

# Land Stewardship Project Staff Changes

Name an issue the Land Stewardship Project has worked on, and **Paul Sobocinski** has probably organized around it during the past quarter-century. Sobocinski, one of agriculture's most effective and experienced grassroots organizers, has retired from LSP.

Since joining LSP's staff in 1995, he has organized around issues related to factory farms, maintaining a strong corporate farm law, concentration in the livestock markets, local government control, funding for sustainable agriculture research, and healthcare reform.



**Paul Sobocinski**

Sobocinski, who raises hogs near Wabasso in southwestern Minnesota, also played a major role in a campaign undertaken by LSP and other members of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment to eliminate the national pork checkoff program and the harmful impacts it was having on farmers like him.

Before coming to LSP, Sobocinski had extensive organizing experience, and had worked to prevent farm foreclosures during the 1980s farm crisis. Most recently, his work had come full circle, when Sobocinski worked with other LSP staff and members to push Minnesota state officials to support farmers suffering through the current economic crisis.

**Karen Benson** recently departed LSP



**Karen Benson**

after 22 years managing the organization's office in Lewiston, Minn. Over the years, Benson not only served as the administrator of the office, but played a key role in managing the logistics of countless field days, workshops, and member meetings. This required hundreds of hours of behind-the-scenes work to make sure things ran smoothly. She also worked with hundreds of prospective farmers while coordinating the application process for LSP's Farm Beginnings course and its scholarship program.

After ending his 23-year tenure as LSP's executive director in 2016, **George Boody** launched a second career at the organization by coordinating science-based endeavors related to the role regenerative agriculture could play in mitigating climate change and cleaning up our water. With the publication of a comprehensive report on the Chippewa 10% Project this fall (*see page 15*), Boody has wrapped up that stage of his career as well, and has officially retired from LSP.

After becoming executive director of the organization in 1993, Boody guided it through a period of rapid growth. During his tenure, LSP became a membership organization, as well as launched the Community Based Foods, Farm Beginnings, and Soil Health programs. The organization also expanded greatly its organizing and policy work during this time. While serving as executive director, Boody found time to launch and help coordinate key initiatives, including the highly respected Monitoring Project and the Chippewa 10% Project. Both served as foundations for LSP's current soil health and climate change work. In fact, long before it was popular, Boody pushed LSP and other sustainable agriculture organizations to get involved with issues related to the role farming could play in heading off climate disaster.

Perhaps it's fitting, therefore, that one of Boody's last projects as an LSP employee was the writing of the white paper "Farm-

ing to Capture Carbon & Address Climate Change Through Building Soil Health" (*see page 11*).

Boody continues to be involved in issues surrounding developing practical regenerative farming systems in the Midwest: during the past year, he has served as the Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems at the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable, through which he has been researching ways to integrate managed rotational grazing systems into cropping operations.



**George Boody**

When **Terry VanDerPol** joined LSP's staff in 1997, she brought with her an extensive background in community organizing and a passion for agriculture that was rooted in her upbringing on a western Minnesota farm. By the time she retired this fall, VanDerPol had coordinated a number of key initiatives at LSP, including the Chippewa 10% Project. As the director of the Community Based Food Systems Program, VanDerPol guided LSP's work with a variety of communities that were

interested in developing a more sustainable food and farm system. Most recently, that involved a collaboration with Hope Community in the Phillips Neighborhood of Minneapolis and playing a lead role in the Twin Cities Good Food Purchasing Program, which is working to transform

**Staff, see page 7...**



**Terry VanDerPol**

the way public institutions purchase food by creating a transparent and equitable food system built on five core values: local economies, health, valued workforce, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability.

Whether working on issues related to the positive role agriculture can play in improving the environment or on how to make the food produced on local farms more accessible to everyone, VanDerPol has been particularly effective because of her personal background as a grass-based beef producer in western Minnesota.

