

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

39 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

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Photo by Dodd Demas

Helping farmers help the soil (page 8).



—*LSP Leadership Change*—

—*Giving a Damn about Ag*—

—*The Need for a Permanent Healthcare Rx*—

—*Reclaiming Indigenous Ag Knowledge*—

—*The Making of a Successful Landowner*—

—*A Small Grain's Regenerative Revamp*—



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Leadership Change: A Joint Statement from the Boards of LSP & LSAF

Jess Anna Glover resigned as the executive director of the Land Stewardship Project and the Land Stewardship Action Fund on Feb. 12. As board members of these two organizations, we are working closely with staff through this transition.

During the past few months, the LSP and LSAF boards and staff have reached out to countless members, funders, and partners to share updates, renew relationships, and strengthen our shared commitment to thriving rural communities. We have also deepened our connections between boards and staff, as well as across departments, through numerous opportunities for conversation and collaboration.

In mid-May, Julie Emery came on board as interim executive director (*see sidebar*). Moving forward, we envision a deep dive with staff, board, and members to consider the most effective long-term leadership structure for this organization.

During this time of transition, our commitment to you as members is to continue to fulfill our mission — fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland, promoting sustainable agriculture, and developing healthy communities. As members of the LSP and LSAF boards, we have the highest confi-

dence in the staff of these two organizations. Together, we are committed to working with members to continue to build our nationally-recognized work on soil health, beginning farmer training, and land access. In addition, our organizers are working with members on the state and federal level “fighting the worst

while advancing the best,” including pushing ground-breaking soil health policy during the 2021 session of the Minnesota Legislature (*page 8*). And legislators endorsed by the Land Stewardship Action Fund in the 2020 election are continuing to

work to advance policies that are good for people and the land.

If you have any questions on this transition or LSP and LSAF’s work in general, feel free to connect with any of us using the contact information in the sidebar below. You are also welcome to contact Brian DeVore at bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-816-9342.

With member support and a passion for stewardship and justice on the land, we have created a rock-solid foundation that makes our work powerful and effective, even during these challenging times. Thanks to you, the roots of these organizations have the kind of depth required to remain resilient, no

• • •
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• • •

Julie Emery Named Interim ED

Julie Emery has been named interim executive director of the Land Stewardship Project, as well as its sister political advocacy organization, the Land Stewardship Action Fund. Emery has a deep background in community organizing and extensive experience integrating policy and electoral organizing. She most recently worked as the outreach director for Wisconsin Voices. She also served as executive director of Virginia Civic Engagement Table and was political director of Service Employees International Union Virginia 512.



Julie Emery

Emery grew up on a Minnesota farm and has a bachelor’s degree in business administration and computer science from Wichita State University.

After the resignation of executive director Jess Anna Glover in February, LSP board member Dan McGrath served in that capacity on a temporary basis.

matter our changing daily circumstances. We are excited to strengthen this resilience and continue to take bold action together toward a sustainable future for all.

— the members of the
LSP & LSAF boards

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Two Decades of Giving a Damn About Ag

Stettler & Bacigalupo Talk about the Past, Present & Future of Farm Beginnings

Note: Over two decades ago, the Land Stewardship Project launched one of most successful beginning farmer training courses in the country. Over the years, Farm Beginnings has held dozens of classes, on-farm educational events, and workshops. It has also launched a follow-up course, called Journeyperson, and served as the model for the national Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. It has also served as the foundation for the Farm Beginnings Collaborative, a coalition of 13 organizations offering courses across the country. Over 1,000 people have graduated from the LSP version of the course, which is offered in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. One estimate is that 60% of those graduates are now farming.

Over the years, Karen Stettler and Amy Bacigalupo have served various roles with Farm Beginnings. Bacigalupo recently left LSP after several years leading up the Farm Beginnings Program, and is now running a fruit orchard in western Minnesota. Stettler continues to work with LSP to help retiring farmers transition their operations to the next generation.

They sat down with *Land Stewardship Letter* editor Brian DeVore to talk about how Farm Beginnings got started, the community-centric philosophy it's based on, and where it's headed. Below are some highlights from that conversation. You can listen to the full interview on episode 248 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1378.

Community Based Organizing

From its initial launch, Farm Beginnings has always been community-based and community-sourced. That was true back in the 1990s when a group of farmers called the "Wabasha County Give A Damns" approached Land Stewardship Project staff looking for ideas on how to support the next generation of farmers. It was also true when LSP did organizing in local communities before even offering the first classes to determine what people wanted and the best approach to achieving those goals. Steering committees were formed, and many of the farmers LSP has worked with over the years have served as course instructors and mentors. That required a lot of on-the-ground organizing that went beyond building a curriculum, say Bacigalupo and Stettler.

Holistic Management

Holistic Management plays a key role in both the Farm Beginnings and Journeyperson curriculums. Holistic Management is a decision-making tool that considers all aspects of a farm—not only financial health, but quality of life, ecological sustainability, and the operation's relationship to the rest of the community.

"The central part of Holistic Management is that the farmer is the person driving the decision-making," says Bacigalupo. "Most other trainings are set up just to move you into the boxes that financial institutions, or seed dealers, or equipment dealers already have for farmers. If you go into those boxes,

what you get out of it isn't going to necessarily line up with your own goals."

Pushing the Pencil

A key part of Holistic Management is dovetailing ideals and belief systems with good old-fashioned number crunching. As



During a Farm Beginnings field day in southeastern Minnesota, course graduates Paul and Sara Freid described how they estimate a market hog's weight. (LSP Photo)

a result, students are required to develop thorough business plan proposals. Students have an opportunity to not only learn how to develop a plan, but to get feedback from established farmers and other ag professionals.

"I don't think you can be successful if you don't actually think through a business plan," says Stettler. "You have to look at real numbers. If you're going to be doing it as a business and doing it down the road, then you need to think about the route involved."

Serving Other Communities

Farm Beginnings has predominately served white people. But in recent years, there has been a concerted effort on the part of LSP staff and the Farm Beginnings steering committee to change that. The 2020-2021 class is the largest and the most diverse one LSP has ever organized — of the 60 enrollees this year, 25% of the class are people of color, including participants from the Red Lake Nation and the Midwest Farmers of Color Collective.

"As a result, we're rethinking everything with our curriculum," says Bacigalupo.

Shifting the Narrative

One major barrier beginning farmers face is the conventional wisdom that there is no viable future for young people in production agriculture. "We would bring people into the class and they would say, 'Well, I've been told my whole life there's no future in farming. So here I am, tell me how to do this differently,'" says Bacigalupo.

LSP has attempted to shift that narrative by, among other things, publicizing the stories of Farm Beginnings grads who are proving there are opportunities in agriculture if one chooses a path guided by innovative management, production, and marketing. Despite the need to shift the narrative, Farm Beginnings also offers up a healthy dose of reality, and some graduates end up choosing not to pursue farming as a career.

"When that happens, we're doing our job — saving them money and the relationships that would be harmed if they threw themselves at a really bad idea," says Bacigalupo.

The Future

Stettler says that as Farm Beginnings looks to the future and how its curriculum is designed and presented, how post-grad support is provided, the need to diversify who it serves, and ways to help beginning farmers overcome barriers like land access, one fact remains unchanged.

"What excites me is that there are people who want to farm, and there are people within the community who want to support those who want to farm," Stettler says. □

FB Accepting Applications for 2021-2022 Class

Farm Beginnings is now accepting applications until Sept. 15 for its 2021-2022 class session. The early-bird discount deadline is Aug. 15. Classes will begin in late fall of 2021. See page 32 for details.

Myth Buster Box

An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

→ Myth: Deep Soils Are Always Healthy Soils

→ Fact:

The depth of soil in the American Corn Belt is legendary.

One popular saying is that some Midwestern soil is deep enough to bury a pickup truck in — vertically. In many cases, such images are not that far from reality. But there is a danger of equating soil depth with soil health or soil productivity.

It turns out a relatively small portion of the soil profile is where most of the biological magic takes place in terms of productivity. It's called the "A horizon" — the darker part of the profile we know as "topsoil," and it's full of the living microorganisms and decaying plant roots that create organic carbon. Sitting on top of the topsoil is the "O horizon," which is made up of dead plants and other organic material in various stages of decomposition. Beneath the A horizon is the subsoil, which normally has less organic matter than the A horizon, so it is generally a paler color. Below that is the "substratum" — a layer of rock and mineral parent material that has not been exposed to much weathering, so is pretty much intact. Finally, in the deepest recesses of the land's basement is bedrock, or the "R horizon." All those horizons play a role in making this resource so useful for doing everything from producing food to managing water and storing carbon. But topsoil, despite the fact that it can occupy a relatively narrow space compared to the other horizons, punches above its weight in terms of biological activity. If soil was a car, topsoil would be the gas tank, and without it, that car doesn't go very far.

That's why a recent study showing that a third of the farmland in the Corn Belt — that's some 100 million acres — has lost its carbon-rich topsoil to erosion since we started plowing it is so troubling. The study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, was based on an examination of corn and soybean fields in Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa.

Because the A horizon is darker, scientists were able to use satellites to compare the color of soil with the USDA's direct measurements of soil quality. In many cases, the lighter colored soil they documented contained so little organic carbon that it wasn't

even considered A horizon soil anymore, even though it was sitting where topsoil was supposed to be. In effect, erosion was so bad the subsoil had become the topsoil.

The bottom line: the removal of all that rich topsoil has released nearly 1,500,000,000 metric tons of carbon and reduced corn and soybean yields by 6%. This is costing farmers some \$3 billion annually, estimate the researchers.

The study found that the greatest loss of carbon-rich topsoil was on hilltops and ridgelines, a sign that repeated tillage is taking its toll. You don't need satellite imagery to witness some of this firsthand — when you drive by a field that has lighter, tannish colored soil at the top of a ridge, that means the A horizon has been seriously compromised.

This study indicates that we have lost much more fertile topsoil than the USDA has been estimating. Some soil experts have questioned the *Proceedings* study's methodology, but acknowledge that even if it is exaggerating the loss, we are still losing that A horizon at a troubling rate. And that causes numerous problems on and off the farm. For one thing, if a field is to remain productive, the fertility benefits provided by a biologically-active A horizon need to be replaced somehow. In most cases, that means adding more petroleum-based fertilizer, which is already a major water quality problem when it escapes agricultural acres. And loss of carbon-rich soil means more greenhouse gas emissions.

It doesn't have to be this way. Farmers throughout Minnesota and the rest of the Midwest are utilizing regenerative practices like no-till, cover cropping, managed rotational grazing, and diverse rotations to build back soil health and sequester carbon. In fact, recent scientific breakthroughs show that farmers have a much greater ability to send soil health trends in a positive direction than once thought. LSP's Soil Builders' Network initiative (page 27) is working with hundreds of farmers who are proving soil healthy practices can be practical and profitable.

But regenerative practices won't become

enough of a norm to have widespread landscape impacts without public support. For decades, government subsidies and tax-funded land grant research, along with market signals, have made raising corn and soybeans in an intensive, soil-damaging manner just about the only game in town. Stepping out of a monocultural, input-intensive system can be accompanied by significant financial risk. Converting to no-till and managing cover crops costs time and money. No wonder less than 15% of farmland in the upper Mississippi River watershed is managed using no-till methods, and under 3% of Minnesota crop ground is cover cropped any given year, according to estimates.

