of southeastern Minnesota's karst geology, he says it's hard to ignore the obvious: our underground aquifers are more threatened than ever.

But as a farmer who also works for the Olmsted County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Larsen draws hope from the crop and livestock producers who are interested in building the kind of soil health that can not only better manage the water that's flowing into the karst, but clean up the chemicals and nutrients that wreak havoc with the aquatic ecosystem.

As extreme storm events brought on by climate change move more water faster through the karst, it's become evident that even best management practices that adhere to suggested nitrogen fertilizer rates and that are timed correctly aren't producing drinkable water below row crops, says

Larsen, who is a member of LSP's Soil Builders' Network (see sidebar above).

“One of the only things we've found that moves the bar on nitrate leaching below row crops is to introduce a cover crop,” he says, explaining that cover crops like rye can scavenge excess nitrogen in the soil profile and make it available for crops later. The root systems of cover crops can also help build organic matter levels, which makes it possible for a field to soak up water and allow it to percolate through the soil profile, rather than leave quickly in overland runoff.

For example, recent research done at the Olmsted County Soil Health Farm, which the SWCD manages, shows that nitrate concentrations in water leaving a soybean field were 13.14 parts per million. Cover cropping lowered that level to 8.84 parts per million, which is below the safe drinking water standard of 10 parts per million.

Larsen says he's seen the benefits of cover cropping — higher organic matter levels and less crusting at the surface — on the 700 acres of corn and soybeans he raises in southeastern Minnesota, and has worked with several farmers in recent years who are successfully building soil

health. And an increasing number of farmers are feeling the pressure to bolster the resiliency of their soils, especially in a year like 2019, when extreme moisture levels created fields so saturated it was difficult to raise even a modest corn crop in them. Rapid, frequent movement of water and any contaminants that it carries isn't just bad for the land and water, it's costly to farmers.

For example, monitoring shows that during one 24-hour-period in 2018, over 1,500 pounds of nitrogen was discharged in the form of nitrate by a single spring in southeastern Minnesota. Larsen's calculations show that translates into \$35 worth of nitrogen being pumped out per hour — and that's just one spring.

“We manage for weeds, we manage for bugs, we manage for diseases, and we manage for marketing,” says the farmer. “Let's not forget conservation, or we won't have to worry about those other things.”



Martin Larsen

Give it a Listen

On episode 231 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, farmer and caver Martin Larsen describes the connections between land use on the surface and water quality problems he sees underground: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1224.



Fruitful Labor The Ecology, Economy, and Practice of a Family Farm

By Mike Madison
2018; 164 pages
Chelsea Green Publishing
www.chelseagreen.com

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

Fruitful Labor: *The Ecology, Economy, and Practice of a Family Farm* is part of Chelsea Green Publishing's New Farmer Library, an entertaining and informative farmer-authored series that includes the late Gene Logsdon's *Letter to a Young Farmer* and Michael Foley's *Farming for the Long Haul*.

Taken individually, each of these works provides a wealth of information, and inspiration, for anyone exploring farming as a new career. Madison's *Fruitful Labor* makes for a good addition to this series by diving deep into his use of agroecology to produce olives, apricots, citrus fruits, melons, and flowers in northern California's Sacramento Valley. Madison takes great pains to describe the "human" background to this 21 acres of land, from its historical beginnings as part of a Mexican land grant to its current manifestation as a working farm.

But he also makes it clear the importance of "natural" history to the success of his farm. Wildlife that live on and near this operation play just as important a role as the orchards and garden plots.

"On my farm, the creek hosts beavers, river otters, and mink, as well as an abundance of fish and turtles," writes Madison proudly. Not many farmers can boast that

they have chinook salmon spawning in their creek. Madison can.

But these are not just idle observations about nature for entertainment's sake. They reflect the author's understanding of the importance of the natural world in creating a sustainable farm. The importance of integrating ecological principles into working lands management has been described in Wendell Berry writings, as well as in Brian DeVore's recent book, *Wildly Successful Farming: Sustainability and the New Agricultural Land Ethic*. Madison lays out in detail how "agroecology" drives his management in both the "narrow" and "broad" sense.