**Doug Nopar** was one of the first community organizers hired by LSP co-founder Ron Kroese back in the early 1980s. Since then, he has worked on everything from helping local communities fight factory farms and supporting migrant workers in their efforts to be treated fairly to spearheading LSP's nationally recognized soil health work. In



**Doug Nopar**

December, Nopar left the organization after over three decades of service.

Soon after joining LSP in 1984, Nopar, along with his wife JoAnn Thomas, organized meetings in South Dakota counties experiencing high erosion rates. He eventually became director of LSP's southeastern Minnesota office in Lewiston and helped pioneer the use of small group discussions at the organization's meetings. Nopar also helped organize the Stewardship Farming Program, a breakthrough four-year project that brought together 25 farm families to discuss ways of promoting and practicing a stewardship ethic on the land.

Working with former executive director Mark Schultz, Nopar pushed for LSP to get involved in racial justice issues, particularly as they relate to immigrant farmworker rights. Nopar has always believed in the key

role cultural programming can play in advancing farmland stewardship. Inspired by how LSP's *Planting in the Dust* play helped communities grapple with soil stewardship issues in the 1980s, Nopar later wrote a one-act play of his own, *Look Who's Knockin'*, which focused on the challenge of transferring farms between generations. In 2020, he worked with musician Bret Hesla to develop LSP's first music videos (see page 21).

Given Nopar's early LSP experience working on erosion issues, it's appropriate that one of his last endeavors at the organization was the launching of the Bridge to Soil Health Program, which, through its Soil Builders' Network, has become a model for organizing farmers around profitable and practical regenerative production techniques that are passed on via peer-to-peer learning (see page 15).

After five years directing LSP's work on federal farm policy, **Tom Nuessmeier** has left the organization's staff to devote more time to farming and his family. Nuessmeier, who raises crops and livestock in southern Minnesota's Le Sueur County, first became involved with the organization's work on policy as a member when he joined LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee in 2009.

Since joining LSP's staff in 2015, he has worked on analyzing and evaluating federal



**Tom Nuessmeier**

farm policy and programs from the standpoint of small and medium-sized farms. He also served on local and national committees related to federal farm policy and played a key role in two special reports LSP produced on crop insurance reform.

In recent years, Nuessmeier helped LSP farmer-members take their demands for ag policy reform directly to policymakers when he organized visits with members of Congress, both in Washington, D.C., and on Midwestern farms. He worked extensively with journalists to make LSP a significant voice in regional and national media.

During the past two years, Nuessmeier was part of a major LSP effort to organize farmers and other rural residents around policy issues related to the farm crisis. These efforts culminated in a petition drive and gathering in Mankato, Minn., in February, where LSP members from across Minnesota spoke to state Commissioner of Agriculture Thom Petersen and Attorney General Keith Ellison about what programs need to be instituted and regulations enforced to support small and medium-sized farmers.

**Bairet Eiter** has joined LSP's Bridge to Soil Health Team. Eiter has a bachelor's degree in crop and soil science, with an emphasis on sustainable agriculture and a minor in dairy science, from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

She recently worked as a cover crop specialist for Albert Lea Seed House, where she assisted farmers with seed selection for pastures, forages, and perennial cover crops. Eiter has also worked as a milking assistant at a dairy farm, as well as an assistant store manager at a food co-op.

Eiter can be contacted at [beiter@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:beiter@landstewardshipproject.org). □



**Bairet Eiter**

## Driessen Joins LSP Board

**L**aurie Driessen has joined the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors. Driessen and her family raise crops and livestock near Canby in southwestern Minnesota and she has spent several decades advocating for providing quality services to individuals with disabilities and the elderly.

During the past few years, she has been involved with LSP's Affordable Healthcare for All work, during which she spoke to policymakers and the media about the important role programs like MinnesotaCare and MNsure play in providing affordable healthcare to farmers and other rural residents. She has pushed the message that state budget cuts in health and human services programs are particularly harmful for the elderly and disabled people. □



**Laurie Driessen**