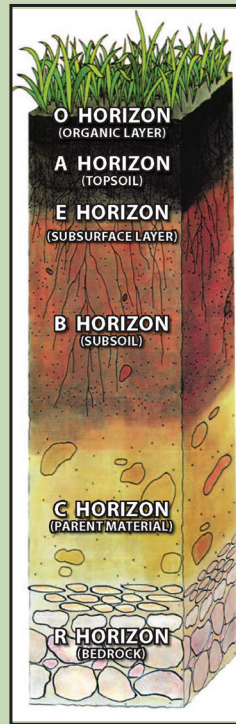
That's why the provisions of the "100% Soil-Healthy Farming Bill," which LSP introduced in the Minnesota Legislature this year, are so critical. Studies and surveys show that once farmers have transitioned into a practice like cover cropping or no-till, they see higher yields, more profit, and resilient soils. But it takes a couple of years to go from good idea to practical, everyday field method. Bridging the gap to ensure that regenerative methods are profitable in the near term removes financial barriers that often limit farmers' ability to put in place long-term investments on the land.

States like Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa have shown that public cost-share and grant programs can play a significant role in increasing the number of "soil smart" acres. They've committed to helping farmers bridge the innovation gap. It's time we did the same in other states, before the other two-thirds of the all-important A horizon ends up over the hill.

More Information

- To read the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* study called "The extent of soil loss across the US Corn Belt," see www.pnas.org.

- For more on the "100% Soil Healthy Farming" legislative provisions, see page 8.





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LSP News

LSP Staff Changes

During the summer of 2000, fresh off a stint as a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay, **Amy Bacigalupo** joined the Land Stewardship Project staff in Montevideo, Minn. She immediately set to work helping the organization expand the Farm Beginnings Program to the western part of Minnesota. That set in motion a highly productive two-decade career at LSP that has come to an end. Bacigalupo has



Amy Bacigalupo

left LSP to spend more time on her family's apple operation in western Minnesota and to coordinate the Organic Fruit Growers Association.

As a class facilitator and later director of the program, Bacigalupo played a key role in making Farm Beginnings one of the most successful and respected beginning farmer training initiatives in the country (*page 32*). The follow-up training initiative, Journey person, was designed and implemented with her guidance, and Farm Beginnings is now being taught in over a dozen states because of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and the Farm Beginnings Collaborative, both of which Bacigalupo took the lead on creating and supporting.

More recently, Bacigalupo served as program director and co-managing director at LSP, and led efforts to make opportunities in agriculture available to more farmers of color, including Indigenous people. For more on Bacigalupo's legacy, see *page 4*.

After eight years of doing the kind of behind-the-scenes work needed to make a

nonprofit organization run smoothly, **Amelia Shoptaugh** has left the organization to pursue other interests. She joined LSP's staff in 2013 as an office manager, and most recently served as the organization's human resources and operations director. In that position, Shoptaugh developed a human resources department from scratch and led efforts to modernize LSP's technology infrastructure. She also created an employee handbook and coordinated various aspects of the organization's internal operations.



Amelia Shoptaugh

Sean Carroll has been named LSP's new policy and organizing director. Carroll recently received a master's degree in public affairs from the University of Minnesota's



Sean Carroll

Humphrey School of Public Affairs. He has over 15 years organizing experience, and has worked as the national field director for the HEAL Food Alliance, organizing director for the RE-AMP Network, and federal field associate for Environment California.

Carroll can be reached at scarroll@landstewardshipproject.org.

Jenna Sandoe, Amber Monaghan, and Charles Spencer have joined LSP's staff as operations and support specialists.

Sandoe has a degree in environmental studies and political science from the University of Minnesota-Morris. She has organized around local food issues, worked as a GreenCorps volunteer, and was a produce manager and bookkeeper for a small food co-op. In 2020, she started her own vegetable operation near Litchfield, Minn. Sandoe can be reached at jsandoe@landstewardshipproject.org.

Monaghan studied apparel design and theater arts at North Dakota State



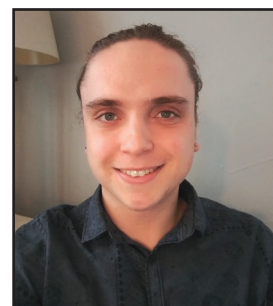
Jenna Sandoe

University and apparel technologies at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. She has worked as an administrative assistant for Homeservices Insurance and Royal Sales, and an office administrator for Virtual Officecenters. Monaghan has also served as an event designer for the company Festivities. She can be reached at amonaghan@landstewardshipproject.org.



Amber Monaghan

Spencer has a degree in communications, media, and rhetoric from the University



Charles Spencer

of Minnesota-Morris. He has worked as an administrative assistant for Neighborworks Home Partners and the YWCA of Saint Paul, as well as a translator and clinic coordinator for Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity. Spencer can be reached at cspencer@landstewardshipproject.org.

Ryan Perez is LSP's new data specialist. Perez has a bachelor's degree from Macalester College and has worked in various capacities to utilize technology as a changemaking tool. He is the owner of Movement Impact LLC, and served as a database manager and democracy program director for COPAL, as well as database manager for the Patricia Torres Ray for Congress campaign. Perez serves on the board of Minnesota Alliance With Youth. He can be reached at rperez@landstewardshipproject.org.



Ryan Perez

Laura Schreiber, Aleta Borrud, and Sarah Goldman have joined LSP's Policy and Organizing team.

Schreiber has degrees in urban studies and public relations and a minor in leadership from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. She has worked as an intern for LSP in various capacities, including as coordina-

Staff, see page 7...

tor of the 2019 Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol. During the 2020 election, she worked as an organizer for LSP's sister political advocacy organization, the Land



Laura Schreiber

as well as the organization's board of directors. She has spoken and written extensively about the need to provide quality, affordable healthcare for rural residents. As an LSP



Aleta Borrud

organizer, Borrud is focusing on healthcare issues and she can be contacted at aborrud@landstewardshipproject.org.

Goldman has a degree in environmental studies from Carleton College and has worked extensively in food and farm policy. She mostly recently worked as a senior research program coordinator for the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, where, among other things, she was the lead author of the report, "Essential and in Crisis: A Review of the Public Health Threats Facing Farmworkers in the U.S."

She also led a team of researchers in investigating policy that supports sustainable livestock production and worked for the National Farm to School



Sarah Goldman

Network, the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, and Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore.

Goldman is focusing on local foods and farm transition issues and can be contacted at sgoldman@landstewardshipproject.org.

Maura Curry has joined LSP's Bridge to Soil Health team. Curry has a degree in geology and biology from Brown University, and has worked as a farm bill specialist for the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts, an assistant farmer at Aurora Farms, and a policy and political intern for Food Policy Action. Curry, who is working with LSP's



Maura Curry



Barb Sogn-Frank

Soil Builders' Network and helping disseminate information about soil health to farmers, can be reached at mc Curry@landstewardshipproject.org. She previously worked for the organization as an organizer. In her new role, Sogn-Frank is working with Soil Builders' Network members. She can be contacted at bsognfrank@landstewardshipproject.org. □

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. □

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. □

Jo Ann Thomas: 1953-2021

In the mid-1980s, a new organization called the Land Stewardship Project hired organizers to travel to counties in the Upper Midwest that were suffering the worst farmland erosion. Their job was to facilitate meetings where farmers and other rural residents could talk about the impacts of this erosion as well as possible solutions. One of those organizers was Jo Ann Thomas, a native of Missouri who had already worked as an organizer for Minnesota COACT (Citizens Organizations Acting Together). After a long battle with cancer,



Jo Ann Thomas

Thomas passed away Feb. 19 on her farm near Winona, Minn., surrounded by her family. She was 67.

A few years after its founding, LSP hired Thomas, as well as Doug Nopar, to organize community meetings. Nopar and Thomas were later married, and raised two daughters, Elizabeth and Sylvia, on their farm. While at LSP, Thomas also organized the initial performances of *Planting in the Dust*, a play written by Nancy Paddock for LSP that featured a woman discussing her concerns about farmland stewardship. The popular play went on to serve as a major organizing tool for LSP in rural communities and was performed internationally.

After leaving LSP in 1985, Thomas was extremely active in various community projects in southeastern Minnesota. She served as the director of Houston County Women's Resources and co-director of the Women's Resource Center in Winona, and eventually opened up a homeopathy practice. No matter what endeavor she was involved with, she was known for demanding justice in a straightforward, loving way.

Nopar, who went on to work for several decades as an LSP organizer before leaving in 2020, says even after she departed the organization, Thomas continued to show an intense devotion to its principles of stewardship and justice on the land. □

2021 State Legislature

LSP Members Push Soil Health, Rural Resiliency

By Amanda Koehler

During the 2021 session of the Minnesota Legislature, thousands of Land Stewardship Project members from across the state were united in our vision for a sustainable and just farm and food system, as well as healthy communities.

For example, one of LSP's priorities was the introduction of the "100% Soil-Healthy Farming Bill." The legislation, which was introduced in February by Representative Todd Lippert (DFL-Northfield) in the House and Senator Kent Eken (DFL-Twin Valley) in the Senate, was crafted by LSP farmer-members from throughout Minnesota.

The legislation sets statewide goals and creates a program to provide farmers with accessible grants and direct payments for the adoption of practices that build resiliency on the landscape by, among other things, sequestering carbon long-term and contributing to mitigating climate change.

Bridging the gap to ensure that soil healthy practices like managed rotational grazing, cover cropping, perennial cropping, and no-till systems are profitable in the near term removes financial barriers that often limit farmers' ability to put in place these measures. Under the 100% Soil-Healthy proposal, the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) would administer the grants and provide technical assistance to Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Up to five years of direct payments would be provided.

The goal of the legislation is to have 50% and 100% of Minnesota farmers implementing soil-healthy practices by 2030 and 2035, respectively. In addition, by 2040 100% of the state's grazable and tillable acres would be farmed utilizing such practices. Experience in states like Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa has shown that public cost-share and grant programs can play a significant role in increasing the number of acres being managed utilizing soil-healthy practices.

During the 2021 legislative session,

members supported this groundbreaking soil health proposal by testifying in front of committees, calling and e-mailing lawmakers, writing letters-to-the-editor, doing literature drops, and participating in virtual town hall meetings organized by LSP.

The 2021 session of the Legislature focused on developing a two-year budget. As this *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press, a general budget deal had been reached, and lawmakers were headed into a special session to hammer out their differences on various proposals. Although the 100% Soil-Healthy Bill did not become law this year, as of this writing elements of it were still on the table in other legislative proposals.



Farmers like southeastern Minnesota crop and livestock producer John Snyder utilize practices like cover cropping to build soil resiliency. LSP's "100% Soil-Healthy" legislative proposals support getting more practices like this established on more acres. (Photo by Dodd Demas)

Overall, when it comes to LSP's priorities, there was a wide gap between the House and Senate versions of legislation. The next few pages summarize the status of various provisions and why LSP focused on them. A final report on where things shook out after the special session will be at www.landstewardshipproject.org this summer.