In the narrow sense, it means paying attention to "nutrient cycling, water relations, energy flow, canopy structure, interactions among species, population dynamics, phenology, and succession," writes Madison. In the broader sense, Madison makes the argument that agroecology encompasses big picture issues that impact a farm, from the structure of markets and the way international trade is carried out, to the influence of land grant institutions and corporate cartels.

Madison, who once worked as a naturalist in the tropics, makes it clear his philosophy of land management goes beyond basic agroecology and adheres to "deep ecology."

"Deep ecology is an environmental philosophy that advocates the rights and values of all species regardless of their utility to human enterprises," he writes.

But this is not just a book-length philo-

sophical essay on ecology. Madison is about helping the next generation integrate the principles of ecology into creating a successful working farm. In many ways, this work resembles a training manual for beginning farmers.

He includes extensive graphs, charts, and illustrations—even tax forms. There is an "Abbreviated Almanac" that takes the reader through a 12-month cycle of the tasks that have to be performed on the farm.

Madison doesn't sugarcoat it: farming is hard work, and everything from cyclical

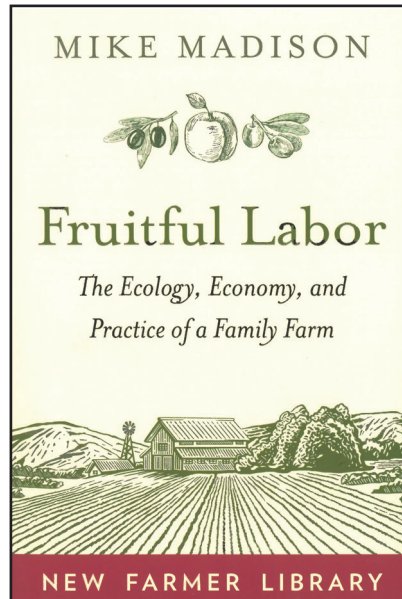
markets to volatile politics don't make it any easier. And Madison faces a challenge that will be familiar to any farmer, whether they are in California or Minnesota: finding someone to take over an operation he and his wife Dianne have worked so hard to steward and improve. He briefly touches on an arrangement they have with a young couple who are leasing olive trees from them as a way to get their foot in the door of farming.

Madison says he and Dianne don't plan on selling the land to the couple, but in a sense, it will become "theirs" as the older farmers slow down and step back,

happy in the knowledge that this land's long, deep human and natural history makes their presence just a blip in time.

Writes Madison, "We consider it a great privilege to have been entrusted with care of a beautiful and productive parcel of land all these years." □

Land Stewardship Project member Dale Hadler lives in southeastern Minnesota.



Farming for the Long Haul Resilience and the Lost Art of Agricultural Inventiveness

By Michael Foley
2019; 272 pages
Chelsea Green Publishing
www.chelseagreen.com

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

As part of Chelsea Green Publishing's New Farmer Library series, *Farming for the Long Haul: Resilience and the Lost Art of Agricultural*

Inventiveness provides a nice "contextual" bookend to this trio of books.

The author, Michael Foley, operates Green Uprising Farm and is the cofounder of the School of Adaptive Agriculture. He believes that in order to take farming down an innovative, regenerative path, we need to know more about its roots. Too often, people assume that farming and our food system have "always been this way" and thus are impervious to change.

But Foley's lively book provides beginning farmers—and anyone, for that matter—a deep philosophical understanding of where agriculture has been, and possibly where we can take it. He describes the historical

context of the legal underpinning of modern agriculture, including how the concept of the commons evolved and was later replaced by the private property model of today. Private property practices were developed to minimize the rights of woman and served to encourage the use of peasants and, in the case of the Americas, slaves, to produce agricultural commodities.

These practices frequently undermine community building, especially when the land falls into the hands of fewer and fewer people, as we've seen with large corporate-controlled holdings in the United States

Long Haul, see page 29...

and, in the case of the former Soviet Union, collective farms. By the way, it turns out many Soviet-era farm workers had their own gardens to supplement the meager food produced by the inefficient state collectives.

