

with the Minnesota Congressional delegation. We joined our partner, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, to gather signatures on a policy letter (<https://bit.ly/2VM2d5u>). In August, the letter, which was signed by 2,100 U.S. farmers and ranchers, was delivered to the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis.

In addition, LSP members have joined federal lobbying efforts to share innovative crop rotation and cover cropping practices, to show how severe weather damages their vegetable crops, and to advocate for policy that invests in farmers and local communities. For Karin and Dana Jokela of Sogn Valley Farm in southeastern Minnesota, this hits close to home for their vegetable operation.

“This year our farm was hit by a fast and furious hailstorm,” says Karin. “Farms across the nation are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the hazardous impacts of climate change. We need collective, landscape-scale adoption of conservation practices to mitigate the impacts of future extreme

weather events, and to build economic and ecological resilience in rural communities.”

One exciting example of a proactive policy proposal is the Agriculture Resilience Act, authored by Chellie Pingree, a U.S. Representative from Maine. It would expand funding and add soil health and climate criteria for working lands conservation programs, invest in transitioning to alternative manure management programs, and increase set-asides for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.



The pepper crop on Sogn Valley Farm in Minnesota was exposed to severe storm damage in 2020. “Farms across the nation are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the hazardous impacts of climate change,” says Sogn Valley’s Karin Jokela. (Photo by Karin Jokela)

LSP’s Soil Health and Climate Organizing Committee asked Minnesota U.S. Representative Angie Craig to support the Agriculture Resilience Act.

“We felt it was important because it would incentivize extensive implementation of more sustainable, regenerative farming practices,” says Jokela.

Next Steps

The Land Stewardship Project is committed to working in partnership with farmers, allied organizations, and policymakers to build a broad base of folks that can win policy that supports a regenerative and eq-

uitable farm and food system. Organizing is essential to making sure that the voices and experiences of people living and working across Minnesota and beyond are included.

“In all of these issues, we need to remember that there’s people behind it,” says Lenz. “Whatever change we make, whether good or bad, it’s going to have an impact on someone. If we want to make real effective change, we need to look at people first.”

Tom Cotter agrees that when it comes to long-term change, it’s about people-to-people connections. “It’s just one farmer at a time is what it takes,” he says, “two or three spread to two or three more.” □

Jessica Kochick is an LSP policy organizer. If you are interested in getting involved in the Land Stewardship Project’s soil health and climate policy work, contact LSP’s Amanda Koehler at akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-400-6355, or Kochick at jkochick@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-400-6349.

Carbon Farming’s Climate Change Potential

The Land Stewardship Project recently published “Farming to Capture Carbon & Address Climate Change Through Building Soil Health,” a white paper by George Boody that describes how farming systems that build healthy soil can lower greenhouse gases while reducing water pollution.

The paper, which includes several state and federal policy recommendations, is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/carbonfarming.

A Future Based on Healthy Soil: Survey Taps into Farming’s Role in Mitigating Climate Change

To learn more about the climate and soil health-related experiences and perspectives of farmers as well as rural and urban community members across Minnesota, this fall the Land Stewardship Project’s Soil Health and Climate Organizing Committee developed and distributed a survey. By December, LSP had received 250 survey responses from members and supporters, both by mail and in digital form. You can find the survey here: <http://bit.ly/LSPclimate>.

Here are a few of the responses LSP has received:

Why is building soil health and/or mitigating the climate crisis important to you?

• “I live here and would like the grandkids to be able to live here, grow their own food, and not be endangered with every breath — maybe even swim and fish safely.”

• “Soil health is one of the best and biggest solutions to climate change, and it will also bring many more rural people into the work

on the solutions we need to protect our lives and futures in Minnesota, the U.S., and worldwide. Love the phrase SOILution!”

• “I am a beginning farmer and am already experiencing challenges brought by climate change. I’m invested in holding our leaders accountable to preventing the climate crisis from going completely out of control, and to developing mitigation strategies for Midwestern farmers.”

What opportunities do you see in public policy to promote soil health and to mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration?

• “Stop fueling big ag and divest those funds to regenerative farmers. Increase the farm-to-school produce program. Promote organic and regeneratively produced products.”

• “All farm subsidies should be tied to soil health practices. We also need stronger incentives and support for adopting more sustainable practices. As a food consumer, I would like to see a regenerative farming certification that I can trust to help me make informed purchases.”

• “Voting in soil conservation and climate concerned policymakers.”