◆ Soil-Healthy Farming

By ensuring our farmers have all the resources they need to implement soil-healthy

practices, we can build rural resiliency and boost farm income.

Minnesota House Proposals:

- Establish a statewide soil-healthy farming goal that at least 30% of Minnesota farmland includes cover crops, perennial crops, no-till, or managed rotational grazing by 2030 to boost farm income, build soil health, prevent or minimize erosion and runoff, retain and clean water, sequester carbon, support pollinators, and increase farm resiliency. This is an adjusted goal from LSP's original 100% Soil-Healthy Farming Bill proposal.

- Establish a Soil Health Cost Share Program and appropriate \$1 million to the program. This is a BWSR proposal, with the addition of some language borrowed from LSP's 100% Soil-Healthy Farming Bill. We would be working with BWSR to ensure these funds are prioritized for farmers who need them most: small and mid-sized farmers and emerging farmers, as well as women, veterans, persons with disabilities, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and members of communities of color.

- \$11.3 million for implementation of soil-healthy practices via the Clean Water Fund. In partnership with legislative allies, LSP has successfully included some language from our 100% Soil-Healthy Farming Bill and ensured that farmers who rent land can access these dollars. We would work with BWSR to ensure these funds are prioritized for farmers who need them most.

- \$4.5 million for the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative.

- Require a \$25 fee on certain housing filings as a step toward equitable and consistent funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts, regardless of zip code.

Minnesota Senate Proposals:

- \$4 million for the Forever Green Initiative.

Legislative Update, see page 9...

- Slash the budget of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant initiative, a program that for years LSP members have fought for.

◆ Supporting Small & Mid-Sized Farmers & Holding Corporate Ag Accountable

As farmers across the state attempt to rebound from the compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, six years of low prices, and consolidation across the industry, our state must provide immediate support for farmers in financial stress and work to address the root causes of these challenges.

Minnesota House Proposals:

- \$574,000 for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Farm Advocates Program. For many years, LSP has been advocating for increased funding for this program — this is a step in the right direction.
- \$1.268 million for dairy development, profitability enhancement, and dairy business planning grants.
- Extend the farmer-lender mediation period from 60 to 90 days. LSP has been advocating for more time — however, this is a step in the right direction.
- Extend from 90 to 120 days the period a creditor and the creditor's successors may not begin or continue proceedings to enforce a debt against agricultural property after a mediation request is filed. This is a step in the right direction.

Minnesota Senate Proposals:

- Eliminate and limit restrictions for spreading factory-farmed manure. This proposal serves just a handful of large operations and their wealthy investors, supporting an industry that is running small and mid-sized farms out of business, forcing rural communities to foot the bill to clean up detrimental impacts on human health and the environment.
- Increase "efficiency" of environmental review and permitting of industrial projects like factory farms and frac sand mines. This idea continues to put corporations above people and the land.
- Limit the rights of people to petition

for environmental review of industrial projects like factory farms or frac sand mines. This is a bad idea: projects undertaken in one county can significantly impact downstream or downwind communities across the state.

- \$494,000 for the Farm Advocates Program. This is a step in the right direction, but the House proposal is stronger.
- \$1.268 million for dairy development, profitability enhancement, and dairy business planning grants. This matches the House proposal.
- The Senate is proposing nothing to continue protection of farmers in financial stress by, for example, extending deadlines in the Farmer-Lender Mediation Act. In 2020, LSP pushed for a bill to extend these deadlines; it passed unanimously.

◆ Investing in Our Local & Regional Food Systems

By creating a robust and safe network of local processors and expanding local markets for farm products, including public institutional buying, we bring jobs to rural communities, bolster farm income, and build a more resilient and healthier farm and food system for all of us.

Minnesota House Proposals:

- \$1.6 million for the Farm-to-School Program, which LSP members have been advocating for since 2019. This is a significant increase from the amount appropriated in 2019.
- \$1 million for start-up, modernization, or expansion of meat, poultry, egg, and milk processing facilities. Preferably, this funding will be prioritized to rebuild a robust network of small processors across the countryside to bolster local food systems, bring jobs to rural Minnesota, and keep our dollars in our communities.
- Creating the Safe Workplaces for Meat & Poultry Processing Act to protect workers from exploitation and unsafe work environments, championed by the Union of Food and Commercial Workers.
- Establish a grant program to help farmers finance cooperatives that organize for purposes of operating a processing facility or marketing an agricultural product or agricultural service.

Minnesota Senate Proposals:

- \$1 million for the Farm-to-School Program. This is a small increase from the amount appropriated in 2019. It's a step in the right direction, but the House proposal is stronger.
- Cut over \$600,000 from the Urban Agriculture Grant Program.
- Cut over \$300,000 from the Good Food Access Program.

◆ Robust Rural Healthcare

Rural Minnesotans face some of the worst disparities in accessing the healthcare they need. Our current health insurance system is a huge, costly barrier to prosperity, sustainability, and health in our state and nation. Access—for everyone—to affordable, quality healthcare is critical if we are to have communities where sustainable, family farm-based agriculture thrives.

Minnesota House Proposals:

- Require a proposal for developing a public option insurance program for all people, no exceptions, which is a strong step toward ensuring Minnesotans have truly affordable, high-quality, accessible healthcare.
- Seek a study to determine more tax efficient ways to pay medical providers to ensure the vitality and survival of our rural health systems.
- Establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board and Council to provide financial relief to people facing the burden of high prescription drugs costs.
- Strengthen public review of proposed hospital closures.
- Require transparency from managed care organizations by asking the Minnesota Department of Health to report on how it reimburses providers in our public insurance programs.

Minnesota Senate Proposals:

- The Senate has a handful of small proposals that are helpful, but ultimately do not address the scale or roots of the challenges Minnesotans are facing.

Policy & Organizing

...Legislative Update, from page 9

- Invest in the “reinsurance” plan, demanded by insurance companies. Reinsurance protects insurance companies from losing money by having the state pay for some of the most expensive patients. Rather than come from a tax on the industry, this money comes out of Minnesota’s public funds.

For more on healthcare issues related to the 2021 legislative session, see page 11.

◆ Emerging & Beginning Farmers

We must invest in getting more farmers on the land, facilitating generational transitions of land and assets, and advancing racial, gender, and economic justice in the farming system. Emerging farmer proposals have been championed by the Latino Economic Development Center and the Hmong American Farmers Association.

Minnesota House Proposals:

- Establish an Emerging Farmer Account and appropriate \$20,000 to it.
- Create an emerging farmer office and hire a fulltime emerging farmer outreach coordinator; appropriate \$300,000 to this work.
- Establish a pilot project that creates farmland access teams to provide technical assistance to potential beginning farmers.
- Increase the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit rate from 5% to 10% for sale of land or agricultural assets to socially disadvantaged farmers — Black, Brown, Indigenous, women, and disabled farmers.
- Allow for 5% of the funds allocated for the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit to be used for administration and to develop an online application.

Senate Proposals:

- \$1 million for grants for beginning farmers.

◆ Healthy Pollinators

Our farm and food system depends on our pollinator populations, which are fast dwindling. It’s clear the survival of these valuable insects is threatened by certain pesticides and seed treatments, such as neonicotinoids. Farmers will be unable to feed our communities or provide economic benefits to our state without stewarding the health of our pollinators.

Minnesota House Proposals:

- Require a written warning on packaging for neonicotinoid-treated seed.
- Ban on selling seed treated or coated with neonicotinoids as food, feed, oil, or ethanol feedstock.



Using social media memes like this one, along with virtual town halls, e-mails, telephone calls, letters-to-the editor, media stories, and radio ads, LSP members made it clear to lawmakers during the 2021 legislative session that a public good like soil health deserves public support.

- Ban on disposal of seed treated or coated with neonicotinoids in a manner not consistent with the product label, or near a drinking water source, surface water, in compost, or by incineration within a home or other dwelling.
- Fund rulemaking for treated seed disposal.
- Restore to local communities control over pollinator-lethal pesticides.

Minnesota Senate Proposals:

- None.

◆ Clean Energy

Minnesota House Proposal:

- Become the next state committed to a pathway to 100% clean, equitable energy and a fully decarbonized electrical sector by 2040. We deserve an equitable clean energy future for everyone in our state.
- Invest in solar installations in public spaces such as schools, state parks, and state buildings, and remove barriers to installing solar systems on farmland.
- Direct the Public Utilities Commission to produce a report that determines the social, environmental, and economic costs of carbon life cycle emissions from renewable natural gas, manure methane, power-to-ammonia, district energy, and other technologies. This information will be vital in clearly outlining what technologies are worth our investment and calculating the societal costs of false solutions.

- Inclusion of language proposed by CenterPoint Energy that includes exploring burning methane from factory farm manure and other industrial facilities to ensure that CenterPoint can continue to use and charge customers for upkeep of its pipelines. This is the wrong direction to go — we need to invest in energy that is truly clean, not false solutions. Non-fossil-fuel-based natural gases still release potent greenhouse gases, are expensive, and prop up industries such as factory farms that harm small and mid-sized farmers, as well as our air, water, and land. Unlike the Senate version, the House version does not prioritize manure-based gas technologies. However, both the Senate and House versions ignore setting goals for decarbonizing energy.

Minnesota Senate Proposal:

- Inclusion of language proposed by CenterPoint Energy described earlier. The Senate prioritizes renewable natural gas or methane-based fuels over cleaner technologies such as strategic electrification. While efforts to decarbonize the fossil fuel sector are appreciated, this bill does not move Minnesota closer to a more sustainable future and perpetuates harms against rural communities. □

LSP policy organizer Amanda Koehler can be reached at akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org.

Healthcare Needs Permanent Solutions, Not More Band-Aids

Our Profit-centric System is Harming Rural Communities & the People Who Live in Them

By Aleta Borrud

The Land Stewardship Project believes that in order for our communities to thrive, everyone, regardless of background or zip code, must have access to the healthcare they need. Yet lack of healthcare access and high costs continue to be major financial stresses for all Minnesotans — particularly for rural residents. More people in rural areas lack employer-based insurance or are uninsured than in urban areas. And even with insurance, about half of us are on high-deductible insurance plans with such extreme up-front costs to accessing care that people are forgoing or delaying the care they need.

In Minnesota, most legislative efforts in recent years have focused on keeping premium costs down to make purchasing health insurance more affordable. But this has been offset by significant shifting of the cost of care to people in the form of co-pays and co-insurance, in addition to up-front deductibles. Few people, especially after the economic drain of the pandemic, have the resources to pay thousands of dollars out-of-pocket if faced with an emergency hospitalization. As a result, many rural hospitals are operating at a loss, with threat of permanent closure. In addition, other essential components of healthcare in rural Minnesota face shortfalls, such as lack of in-home care workers, nursing home beds, obstetric care, mental health services, and volunteer staffing for ambulances.

Our fractured payment system for healthcare fails to guarantee equitable access. The billing complexity frustrates medical providers and wastes precious healthcare dollars. Medical providers spend hours obtaining authorization for necessary care of patients,

while up to a third of the costs of hospitalization is spent on billing and coding. We must demand better for all of our communities if they are to be places where people want to invest their lives.