Although Foley describes in detail the economic, ecological, and societal damage created by large holdings, he also argues that such control and management of land is not the norm everywhere.

There are still groups of people that practice “community” agriculture, such as the Amish here in the U.S. and many societies in the rice growing regions of Asia, as well as some isolated indigenous communities in Africa and South America. Foley argues that these communities may have lessons to teach as we struggle with the downsides of a private landowner society.

Unlike Gene Logsdon who, in *Letter to a Young Farmer* (see the no. 2, 2018, Land Stewardship Letter) wrote from a very personal perspective as a dying man who wanted to pass his knowledge on to future generations, Foley uses a more global approach. He describes a variety of farming systems from literally around the world.

In the process of describing global agricultural history, Foley also tells the story of some of the populist movements that attempted to address the inequities of laws and

policies that hampered the abilities of farmers wishing to get their product to a market that would provide them a fair price.

“Farmers, [economists] acknowledge, are price-takers not price-makers,” writes Foley. “But the economists believe in a self-equilibrating model of market behavior.

Alas, the economists’ God (that is, the Model) gives no thought to the wrecked lives, lost topsoil, or abandoned communities that the market leaves behind in the process of ‘reaching a new equilibrium.’ All those lost farmers are just so much fodder for the efficient market game.”

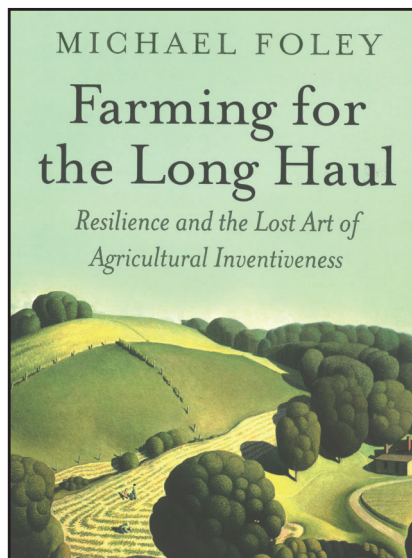
Throughout history, there have been numerous attempts to put market and economic power in the hands of farmers. For example, the Grange — also known as the Patrons of Husbandry — was founded after the Civil War by Minnesotan Oliver Kelly. The Grange fought a series of economic and legislative battles against the monopolistic power that allowed the railroads to charge whatever they wanted to ship farm products to market. Partly because

of Kelly’s brilliant ability to organize farmers, the movement had concrete successes, particularly on the state level. Given the rampant concentration in today’s agribusiness market, a powerful nationwide farmer-led movement like this is needed now more than ever.

Foley clearly understands both the history of farming—all the way back to the stone age—as well as current problems, such as consolidation of farmland and climate change. He does not discourage people from pursuing agriculture, but paints a realistic picture of the challenges they will face.

But that’s why it can be useful to read a book like this that takes the long view of people, land, and how agriculture defines the relationship between the two. The industrialization of society will come and go, but a human-scale, regenerative system for producing food will survive under the radar, waiting for a chance to return resilience to the land and our communities.

“Like every farming culture before us — indeed every culture before us — we are in this for the long haul,” writes Foley. □

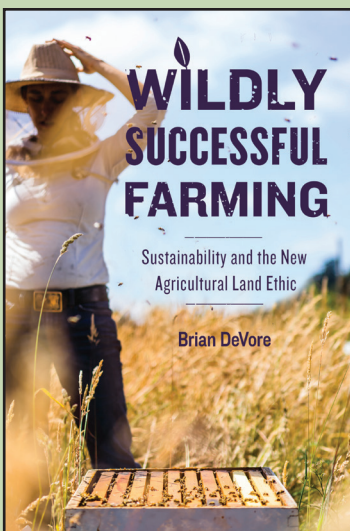


Wildly Successful Farming Out in Paperback in 2020

The University of Wisconsin Press has announced that *Wildly Successful Farming: Sustainability and the New Agricultural Land Ethic* will be issued as a paperback in 2020.