When access to care is limited by availability, either due to distance or restrictive provider networks, people can't "shop for care." It's time to discard the worn-out call for marketplace solutions as a means of controlling costs. When companies can profit from healthcare, controlling costs means

Healthcare Hotlist

Join LSP's Healthcare Hotlist to keep updated on ways you can participate in creating a truly healthy healthcare system in Minnesota. Sign-up at www.landstewardship-project.org/healthcareaction.

reducing care, such as by closing rural clinics or standing between doctors and the care they want to prescribe for patients. We need to use our collective power, as Minnesota residents, to demand investment in healthcare. We need a publicly funded and publicly administered system of care that takes profit out of the equation and guarantees access to care wherever people live. This is a critical part of the reinvestment needed to rebuild the strength of our rural communities.

We are far from creating the healthcare system we need, but during the 2021 session of the Minnesota Legislature (*pages 8-10*), efforts were made to lay the groundwork for key changes. The House passed the following steps during the regular session:

- Require our state government to report on alternate methods of delivering care and reimbursing medical providers in Minnesota's public medical insurance

programs. This could provide information on possible cost efficiencies of public administration of public health insurance programs.

- Require our state government to develop a proposal for a public health insurance option program by Dec. 15, 2021.
- Establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board to control the runaway costs of pharmaceuticals.
- Before healthcare entities close facilities or reduce services, hold public hearings to review the impact on communities.

In contrast, the Minnesota Senate continues to support "reinsurance," which uses taxpayer dollars to insure insurance companies against losses, while patients still go into debt paying for healthcare. LSP argued against using healthcare dollars in this way, as it does nothing to control significant out-of-pocket costs for people needing to buy insurance on their own in the marketplace. But most importantly, we opposed this because it continues an insurance system that is not making care more affordable and accessible, especially for rural communities, farmers, and Main Street businesses.

Despite the dire need for reform, the fundamental change we need in the healthcare system in Minnesota will not happen this year. But the fight isn't over. We need to come together in our communities and ask legislators to deliver meaningful, long-term solutions, instead of sticking more Band-Aids on the same old wounds. □

LSP healthcare organizer Aleta Borrud is a retired physician from Rochester, Minn. She can be contacted at aborrud@landstewardshipproject.org.

2021 Family Farm Breakfast Goes Virtual

After a year off due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 edition of the Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol returned April 15, albeit on Zoom. Over 150 people joined lawmakers and other Minnesota decisionmakers, including Governor Tim Walz and Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen, for an online discussion about the importance of supporting resiliency in our communities by passing legislation such as the "100% Soil Healthy Farming Bill" (*page 8*).

"Small actions make a big difference," said Minneapolis resident Emma Thomley during the event. "The soil our food is grown in touches every one of our lives."

Besides soil health, climate change mitigation, farm-to-school, the need for local meat processing, healthcare reform, tax reform that supports a fair state budget, and support for farmers in crisis were discussed on the call by LSP members from across the state.

The importance of not limiting to the state Capitol one's involvement with policy changes was also emphasized. "Organizing in local communities might force you to step out of your comfort zone, but it really makes a difference when you show up," said Ghent resident Darwin Dyce. "If there ever was a time to connect and build relationships, it's now."



Federal Ag Policy

Day One Demands for USDA Leaders

LSP Members Advocate for Climate Smart Ag Policy Proposals

By Jessica Kochick

During the Biden Administration's first 100 days in office, the Land Stewardship Project was busy on the federal policy front. The role of agriculture in mitigating the climate crisis has been one focus of both the Administration and the new Congress. Over 500 LSP members and supporters signed on to our public comment on climate policy (www.landstewardship-project.org/usdaclimateaction) that was submitted to USDA, and LSP organized a series of virtual fly-ins to advocate for our priorities with members of Congress.

Federal Virtual Fly-in

For two weeks in April, 19 Land Stewardship Project farmer-members participated in a series of virtual fly-ins with all five members of the Minnesota Congressional delegation who serve on Agriculture Committees: U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, and U.S. Representatives Angie Craig, Michelle Fischbach, and Jim Hagedorn. LSP coordinated this effort with coalition partners across the Midwest and country, including the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment (CFFE) and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC).

Given the federal focus on climate and infrastructure policy, LSP members advocated for our Agriculture Committee members to be champions in bringing climate funding to our farmers and rural communities. As the quotes highlighted on these two pages show, these farmers had a clear, consistent message: status quo agriculture policy isn't working for small to mid-scale farmers or the climate, but we have an opportunity here to invest in what does work. It makes sense for public money to go toward the public good, investing in a farm and food system that builds soil health while strengthening local economies.

Consolidation in agriculture has led to disinvestment of rural communities, as well as supply chain breakdowns during a global pandemic. Climate policy must not continue that trend. We reject false solutions to the climate crisis that prop up a failing system, and instead advocate for local, resilient food systems that create more land access for beginning farmers, build local economies and food security, and protect air, water, and climate for future generations.

Climate Policy We Need

Small to mid-scale farmers employing regenerative practices can mitigate the worst climate change impacts through practices like no-till and cover cropping, and can sequester carbon via perennial crops and managed rotational grazing systems. In order to make this possible at landscape scale, we must improve and expand access to USDA conservation programs like the Conservation

Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Currently, two-thirds of CSP and EQIP applicants in Minnesota are turned away each year due to lack of funds. Beginning farmers and

farmers of color are at the forefront of employing regenerative farming practices, but may lack the capital to get started. Investing in regenerative food systems is smart policy.

That's why LSP supports the Agriculture Resilience Act, a bill recently introduced by U.S. Representative Chellie Pingree (Maine) and U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (New Mexico). This bill:

- Expands investment in conservation programs like CSP and EQIP.
- Provides soil health grants to states.
- Includes set-asides for beginning farmers and farmers and ranchers of color.
- Promotes a transition to managed rotational grazing.

"We need to stop investing in systems that don't work and start investing in the ones that do, if we want to make a difference in soil health, climate change, and improved rural economies."

— Jon Jovaag,
livestock & crop farmer,
Austin, Minn.

"We need to pull back the curtain and see carbon markets for what they are: a false game that allows companies to continue to pollute. Instead, ag leaders should support and increase participation in the CSP program. This spring, we were told we cannot sign up for a contract for two years due to lack of funding. Expanding a proven program like CSP would benefit farmers and society."

— Bonnie Haugen,
dairy farmer, Canton, Minn.

- Expands local animal processing.
- Invests in developing local markets to support products that improve soil health.

LSP members asked all five Agriculture Committee members from the Minnesota Congressional delegation to co-sponsor the Agriculture Resilience Act and to champion the bill's inclusion in the American Jobs Plan. Healthy soil, local processing capacity, and local markets are crucial aspects of rural infrastructure.

Since then, Minnesota U.S. Representative Betty McCollum, who serves on the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, has co-sponsored the Agriculture Resilience Act, and we thank her for her leadership.

Climate Policy We Do Not Need

Factory farms are a cause of climate change, and they should not be considered part of the solution. They require huge quantities of feed, water, and chemical inputs, as well as energy, and they manage manure in a way that increases greenhouse gas emissions. Methane digesters are an expensive, dangerous, and inefficient way to hang on to a failed system. Public initiatives like EQIP should not be used to prop up factory farms and make it harder for small to mid-scale farmers doing right by the environment and their communities to compete.

Private carbon markets have also created a buzz, yet they are just another way to suck money out of rural communities and put it into the hands of brokers and big business. The industrial food system will never be a carbon sink, and should not act as an offset market for fossil fuel polluters. Historically, carbon markets have failed to offer a stable price to farmers and can be difficult for smaller operations to access, creating more inequities. The climate crisis demands transformational action, and this is not it.

Climate Policy, see page 13...

During the fly-ins, LSP members advocated for payment limits in federal programs to prevent further consolidation. They shared their opposition to investing in factory farms and made it clear carbon markets are the wrong direction for climate policy.

Since then, U.S. Senators Klobuchar and Smith have co-sponsored the Growing Climate Solutions Act, a bill that creates a framework for USDA involvement in certifying third parties to verify carbon credits. LSP opposes this approach because it is bad for the climate, bad for small to mid-scale farmers, and bad for communities where concentrated pollution continues to harm public health. Government should regulate polluters, not provide a loophole for ongoing climate destruction.

Climate Policy & Infrastructure

The next major legislation to come out of Congress will be an infrastructure bill, currently being referred to as the American Jobs Plan. Given the breakdown in the food system resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that this infrastructure bill addresses the needs of farm and food system supply chains. Components of the Agriculture Resilience Act referenced earlier address farm-to-table infrastructure, from building soil health to local processing and market development.

In addition, LSP supports the Strengthening Local Processing Act, introduced by Representative Pingree and U.S. Senator John Thune (South Dakota). This bill:

→ Helps small meat plants meet state and

federal guidelines.

→ Creates a new grant program for small plants, including new plants, to expand processing capacity.

→ Creates animal processing training program grants.

Rural investment must be prioritized in the American Jobs Plan. Corporate control of wealth has created an untenable situation for farmers

Take Action

Let your members of Congress know that you want them to champion the Agriculture Resilience Act, the complementary Climate Stewardship Act, and the Strengthening Local Processing Act, and that we need to see these rural investments now in the American Jobs Plan.

After receiving hundreds of e-mails from Land Stewardship Project members and supporters, Minnesota U.S. Senator Tina Smith recently signed on to a letter circulated by colleagues in support of putting \$200 billion of agriculture funding in the American Jobs Plan Act (AJPA), focused on conservation programs, local foods infrastructure, renewable energy, and more. This is a first step toward winning these key priorities.

Let's keep the pressure on: contact your members of Congress at www.govtrack.us/congress/members or send them an e-mail message by going to www.landstewardship-project.org/advocacy/#121.

• • •
"Farmers are caretakers and entrepreneurs who mitigate a staggering array of risks, choosing carefully where to invest our limited resources. Without processors nearby to take livestock from our farm on to consumers, right-sized operations like ours can't provide healthy food for our communities."

— Dana Seifert, livestock
& crop farmer, Jordan, Minn.

• • •

and other rural community members for too long. What is good for the climate and the environment is also good for local economies and community food security. It is time for our legislators to enact policy that benefits us, not corporate ag.

LSP members thanked Senator Smith and Representative Craig for co-sponsoring the Strengthening Local Processing Act. All other Agriculture Committee members from the Minnesota Congressional delegation were asked to join their colleagues in supporting this bill.

LSP members also advocated for the inclusion of both the Agriculture Resilience Act and the Strengthening Local Processing Act in any forthcoming infrastructure bill, such as the American Jobs Plan.

Contact me for updates on federal policy, details on action taken by our Agriculture Committee members, and more ways for you to get involved. □

LSP policy organizer Jessica Kochick can be reached at jkochick@landstewardshipproject.org.

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

Vision for the Future: 2019-2024 is the Land Stewardship Project's long range plan for working toward our goals of creating a sustainable, just, farm and food system. The plan opens by presenting LSP's 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.

→ **Justice** means there is economic, racial, and gender equity for farmers, workers, and all those who are engaged in the food and agriculture system.

→ **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.

→ **Health** is the value of nourishing the beauty, function, and vitality of an ecosystem made up of people, landscapes, plants, animals, soil, and water.

→ **Community** is the value of understanding our interdependence and caring for

the relationships that sustain each of us. □

The plan is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/longrangeplan. Free paper copies are available by calling 612-722-6377.

Sign-up for the Land Stewardship Action Fund Hotlist

Interested in learning more about how the Land Stewardship Project and its members are harnessing collective political power to elect candidates who will be champions for our vision of a just food and farming system? Then check out LSP's sister political advocacy organization, the Land Stewardship Action Fund (LSAF).

Getting on the LSAF hotlist provides a chance to stay up-to-date on this work and to get involved. You can register at the LSAF website: www.landstewardshipaction.org/take-action/sign-up.



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Not an Inevitable Fact of Nature

'Seeing Whiteness in the Food System' Digs into Racism's Man-made Roots

By Brian DeVore

Before we truly address racial inequity in this country, we need to debunk certain myths that have driven antagonistic relationships between different groups. And one of the biggest, and most damaging, misconceptions is that race is a scientific, biological fact. In fact, the Genome Project has revealed that all human beings are 99.9% the same genetically.

"Nature did not make people into distinct races," said John Biewen, a veteran journalist and documentarian, during a recent Land Stewardship Project online presentation. "People constructed race."

Biewen was the keynote speaker for a "Seeing Whiteness in the Food System" online study group put together by LSP. For several weeks in March, over two dozen LSP members worked to trace the origins of "whiteness" in this country and how it has impacted people of color involved in our food and farming system.

"At the core of LSP's work is justice, stewardship and democracy," said Elizabeth Makarewicz, an LSP membership support specialist who organized the study series. "We believe we can't have a healthy food and farming system without creating healthy opportunities for all," she added. "Because whiteness is treated as the norm, it can be incredibly difficult for me as a white person to recognize how my race informs my life. But the work is well worth it — when we can articulate how whiteness shows up in our food and farming system, we are better equipped to create a new culture of inclusion."

The study group's discussions were guided by Biewen's work as a journalist. He is the audio program director for Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies, and, as a public radio journalist, has frequently covered issues related to racial inequity. Specifically, the study group examined the issues brought up in Biewen's groundbreaking Scene on Radio podcast series, "Seeing White." Through the 14-part program, he used interviews with historians, researchers, and activists to take a deep dive into the roots of racial inequality. Biewen is white and grew up in Mankato, Minn. He started his career with *Minnesota Public Radio*, and he said for many years he had a

pretty abstract view of issues related to the injustice's people of color face: "Racism is wrong, racists are bad people. I didn't feel personally implicated."

But in recent years, he's realized that it's not just people with "hoods and swastikas" who are the problem — it's a systemic issue related to how "whiteness" controls so many aspects of society. Because white people dominate, that puts the responsibility on them to deal with the issue of systemic racism. And to begin to deal with it, we need to address what's true and what's false.

For example, many assume racism started with some sort of "tragic misunderstanding." But it's actually rooted in a false narrative steeped in pure economics — Portuguese slave traders invented the concept of "race" in the 1400s to justify subjugating people of African origin and drawing wealth from their labor. It made it easier to exploit people

'Seeing White' Podcast

John Biewen's "Seeing White" podcast series is available at www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white.

Racial Justice & LSP

To stay up-to-date on LSP's racial equity work, including upcoming workshops, events, and opportunities to engage with other people doing important work in their communities, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/racialjustice.

if they were considered an inferior "other."

"It's about money, power, and control," said Biewen.

Once one realizes that the concept of race has been around since the 15th Century, it becomes clear it's not just an issue of attitudes and individual bigotry. "It's a tool to divide us and to prop up economic, political, and social systems that advantage some people and disadvantage others," said Biewen. "It's a handy tool to convince white folks who may or may not be getting a great deal out of our extremely stratified society to support the status quo. Powerful people leverage and enforce this weapon to maintain money and power in the hands of white people, and of a few white people in particular."

Those ideas came across the ocean to America and made it easier to justify slavery

here. Unfortunately, the conclusion of the Civil War didn't end the problem. Non-whites were not allowed to obtain land under the Homestead Act and because of racial red-lining in neighborhoods, many were denied access to government backed mortgages for housing provided by the New Deal. Even the benefits of the post-World War II GI Bill were not fully available to Black people in practice, although they were supposed to be by law. All of that makes it extremely difficult for people of color to build the kind of wealth that can be passed on to future generations. And today, there is a concerted effort to undercut the advances made during the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s by, among other things, limiting voting rights.

Another myth is that racial strife and racial injustice is mostly a problem south of the Mason-Dixon line. A look at the statistics tallying the results of racism — discrimination in education, housing, and the justice system, for example — shows these issues are as prevalent in the North as they are in the South. In fact, many of the most segregated cities in the U.S. are in the North. Based on race and socioeconomic status, Minnesota has one of the widest student achievement gaps in the nation, for example.

Biewen struggles with his own ignorance around the history of racial injustice. As a native of Mankato, he said he's embarrassed that he knew little about the 1862 hanging of 38 Dakota men in his hometown. It is the biggest government-sanctioned mass execution in American history.

"The violent extraction of Native American land made room for people who look like me," said the journalist.

So what do white people do? Biewen said it does little good to feel shame and guilt — foundations for a racially divided society were put in place long before any of us were born. But since many white people have benefited from this system, it's their responsibility to do something about the injustices it's spawned. That means listening to people who are being discriminated against, standing up in our local communities to injustices we witness, and supporting groups led by people of color. Biewen hopes that the intense attention that's been given to racial injustice since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis isn't a temporary "sugar high" that results in the country dropping off to sleep again.

"Will enough of us, including enough white people, stay awake and stay active to the point where we'll make real and lasting change?" he asked. "I genuinely believe that we all stand to benefit if we could create a society that's not built on the exploitation or oppression of anyone." □

'It's Not Lost, it Just Went to Sleep'

On a Mission to Reawaken Native Farming's Heritage

Note: Ella Robertson and Eric Wana are members of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate and live in northeastern South Dakota. During the past few years, they have been working to reclaim their people's food producing heritage and show that farming does not have to follow the traditional European model of squared off fields separated from natural habitat. They're raising traditional fruits, vegetables, and other crops, and are rediscovering the role gathering and preserving "wild" food produced on their reservation can play in providing a healthy form of sustenance. They and other Native Americans are also proving that many of the "regenerative" farming practices spawning so much excitement these days have deep roots in Indigenous ways of interacting with the land.

Land Stewardship Letter editor Brian DeVore visited Robertson and Wana to interview them for the We Are Water initiative (pages 16-17). Below are excerpts from that interview. You can hear the entire conversation on episode 249 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1390.

On a New (Old) Way to Look at Farming

◆ **Robertson:** "When it was about fighting the Native Americans of the United States, it was about attacking their food source. So what we're trying to do is trying to regain that knowledge and strength through our foods, because foods met so much to us."

◆ **Wana:** "The farming that comes to mind to the average person in the United States is a squared, blocked-out piece of land with 40 acres of beans, 40 acres of corn, 40 acres of whatever. Native Americans had agriculture, and it went back hundreds and hundreds of years. We cropped. We had orchards."

"We don't have 40 acres that we're growing on. We don't have 200 acres that we're planting on. But, that being said, we have what we have here. A lot of the food that we gather is all over our reservation. We harvest from a thousand acres. We harvest from 2,000 acres, throughout the seasons. We're farmers. Not in the traditional European sense, but we're farming. We're actually doing it."

On Unearthing Indigenous Farming Knowledge

◆ **Robertson:** "Talking with the elders about food production, none of them did it. They remember stories, but none of them did it. So last year was the first year we tapped trees and we learned it on YouTube. It doesn't matter where we learn it from, it's that we're trying."

◆ **Wana:** "Before the Internet, I spent a lot of time in the library. Once we got the Internet, oh my god, it opened up a whole new world to me about what my people did, what we did previous to all the hardships endured over the past 150 years."

◆ **Robertson:** "You think about our foods — we had ceremonies, we had songs, we had special prayers that we did for each of those things. And that has gone to sleep. So we're trying to wake it up. Because to me, that strengthens our connection to Mother Earth. Now that we have a better understanding of that, that's what we pass on to other people, that's what we share with our children. Because there is always a reason



Ella Robertson with some of the foods she and Eric Wana grow and gather. She says ways to connect to the land through Indigenous food production is "just waiting for us to find it and to breathe life back into it." (LSP Photo)

and a purpose for the way we do things."

On Why Stewardship of Land & Water is Key to Food Production

◆ **Robertson:** "Because we utilize our reservation for collecting, we have to be conscious of what we're doing, where we're doing it, and what people are doing on the land. So the bigger picture here is in this smaller area. It's our reservation, but because we have relatives on other reservations, we have a concern for them. As Native Americans we know we can empathize with those that are having issues with land, with water, with chemical use. You know, because that could be us. It could easily be us. And if we don't collectively have a concern for it, then nothing can improve, nothing's going to get better."

"Water is the center of everything that we do. So when there's a concern about water, our resources being depleted, then it's scary for us, it's a concern for us. Because what we do all centers around water."

◆ **Wana:** "Not too long ago, I wrote a number of papers on drain tiling and the impact it had on our area. So drain tiling has been going on here since the 1880s. Immediately, the impacts were seen amongst our people, because by the turn of the century, those waterways were gone, totally gone from us. A lot of the prairie potholes in the Coteau Areas that originally held water are drained, completely drained. A lot of the lakes, even, were drain tiled out to the point where they wouldn't flood any more. Seasonal flooding, the refilling of the potholes, it just wouldn't happen. I mean, there is not a spring in the area, not a lake in the area, that isn't contaminated in some way, shape, or form."

"So water is life. Water is something from nature that we're not going to get back from nature once it's gone."

And On Passing Knowledge onto the Next Generation

◆ **Wana:** "Ella and I are into history, reading books from two or three hundred years ago and accumulating knowledge. When we're doing these things, writing them down, what's in the back of my mind is that we're revitalizing our food ways. Two or three hundred years from now, people are going to be reading about what we're doing, and the knowledge we're passing on."

◆ **Robertson:** "I like to say, 'It's not lost, it just went to sleep.' It's just waiting for us to find it and to breathe life back into it." □

We Are Water

This past winter and spring, people who farm in the upper reaches of the Minnesota River watershed were featured in a series of “We Are Water” online discussions. Through short video clips and interviews, they shared how they are using innovative production methods to make their land more resilient in the face of challenges such as climate change. They also talked about their relationship to water and the land.

The webinar series that resulted is a partnership involving the University of Minnesota-Morris Office of Sustainability, the Stevens County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Clean Up the River Environment, in cooperation with the Land Stewardship Project and with support from the Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership.

To view the webinars, see www.wearewaterwcmn.com/relationships-with-the-land. Some of the stories are also featured on LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast (landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast): episodes 249, 250, 251, and 252.

These two pages feature excerpted comments from farmers who shared their stories through the We Are Water initiative. □



LSP Photo

Mark Erickson

After repeatedly running into problems with fields too wet to raise a decent crop on, Mark Erickson convinced his four landlords that it would be better for the land, as well as his bottom line, if he converted their acres from row crops to rotationally grazed pastures. The operation, which is in west-central Minnesota’s Stevens County, now produces grass-fed beef using high-density mob grazing.