Written by *Land Stewardship Letter* editor Brian DeVore, the book, which was originally released as a hardcover in fall 2018, tells the stories of farmers who are balancing viable food production with environmental sustainability and a “passion for all things wild.” They are using innovative techniques and strategies to develop their “wildly successful” farms as working ecosystems. Several Land Stewardship Project farmer-members are featured in *Wildly Successful Farming*.

DeVore will be giving a *Wildly Successful Farming* presentation Feb. 6 in Rice Lake, Wis. For information on that event and details on ordering copies, see www.wildlysuccessfulfarming.com. Copies are also available by calling 1-800-621-2736 or through local bookstores.



“I could not help but feel wildly optimistic for a future when, while driving down country roads, one is never sure whether he or she is driving past a farm or a wilderness preserve, or maybe both... I enjoyed Brian DeVore’s book.” — **Practical Farmers of Iowa**

“DeVore’s valuable insights broaden the book’s scope beyond storytelling to address fundamental issues like responsible agriculture and climate change. *Wildly Successful Farming* is a book with a vital message.” — **ForeWord**

“This uplifting book documents the successes of Midwestern farmers who do not follow mainstream conventions of agriculture as they achieve greater diversity, satisfaction, and sometimes profit on their land.” — **Choice**

Talking Wildly Successful Farming

The “Talking Wildly Successful Farming” web page features Land Stewardship Project *Ear to the Ground* podcast interviews with some of the farmers, natural resource professionals, and scientists who are featured in the *Wildly Successful Farming* book. Check it out at www.wildlysuccessfulfarming.com.



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Membership Update

Member Voices

The True Meaning of Stewardship

By Beth Slocum

This past summer, I spent a lot of time in long sleeves, long pants, boots and leather gloves, chopping wild parsnip out of our hilly pastures and hay fields. It was sweaty work, and when my husband came out to check on me one afternoon, he commented on how patient he thought I was to chop out each stalk one-by-one. Patient, perhaps...but mostly I was thinking about our old Swedish farmer-neighbor, Carl Kullberg, now gone, and how he took care of these same fields.

Long after he and his wife Hazel stopped milking their cows and he finally sold the heifers he grazed on these hillsides, Carl came out every pleasant day to maintain these pastures, even though he was in his 80s. He cut hay once each summer, made small square bales that I loaded onto his hay wagon and took back to my barn for our sheep and goats. Then Carl would spend more pleasant days with his shovel and axe, digging and chopping out the small trees that wanted to encroach on these hilly pastures, his "park" as Hazel called it. He never hurried.

This work was the work of stewardship, and Carl taught me what that means — careful, thoughtful, deliberate and patient attention to what the land needs. And it's not just how we care for the land, but how we care for all our resources — our water and

air, our livestock, our food production, our families, our neighbors.

To me an ethic of stewardship — which is at the heart of the Land Stewardship Project's mission — means doing good by the land, the animals, and the people we are connected to. It means being responsible for creating the best living conditions for our soil, our plants, our livestock, and our people, so that we all thrive. And to do that with each other.



Beth Slocum

"With each other" matters. Stewardship requires a heart for the common good, like my neighbor, Brad. Just up the hill not quite a mile from our place, Brad runs a successful second-generation dairy and several hundred acres of row crops and hay, planted in contours that hug the gentle slopes, holding the soil in place. He builds soil health by planting cover crops after an early corn silage harvest. His folks, retired for many years, still live on the place, and they occasionally drive tractor or help in the milking parlor. Mostly what I see on Brad's farm are families living together on the land with the crops and cows that they nurture — and the relationships they nurture throughout our farming community. Brad makes hay for us and for other neighbors who don't have the necessary equipment; he answers calls for help and harvests and hauls for other farmers without any hesitation. He connects with farmers who are struggling and gives them reassurance,

with local bankers figuring out how to help farmers stuck in the mire of trade wars, with the local young folks working for him who learn his easy manner and kindness. This is stewardship of us — of our families and our community — for our common good.