Erickson: “So now, we’re getting pretty comfortable with where the land is at. The water’s not pooling anymore. Even with heavy rains, it sits for a very short time. We don’t have any drowned-out spots on the farm at all anymore, and there’s no runoff so we’re able to harvest all the water.

“You put equal weight on what happens to the land, and what happens to the people, and what happens to the economy. You put equal weight on all the things that are happening around you, not just on what’s happening on your farm.” □



LSP Photo

Bryan Simon

Bryan and Jessie Simon farm a peninsula of land that sticks out into Cormorant Lake, in west-central Minnesota’s Grant County. They took corn and soybean ground and converted 160 acres to highly diverse native prairie, which they graze cattle and goats on.

Simon: “Farming has a bad rap in the environmental world, and the environmental world has a bad reputation in the agriculture world. They don’t really get along. It is my hope to merge those two worlds to show that you can have wildlife and clean water and healthy soil, all that, and produce good, healthy food at the same time. It’s been a big reason why I got into agriculture.” □



LSP Photo

Jessica Blair

Jessica Blair’s family has converted most of their 550 acres in west-central Minnesota’s Pope County from row crops to rotationally grazed pastures.

Blair: “For us, on our farm, soil health is number one. It’s the foundation of everything we do. It’s what’s going to allow us to pass our land onto our children. When we have these big weather events and other things, it makes us resilient to have healthy soil.

“It’s been really eye-opening to me to see how water can change the landscape....we’re always thinking about what’s coming off our land. That directs the decisions we make to ensure the water that’s coming off our land is just as clean or cleaner than when we came to the farm.” □

We Are Water, see page 17...



LSP Photo

Carrie Redden

Carrie Redden, along with her husband, Derek, produces organic milk on a pasture-based farm in west-central Minnesota's Stevens County. The farm has been in Derek's family for over 100 years, and although they did not grow up farming, the couple started the dairy from scratch after taking the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course.

Redden: "The biggest advantage to rotational grazing is that it builds healthy soil — we try to keep a permanent vegetative cover on the land as much as possible. We use perennial crops when we can and then use the animals to harvest the crop and to distribute the fertilizer. We're looking at increasing the organic matter in the soil so the soil is going to be able to retain water better to reduce runoff and make the land less dramatically affected by extreme rainfall events, but also to make it more drought tolerant.

"I am confident that prioritizing stewardship of the land and water is what is going to allow this farm to continue. There's absolutely no doubt that we have to prioritize responsible management of the land, and especially the water, just for the vitality and the sustainability of the farm and the land itself." □

Ella Robertson & Eric Wana

Ella Robertson and Eric Wana are on a mission (*see page 15*) to reclaim their connection to the land as members of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate in northeastern South Dakota. Specifically, they are unearthing how their people have traditionally connected to the land through farming. And at the core of this is the role clean water plays in assuring the food they produce is healthy.

Robertson: "As Native Americans, as a Dakota family, we look at things holistically, and because of that connection with Mother Earth, we know that if our water is poisoned, or the land has too many chemicals on it, some of our medicines aren't going to grow, some of our foods aren't going to be able to grow."

Wana: "So what happens now, the way we use our waters, what goes into our ground, what goes into our aquifers, what trickles into our streams, affects all of America, not just what's happening right here. If you back out, back out, back out, and look at all of America, what's happening here in our little piece of the world is affecting our entire nation. It's nationwide, it's not just what we're doing. It's everything." □



LSP Photo

Abbey Dickhudt

Abbey Dickhudt is a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota-Morris and has worked on various farms, including Prairie Drifter Farm, a Community Supported Agriculture vegetable operation near Litchfield in west-central Minnesota. Dickhudt is interested in making farming a career as a way to steward the water and land, but sees access to acres as a daunting challenge.

Dickhudt: "Just because of that burden of finding land and affording it, I know that if I keep farming, it's going to be in partnership with others. I'm curious what it looks like when it's more collective ownership of land or it's a more regionally based system. And as a young queer farmer, having one family unit is going to look really different. I want to learn about different relationships to farming — seeing when do I need to own land versus when is renting good.

"In general, my relationship to the land, not just ownership, but my relationship to it, is something I really value. And I know that relationship doesn't have to be an extractive one, that it can be reciprocal. It can almost not be a choice about whether you take care of the Earth. It should have never been a choice.

"I know I say, 'I don't know a lot,' but I'm intentional about that because I think it's important to admit I have a lot to learn and that I have a lot to learn from people from different backgrounds, and different places." □



LSP Photo

A Raw Deal on Farmland

Using Farm Beginnings & Soil Health to Push Marginal Land Beyond Expectations

By Brian DeVore

There are upsides to launching a farm on raw, open land: no broken-down outbuildings or junk piles to deal with, the ability to truly start anew from the soil up. Then...there's the other side of the fence, so to speak.

"I decided to move the sheep before they move themselves," says Hannah Bernhardt with a laugh as she finishes setting up a new paddock on a windswept pasture in north-eastern Minnesota on an October afternoon. The white wool of the sheep pops in contrast to the mix of dormant grasses and still-growing green forage in the new grazing area Bernhardt has formed with the portable electronet. It turns out one of the major downsides to a piece of land that lacks even the most basic of infrastructure is loose livestock and the need to do fencing on the go. Once, on Bernhardt's birthday no less, the cattle disappeared. Surprise! It turned out they had walked two miles to the town of Finlayson. And don't even get her started on the headaches involved with getting water to livestock on open land: hauling lots of buckets, cracked tanks in winter — you get the picture.

"I usually tell people the only way I would recommend starting with raw land is if you're an insane person who wants to work non-stop," says Bernhardt, 38. But the 160 acres of former hay ground she and her husband, Jason Misik, 45, bought in 2016 is looking a little less raw these days. Medicine Creek Farm (www.medicinecreekfarm.com) now has a house, outbuildings, water lines, and yes, some permanent fencing, all constructed by the beginning farmers. It's also home to a thriving pasture-based direct-to-consumer livestock enterprise. A lot of sweat equity has gone into this transformation. And backing up that hard work is the strong belief on the part of Bernhardt and Misik that sub-par

ag land far from traditional Farm Country can exceed expectations with the help of the kind of innovative management they learned through the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program.

"We were able to buy 10 times more land here than we could have afforded in southern Minnesota," says Misik. And for Bernhardt, that not only means they have more room to make a fulltime living on the land, but an opportunity to have a positive impact on a bigger patch of real estate. "How much land can you improve in southern Minnesota when you can only afford to buy five acres? It's like if you can afford 160 acres, think of the good you can do improving that amount of soil," she says.



"We were able to buy 10 times more land here than we could have afforded in southern Minnesota," says Jason Misik, shown here with Hannah Bernhardt. (LSP Photo)

A View from the Rooftop

Bernhardt is intimately familiar with what prime farmland looks like. She grew up in southern Minnesota's Martin County, one of the top producers of corn and soybeans in the state (its many CAFOs also put it in the top tier as a hog producer). She was born when the 1980s farm crisis was raging, and her father quit farming fulltime by the time Bernhardt was 5. She received a clear message at a young age: it's next to impossible to get started and make a financial

success in farming, at least in the heart of the Corn Belt. College took her to the East Coast and she later worked as a lobbyist for a Minneapolis-based law firm.

But her agrarian roots were calling, so Bernhardt started working for the National Young Farmers Coalition, an opportunity that took her to New York. Through that experience, she saw that there were opportunities in agriculture that go beyond raising corn and soybeans. She met farmers who were running Community Supported Agriculture operations and raising pasture-raised livestock for direct sale to consumers. At one point, she was working on two rooftop farms in Brooklyn. "It was really funny — like I grew up on a farm and here I am growing vegetables on a roof in New York City," she recalls.

Bernhardt became particularly convinced there are alternative ways to make it in farming when she worked on a pasture-based livestock operation in the Hudson Valley. That experience also won her over to the economic and ecological benefits of regenerative livestock production, and she returned to Minnesota to launch her farming career.

Misik had little background in farming, but grew up in a dairy producing community in southeastern Wisconsin. His lack of farming experience is one of the reasons the couple enrolled in the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course during the winter of 2015-2016. The other reason was that Bernhardt has always been concerned about her lack of financial acumen. That was also a reason they took LSP's follow-up course, Journeyperson, a few years later.

"Through Farm Beginnings, Hannah wrote a really impressive business plan," says Misik. "That's probably the single most important thing. Hannah is a perfectionist, so she took it *all* the way. There were pie charts, spreadsheets, and photographs."

"I overcompensated," Bernhardt admits with a shrug.

The Farm Beginnings course, which LSP has been offering for over two decades in the Minnesota-Wisconsin-northern Iowa region (*pages 4 and 32*), is led by established farmers and offers opportunities for doing the kind of networking that supports new ag operations as they get up and running. The Journeyperson course takes a deeper dive into whole farm planning strategies like Holistic Management, and sets participants up with mentors, as well as an instructor with

Raw Deal, see page 19...

the Farm Business Management Association, a Minnesota state initiative that guides farmers through financial management decisions.

Bernhardt's overachieving business plan paid off: it helped the couple obtain financing through the Farm Service Agency to get their farm started, including a microloan that helps with infrastructure. With the help of funding from the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Bernhardt and Misik have also established an extensive fencing and watering system for rotational grazing, although they'd like to establish more perimeter fencing. They have also benefited from private loans provided by family members.

Pure Potential

The couple didn't necessarily start out to be modern-day homesteaders. Bernhardt, in particular, was aware of the advantages of farming in what's traditionally considered an agricultural area: fertile soil, farmsteads with basic infrastructure, and support services like co-ops and repair shops. But after looking at almost two dozen farms in the Minnesota-Wisconsin area, they were struck by a harsh reality: prime ag land is extraordinarily expensive — land goes for around \$8,000 an acre in Bernhardt's home county. On top of that, many farmsteads are being bulldozed to make room for more corn and soybeans, leaving few options for obtaining a farm that can also be a home for people and livestock.

At around \$1,200 an acre, the price was right for the 160 acres they found in Pine County, roughly an hour-and-a-half north of the Twin Cities. It's in an area that's a bit of a transition zone between the agricultural region of southern Minnesota and the North Woods — smaller stands of timber, boggy spots, and meadows dominate. Starting from scratch can be daunting, but Bernhardt and Misik felt that besides their young energy, they had two other competitive advantages. For one, through Farm Beginnings they had learned how to create a good business plan and had met established farmers who were able to make a viable living on relatively few acres direct-marketing products like pasture-based meat.

And although this part of Minnesota doesn't have many of the ancillary businesses farms rely on, it does have a critical service for a direct-to-consumer livestock

operation: a USDA certified meat processor is located just 20 miles from Medicine Creek Farm. Many parts of the Upper Midwest lack local meat processing, so this is a huge plus for Bernhardt and Misik. They say that having a business that can process animals into retail cuts gives them more flexibility in reaching customers who don't have enough freezer space for something like a quarter-beef.

And it wasn't just the selling price of the farm that made it a good financial risk. Misik works off the farm doing set design for commercials, and in order for him to be on the farm fulltime, the operation will need to expand capacity. That will mean more animals, which may mean more land.

"It we wanted to rent, we could rent additional farmland for \$15 an acre here," says Misik. "The same farmland down south that we were looking at rents for \$275 an acre. And so, our opportunity to expand, as we get this place paid off, is just much greater."