That sense of common good, of sharing, is what has grown the Land Stewardship Project's Soil Health Program from a handful of people to over 700 farmers who gather for pasture walks and field days, sharing their experience and knowledge, their successes and failures. By starting with soil, we can sharpen our vision of the land that we are stewards of, land that we are responsible for. Thinking of "the land" can help us understand that land itself has an inherent value that goes beyond the "price-per-acre" calculation. And that is where we start with our understanding of stewardship. When we think about soil, we come closer to understanding our land as a living organism that we have a collective responsibility to protect and nurture, in the same way we have a collective duty to protect our families, our children, our communities.

Recently, I saw how this idea of soil health and the practices that promote it operate on another family farm in Goodhue, Minn. It was a cold rain that kept falling on me and the nearly 20 farmers who came out to see what another two-generation family farm was doing with its beef cattle herd and row crops, some organic, some conventional. We rode on a hay wagon to see a beautiful, healthy, energetic cow-calf herd owned by Jon, Jared, and Valerie Luhman. Jared demonstrated how they rotate the cows from paddock-to-paddock; in one, rolling out big round bales for the cattle to graze as a nutri-

Volunteer for LSP

Volunteers are key to the Land Stewardship Project's work. If you would like to volunteer in one of our offices, for an event, or at a meeting, contact:

- **Montevideo, Minnesota**

Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105
tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org

- **Lewiston, Minnesota**

Karen Benson, 507-523-3366
karenb@landstewardshipproject.org

- **Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Clara Sanders Marcus,
612-722-6377
cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org.

In Memory & in Honor...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gifts made to honor and remember loved ones and friends:

In Memory of Dick Gustafson

◆ Kathleen Wold

In Memory of Ardath Luikens

◆ Richard Storrow

In Honor of Ariel Kagan & Brian Dockstader

◆ Elizabeth Stahl

To donate to LSP in the name of someone, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org. Donations can be made online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate.

Stewardship, see page 31...

Support LSP in Your Workplace

The Land Stewardship Project is a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, which is a coalition of environmental organizations in Minnesota that offers 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.

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 to give through the Minnesota Environmental Fund, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For details, contact LSP's Amelia Shoptaugh at amelias@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.



...Stewardship, from page 30

tional balance to all the wet forage, and, in another, using a mix of a dozen or so annual cover crops for high quality forage. The rain never stopped. But neither did the folks who had come to learn from the Luhmans. We walked out to see a sorghum field that had been grazed, now ready for the next crop to go in — a success. We also rode through a sudangrass paddock that was not so much of a success — it turns out the cattle didn't like the forage growing there very much. We looked at soil turned up with a shovel at several locations, information that would help determine what crops or forage could be used to build better soil structure. We saw how a compaction monitor could provide information about soil conditions after graz-

ing. We heard continuous conversation about how these family farmers think deeply about every acre of their land, how they determine what will be the best next "experiment" to improve their soil, grow their crops and cattle, and make the "numbers" — make a profit, a profit that will allow them, their livestock, and crops to regenerate and keep this family on the land.

So stewardship is not just about goodwill and generosity to your neighbors, or cleaning up the weeds in your hay field. It's also about using the ethic, the principles of stewardship, to be sure that farm families can thrive on the land while producing food. Good stewardship means caring about the big picture — supporting rural communities and shopping at Main Street businesses. But it also means knowing our soil, its life and its needs, so we can build on our steward-

ship values, literally from the ground up.

Where we need this sense of stewardship most is in the hearts and minds of our elected officials, our leaders, at all levels. The conversation needs to broaden, and we need to continually remind our public officials of their responsibility to be good stewards of our natural resources and our human resources, to promote health and well-being, to nurture our land and our people for the greater good and for the long term. □

LSP member Beth Slocum and her husband, Robin Brown, raise sheep in southeastern Minnesota. They direct market all their pasture-raised lambs, which are rotationally grazed on grass-alfalfa-clover fields that are being improved using the stewardship principles of soil health.

LSP Neighbors Coming Together

Members of the Land Stewardship Project came together in November to discuss strategies for addressing the farm crisis.

"We as neighbors need to work together," LSP organizer and farmer Paul Sobocinski told the participants, who had gathered in Lewiston in southeastern Minnesota.