Before it was bulldozed, the beginning farmers rescued an 1880s-era barn from southern Minnesota and reassembled it on their land. The barn's former home sold for \$12,000 per acre, says Misik. (LSP Photo)

Another benefit to being in this particular community is the presence of Janet McNally at Tamarack Lamb and Wool, a sheep producer and guard dog breeder who has served as a mentor to Bernhardt and Misik.

Finally, a critical factor that gave them the confidence to take a chance on marginal land goes deeper, literally into the ground itself. Financial analysts like to quip that, "Past performance is no guarantee of future results." That could certainly be said of soil in places like southern Minnesota, which has enjoyed an historical run of natural high fertility. But past performance doesn't mean it has a lock on future potential, particularly as intensive monocropping takes its toll. Bernhardt said she became aware of that fact after she and Misik participated in a Practical Farmers of Iowa tour of Gabe Brown's operation in North Dakota.

Give it a Listen

Episode 247 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast features Hannah Bernhardt and Jason Misik talking about how they are using sweat equity and the building of soil health to transform a marginal piece of ground far from Corn Country: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1355.

Brown has shown that one can make a good living utilizing rotational grazing, no-till, diverse rotations, and multi-species cover cropping to build organic matter on marginal soils. Utilizing innovative livestock production systems to make a living on land that's not suitable for bin-busting corn yields is particularly attractive to beginning farmers with limited resources.

Bernhardt came away from that tour convinced that they could make underperforming land pay off eventually by building its soil through practices like managed rotational grazing. Misik was impressed too, and gets emotional when he thinks about the epiphany he had on that trip.

"For the first time in my life I was, like, this is proof that something positive could happen in the world," he says. "I could see it happening here."

Come for the Carbon

On this October day, it's beginning to look like things are indeed happening here. The rotational grazing system they raise their sheep, cattle, and pigs under is building soil organic matter, resulting in more productive pastures and thriving animals. The beginning farmers say their carrying capacity has already increased in just a few short years.

"Things are changing quickly and the biology's waking up," says Misik.

They market their beef, pork, and lamb direct to mostly Twin Cities and Duluth customers. Numbers fluctuate, but their sheep herd numbers around 80, and they have 35 head of cattle and 20 pigs; they also breed and sell guard dogs. Like many direct-to-consumer meat producers, Medicine Creek Farm sold out in 2020 as a result of the pandemic raising people's concerns about the source of their meat. Bernhardt estimates that in order for Misik to quit his off-farm job, they will need to double

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2021-2022 FB Class

The 2021-2022 edition of LSP's Farm Beginnings course is now accepting applications. Classes will begin in the fall. See page 32 for details.

Farm Beginnings

...Raw Deal, from page 19

livestock numbers, either by increasing the productivity of their existing acres or acquiring more land.

Bernhardt is adept at using social media to tell her farm's story. Her animals and the land are extremely photogenic and while scrolling through Medicine Creek's Instagram feed, it's easy to forget how much work has gone into setting up this operation. Misik built their house and outbuildings, filling knowledge gaps by viewing YouTube videos on such things as plumbing. Their latest construction project is a reminder of why they ended up launching a farm far from a prime row crop production region.

After setting up the temporary paddock, the couple head back across open pastures

to the farmstead and take refuge from the autumn wind in an 1880s-era barn that is in a state of being reassembled. Misik found it on a farmstead in southern Minnesota that was slated for dozing. He carefully took it apart and labeled the timbers with animal ear tags before hauling it north. Its former home sold for \$12,000 an acre, he says.

As they sit in an old church pew (Misik rescued it from his hometown) in the barn's cavernous loft, the couple talks about how they aren't finished when it comes to building a farm from the roots up. Their long-term goal is to make the reassembled barn into a combination events/education center, on-farm store, and Airbnb. They are also working constantly on building soil health using tweaks to their rotational grazing system. For example, they recently expanded bale grazing to more distant pastures as a way to improve those paddocks while providing animals nutrition during the winter. And recalling their training in Holistic Management goal setting, they are also

working on making sure farm work doesn't dominate: they have a 3-year-old son, Harvey, and have committed to doing things like going swimming more this summer.

Guiding the young farmers' efforts is the overall goal of making the land an important link between the health of the soil and how eaters view their food choices, as well as what public policies they support. From the beginning, Bernhardt has emphasized through the farm's website and social media outreach that their "regenerative" system not only provides healthy, happy meat, but improves the environment, producing, among other things, carbon-sequestering soil.

"I feel like we're luring customers in with happy animals and then trying to teach them soil health," she says. "Someday, maybe they'll come for the soil health education and then get some meat on the side, instead of the other way around."

In other words, this non-Farm Country farm has the potential to have a positive impact far beyond its fence lines. □

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. Below are a few recent listings. For the latest listings, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse.

Seeking Farmland

◆ Kari Boyer is seeking to rent 1-5 acres of farmland in *Illinois or Wisconsin*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and includes 1-3 tillable acres is preferred. Contact: Kari Boyer, 618-581-6390, karielizabethboyer@gmail.com.

◆ Camille Mefleh and Luciano Chance are seeking to purchase farmland in the *western Wisconsin area between the Twin Cities and Menomonie*, ideally within 1.5 hours of the Twin Cities. They are looking for at least 25 acres. Contact: Camille Mefleh and Luciano Chance, 612-226-4397, camille.mefleh@gmail.com.

◆ Mark Sloo is seeking to purchase farmland in *Minnesota or Wisconsin (relatively close to the Twin Cities)*. He and his partner will consider all sizes of farms. Contact: Mark Sloo, 612-879-8838, msloo@msn.com.

◆ Kate and Peter McColl are seeking to purchase 5+ acres of tillable farmland in *western Wisconsin or southeastern Minnesota (Winona and Onalaska area)*. Contact: Kate and Peter McColl, 507-460-2465, katolah@gmail.com.

◆ Mikayla Birschbach is seeking to purchase a maximum of 100 acres of farmland in *eastern Minnesota or western Wisconsin*. A farm with at least 70 acres of pasture, a house, and a milking parlor is preferred. Contact: Mikayla Birschbach, 920-517-1650, mikayla.birschbach@gmail.com.

◆ Xee Vang is seeking to rent 1 acre of tillable farmland in *Minnesota*. Land with water is preferred. Contact: Xee Vang, 612-407-0874, xeevang02@gmail.com.

◆ Minnesota Agrarian Commons is looking to purchase 70-150 acres within a one-hour radius of *Minnesota's Twin Cities or along the corridor between the Twin Cities and Rochester*. Agrarian Commons is looking for a gift, bargain sale, or market value sale to be achieved through Agrarian Trust. Contact: Robin Moore, 320-321-5244, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org.

Farmland Available

◆ Susan Swanson has for sale 3.25 acres of farmland in *Washington County in the Twin Cities, Minn., region (Marine on St. Croix)*. There is 1 tillable acre and 1 pasture acre, and the land has not been sprayed for several years.

There is the possibility of leasing 9 acres adjoining the property. The asking price is \$289,000. Contact: Susan Swanson, 651-442-5789, smswan17@gmail.com.

◆ Suzan Erem of the Sustainable Iowa Land Trust has for sale 53 acres of certified organic farmland in *southwestern Iowa's Pottawattamie County (near Honey Creek)*. The land consists of 33 tillable acres and 18 acres of timber suitable for agroforestry in the Loess Hills just north of Omaha and Council Bluffs. Contact: Suzan Erem, 319-480-4241, suzan@silt.org.

◆ Margaret Lyngholm has for sale 30 acres of farmland in *southeastern Minnesota's Fillmore County (near Lanesboro)*. The land consists of 4 tillable acres, 4 pasture acres, and 16 forest acres. Contact: Margaret Lyngholm, 507-250-5065, strawbale100@gmail.com.

◆ Terry Rikke has for rent 5 acres of farmland in *west-central Minnesota's Kandiyohi County (near Lake Lillian)*. The land consists of 2 pasture acres. The land has not been sprayed for several years. Contact: Terry Rikke, 612-212-6407, notstandingstill@gmail.com.

Key Players in the Future of Farming

Helping Landowners See Their Role in Creating a Positive Ag Landscape

This winter, the Land Stewardship Project hosted a series of online workshops and forums for folks who play a pivotal role in the future of our food and farming system: established farmers nearing retirement and landowners who may not be actively farming, but are renting their land out. As LSP organizer Robin Moore explained it to participants in one of the workshops: “You are really, really important. You have a lot of power to affect what’s happening on the landscape.”

The workshops featured an impressive array of experts, as well as farmers and landowners who had tips to share on everything from how to create a lease that reflects one’s conservation values to financial, legal, and long-term care considerations when transitioning land and infrastructure to the next generation. Participants were even given a primer on that most valuable of land resources: healthy soil.

To provide a glimpse at these workshops, here are a few samples of comments made by the presenters:

Farm Transition Introductory Workshop

“One of the most important decisions you’ll ever make as a farmer is one of the last ones you ever make — it’s that decision of what’s going to happen to your land for several generations to come. And it’s not only what happens to the land, it’s how it affects the community. I’ve known farmers who have sold their land to the highest bidder, and they’re just sick when they see what happens to it. I’ve gotten to meet a lot of young people who are just really excited about farming and the enthusiasm is infectious. Some of them need mentoring, some need access to land, some maybe need creative financing. But they all need an opportunity, and that’s something that we as retiring farmers can provide.”

— Bill McMillin, who, along with his wife, Bonnie, recently transitioned their farm to a beginning farmer

Goal Setting for Life & Land Workshop

“We are Cree and Jason Bradley. We’re not Chelsea Morning Farm. And so those

values that we have, they’re our values, and they pertain to our life on-farm and off-farm. But the more we can represent those values in the farm decisions that we make, the more compelling that farm is going to be for us. And that applies whether you’re transitioning a farm or are thinking about how you interact with other farmers through rental agreements.”

— farmer Cree Bradley

Soil Health Workshop

“The challenge is to not just get farmers, but to get everyone to see how interconnected the soil is to so many other facets of

Continuing Your Legacy

For help on issues related to transitioning your farm or creating rental agreements that reflect your stewardship legacy, contact LSP’s Robin Moore (rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org) or Karen Stettler (stettler@landstewardshipproject.org).

LSP’s *Conservation Leases Toolkit* is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders/conservationleases. Our *Farm Transition Tools* web page is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmtransitiontools.

our life. It all really begins with the soil. My answer to all your questions, no matter what they are, is soil health. That will pretty much cover it.”

— Kristin Brennan, soil health expert with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Financial Considerations for Farm Transition Workshop

“The first thing that I often find a farmer pushing back at me against is that they don’t believe that farmer retirement is a thing. I would still encourage you to plan for retirement, because sometimes we don’t know that we’re going to retire. Sometimes we have to retire for reasons that are outside our control — for healthcare reasons, for other reasons that we didn’t anticipate. So even

if you don’t plan to retire, I still think you should plan for it.”

— Megan Roberts, U of M Extension

Legal Considerations for Farm Transitions Workshop

“When we’re navigating a farm succession plan, we have to remember it often takes time for specific goals to materialize and to know how the timeline and the finances are all going to work together. For that reason, estate planning is often where we start with the farm succession plan. And no one’s plan is exactly like anyone else’s.”