This is the first in a series of farm crisis meetings LSP will be holding this winter — check the calendar on page 32 and at www.landstewardship-project.org for details. For more on LSP's farm crisis work, see pages 10-11. (LSP Photo)





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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **JAN. 9—LSP Farm Crisis Forum**, Granite Falls, Minn. Contact: Scott DeMuth, LSP, 320-269-2105, sdemuth@landstewardshipproject.org
→ **JAN. 20—LSP Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farm Directory Deadline** (see page 6)
→ **JAN. 25—Mitigating Damage to Water & Soil**, Owatonna, Minn. Contact: Caroline van Schaik, caroline.ikesumri@gmail.com
→ **JAN. 24-25—Emerging Farmers Conf. (Formerly Immigrant & Minority Farmers Conf.)**, U of M, St. Paul campus. Contact: Mhonpaj Lee, The Food Group, mhlee@thefoodgroupmn.org, 651-504-8105, www.bigriverfarms.org/about-efc
→ **JAN. 29—Soil Health, Grazing & Finances with Grant & Dawn Breitreutz, Tom Cotter & Myron Sylling**, Elgin, Minn. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366
→ **JAN. 30—Soil Health, Grazing & Finances with Grant & Dawn Breitreutz**,

Tom Cotter & Myron Sylling, Ridgeway, Iowa. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366
→ **JAN. 30—LSP Dairy Crisis Meeting**, Greenwald, Minn. Contact: Tom Nuessmeier, LSP, tomm@landstewardshipproject.org, 507-995-3541
→ **FEB. 1—LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Red Wing, Minn. (see page 21)
→ **FEB. 6—Brian DeVore Wildly Successful Farming presentation**, Rice Lake, Wis. Contact: www.wildlysuccessfulfarming.com
→ **FEB. 11—2020 Minnesota Legislature Convenes**, Saint Paul, Minn.
→ **FEB. 12—LSP Farm Crisis Forum**, Elgin, Minn. Contact: Karen Stettler, LSP, 507-523-3366, stettler@landstewardshipproject.org
→ **FEB. 13—LSP Dairy Crisis Meeting/ Farm Crisis Forum**, Preston, Minn. Contact: Karen Stettler, LSP, 507-523-3366, stettler@landstewardshipproject.org
→ **FEB. 21—LSP Conservation Leases Workshop**, Mankato, Minn. Contact: Robin Moore, LSP, 320-269-2105, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **FEB. 22—LSP Farm Transition Workshop**, Red Wing, Minn. (see page 21)
→ **FEB. 28—I-90 Soil Health Tour with Rick Clark**, Stewartville, Minn. Contact: Olmsted County SWCD, 507-328-7070
→ **MARCH 5—Regenerative Agriculture Presentation by Dr. Jonathan Lundgren of Blue Dasher Farm**, Caledonia, Minn. (Day) Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366
→ **MARCH 5—Regenerative Agriculture Presentation by Jonathan Lundgren of Blue Dasher Farm**, Austin, Minn. (Night) Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366
→ **MARCH 6—Regenerative Agriculture Presentation by Jonathan Lundgren of Blue Dasher Farm**, Rice County, Minn. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366
→ **MARCH 14—LSP Farm Transition Workshop**, Red Wing, Minn. (see page 21)
→ **MARCH 31—15th Annual LSP Family Farm Breakfast & Day at the Capitol**, St. Paul, Minn. Contact: Emily Minge, LSP, 612-722-6377, eminge@landstewardshipproject.org

Go Public With Your LSP Support

There are numerous fun ways you can show your support for the Land Stewardship Project. LSP has available for purchase t-shirts (\$20), window decals (\$3), tote bags (\$15) and, marking the return of a classic, “Let’s Stop Treating our Soil Like Dirt” bumper stickers (\$3). All of these items can be ordered from our online store at www.landstewardshipproject.org/store. Some items may also be available from our offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105), or Minneapolis (612-722-6377), as well as at Land Stewardship Project events and meetings.



T-shirt



Window Decal



Tote Bag



Bumper Sticker