— attorney Jason Wagner

Long Term Care Considerations for Farm Transitions Workshop

“I don’t see my role as being someone who’s going to tell you what your goals and visions are. I think you have to come up with that on your own because it should be your vision, not my vision, and there really is no one-size-fits-all approach. I think whenever you’re working with a professional, whether it’s your tax adviser, your financial adviser, or your attorney, you want to have that big picture in mind of where you are and where you’re trying to go. And then my role as the attorney is to provide you with the tools to get you to where you want to go. Without clear goals in mind, it’s really difficult to get there. I think that’s the real difficult thing to do, and the rest of it is just technical paperwork stuff.”

— attorney Kate Graham

Conservation Lease Forum

“I did go through a review process with folks I’m considering renting to. The first was an e-mail, the second was a phone call, and the third was actually meeting together. Relationships are really important. I think spelling things out is really, really important. I do have a section in the lease about sustainable practices on the farm. You can’t think of everything, but you can try to have that conversation.”

— farmer Lori Cox, who is renting out parcels of her farm to four different produce farmers

“I don’t know if my landlords are into soil health, but I think they are on-board with what I’m doing. Probably about four or five years ago I did have some landlords come to me because of what I was doing and I rented some additional land that way. So that was a good feeling.”

— farmer John Ledermann, who builds soil health on rented land using no-till and cover crops

The Making of a Successful Farm Owner

When Timing is Everything, Sometimes it Pays to Manipulate the Calendar

Harvey Benson had a simple transition plan for the farm that had been in his family since the late 1860s: he would continue living on those 160 acres until he died, and then it would be passed on to his partner, Bonita Underbakke. In fact, when people ask him if he's lived on the farm all his life, the 90-year-old quips, "Not yet." Bonita is 16 years his junior and they have grown quite close since they started dating in 2009 or so. Didn't this arrangement make sense?

When she learned of this proposal, Bonita, not one to mince words, had a response that was clear and to the point: "That's not a plan."

What followed was a half-a-dozen years of discussions, some quite difficult, around creating a more nuanced transition plan for the farm in southeastern Minnesota's Fillmore County. With the help of a young couple who has an interest in farming, community, and land stewardship, the older couple created an arrangement that strikes a balance of allowing Harvey to live out his wishes without putting an undue burden on Bonita when it comes to estate issues. A bonus is it provides a land access opportunity for beginning farmers while building soil health. It required creative thinking, but Harvey is glad he was pushed to think deeper about the future of the farm — it's changed not only how he views the land, but how he views himself.

On a spring afternoon, as he gives a tour of the farmstead, Harvey reflects on how he has transitioned from being a "failed farm owner" to someone who is successfully passing on a stewardship legacy.

"I avoided even starting to think about passing on this farm because that would change my relationship with the land," he says. "But ultimately, I'm very happy with this decision."

Lifelong Learner

Harvey likes to say that "every decade you learn something more," and it's clear his curiosity about the world around him is boundless. He was born in the house he

lives in now, and while he was growing up the farm was a typical diversified crop and livestock operation. After graduating from the University of Minnesota, Harvey was a social worker in the area. He eventually moved to Finland, where he taught English at the Helsinki University of Technology for 30 years. After retiring, he traveled around the world for a few years before returning to the farm, where he's lived for the past two dozen years. During that time, the farm's been rented to a neighbor who grows corn,



(l to r) Harvey Benson and Bonita Underbakke, along with Aaron and Amy Bishop, on the farm Harvey sold to the younger couple. "Of course, it will always be Harvey's," says Aaron. (LSP Photo)

soybeans, and alfalfa on the land.

Harvey has no children, and when he entered his 80s, he started thinking more about the future of the land. In 2016, Bonita, a long-time Land Stewardship Project member, talked him into attending a series of Farm Transition workshops the organization puts on periodically. The workshops (page 21), which are led by LSP staffer Karen Stettler, offer participants access to legal experts, as well as people who can help retiring farmers and non-operating landowners do the kind of goal setting needed to transition a farm in a way that meets their financial and conservation desires.

Harvey says the workshop was valuable, but he still didn't feel he was in a position to pass off the farm to the next generation, especially if it meant moving off the land.

Bonita, who is a self-identified "pushy person," along with Stettler, talked to Har-

vey about how selling to the highest bidder would likely mean the farm would just become one more field in a bigger cropping operation. Harvey started attending LSP workshops that covered, among other things, building soil health through practices like cover cropping, managed rotational grazing, and no-till. He was intrigued that working farmland could be good for the landscape.

"I've got that LSP bumper sticker that says, 'Let's Stop Treating Our Soil Like Dirt.' I look at that every day and think to myself, 'Good for them,'" says Harvey.

And through the Farm Transitions workshop and other LSP meetings, Harvey became aware that beginning farmers face significant barriers when it comes to accessing affordable land.

"Young people, unless they inherit the farm, there's virtually no way they can get started," he says. "So I wanted young people with good ideas and who were going to take care of the soil. I wanted people who would be in the community, part of the community."

Community Couple

Enter Aaron and Amy Bishop. The couple live in nearby Harmony and have roots in the community. Aaron grew up two miles from Harvey's farm — his family owns and operates Niagara Cave, which offers tours of the underground cavern. He also serves on the local school board, and is involved with other nonprofits. The couple is remodeling an old bank building on the Main Street of Harmony, and plan on turning the upper level into Airbnb lodging and the lower level into space for a future business.

Amy grew vegetables and marketed them through the farmers' market and Community Supported Agriculture models for four years, and worked at Seed Savers Exchange in nearby Decorah, Iowa, for an additional six. It's her goal to farm fulltime, and she had been looking for land in the area for a number of years. Both are mindful of land stewardship — Aaron has a geology degree and through his experience studying and exploring southeastern Minnesota's karst geology, is intimately aware of the oftentimes fraught relationship between land use on the surface and water quality underground.

To top it off, the young couple — he's 30 and she's 38 — is close friends with their older counterparts (Harvey and Bonita served as their marriage witnesses). In short, they checked a lot of boxes. "Aaron

Successful Farm Owner, see page 23...

and Amy are the family Harvey didn't get around to having earlier," says Bonita.

There's just one catch: since they had never anticipated being able to afford 160-acres of land, the Bishops aren't quite ready to take over management of the entire farm. Timing is the great enemy of successful farm transfers. It's difficult to align when the landowner is ready to move on with when there is a new farmer ready to step in. But the two couples have come up with ways to manipulate the calendar and fit it to their situation.

Back to the Books

In January, the Bishops officially took over ownership of the farm. However, Harvey will continue to live on the land and call it home for as long as he wants. Even though he's convinced the young couple's worldview perfectly matches his values and wishes, Harvey says it's still difficult to realize he's no longer the owner.

"Joining futures with them was absolutely the right decision, but it comes with mixed emotions that still rise up once in awhile," he says.

Because of Harvey's generosity, the transition resembles a family land transfer more than a sale between two unrelated parties, which made it necessary to make certain the legal details were taken care of to deal with issues like probate law and the "clawback" of assets that can occur if a former landowner needs to go into long-term care. The two couples worked with a local attorney who specializes in ag law; the process required many calls, meetings, and e-mails.

"Harvey was resolute when it came to his expectations of the land transition," Aaron recalls. "There were multiple ways we could have gone about it, but he wanted no mortgage and no interest involved."

In order to meet those criteria, the attorney had to delve into notes he'd taken during college classes on seldom-used concepts.

Aaron and Amy will make payments on the farm for 20 years, which will likely cover Harvey's lifetime; after that, Bonita will receive them. Any payments remaining after Bonita's passing can be donated to charity. In the end, Harvey will have ended

up selling the farm to the younger couple for about half the going market rate.

"Essentially, we will be taking care of Harvey and Bonita until then, with paying off the farm to the agreed-upon amount and time," says Amy. An unofficial part of this arrangement is that the younger couple will continue doing something they've already been doing the past few years: provide Harvey support with maintaining the yard, his house, and his garden.

The purchase agreement includes "a right of reentry" — if Aaron and Amy don't live up to their promise to keep it a family farm utilizing conservation practices and/or if they don't allow Harvey to remain living on the property, then the older man, or Bonita, can reclaim ownership.

For Now: Stewards, Not Farmers

The younger couple has also developed a creative work-around when it comes to the other timing issue involved — they may not be ready to farm the land's 145 tillable acres fulltime, but in the meantime they want to make sure it's stewarded to Harvey's specifications. As a result, after consulting the lease templates included in LSP's *Conservation Leases Toolkit* (see sidebar), they approached the current renter with three options that provide the opportunity to reduce his rental rate by implementing additional soil-friendly practices — the more cover crops he implements, the lower the rate. The renter recently signed a two-year lease, and for the 2021 growing season went with the middle option offered: planting cover crops on half of the row-cropped acreage.

Amy and Aaron based their rental option calculations on the cost of putting in a cover crop. They also provided the renter resources on cover crop cost-share programs available through agencies like the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Fortunately, Harvey has maintained the fencing on the land, so the renter has the ability to graze his cattle on the cover crops.

"It's fortunate for us the neighbor is willing and able to continue renting because it's going to ensure that something's going to happen under the conservation terms that we worked out," says Aaron.

The new lease buys the Bishops time to develop and implement various plans for the farm, including returning a portion of

Conservation Leases

LSP has developed a toolkit for people seeking to utilize leases that emphasize building soil health and other conservation practices.

For fact sheets, templates, and other resources related to developing conservation leases, and to sign-up for LSP's conservation leases update list, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders/conservationleases or contact LSP's Robin Moore at rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org.

it to native prairie. This year, Amy is using three acres on the farm to grow a contracted vegetable seed crop for Seed Savers Exchange and to conduct small grains trials. Meanwhile, Aaron will continue working as a cave guide and substitute teacher.

Harvey is thrilled with this new arrangement. He had previously approached the renter about adopting soil health practices, but the conversations were difficult, with hurt feelings involved. With new owners taking over, it opened up the opportunity to renegotiate the lease without the burden of decades of tradition hanging over their heads. Farm transition experts say that a change in ownership offers a prime opportunity to modify a lease to include more conservation requirements.

Finally, the foursome has come up with a plan to deal with the other bugaboo when it comes to farm transfers: where will everyone live? Harvey has made it clear where he's residing, and Aaron and Amy will eventually be making their home in a 1950s-era corn crib that is downhill from the house.

After Harvey shows off his tree plantings on this recent spring day, the young couple provide a tour of the crib they are remodeling, pointing out where different rooms and work places will be. They also talk excitedly about future plans for the farm that include the possibility of providing opportunities for other beginning farmers who might want to do everything from rotational grazing to small grains production.

Harvey is excited too. In fact, he asks, why not live a little longer just to see how all these plans work out? "I'm looking forward to this," he says with a smile. ☐

Farm Transition Tools

The Land Stewardship Project has developed numerous resources to help retiring farmers and beginning farmers with transitions to the next generation. Check them out at www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmtransitiontools. On that web page, you will also find information on the Minnesota Beginning Farmer Tax Credit, which provides an incentive to sell or rent land or other agricultural assets—machinery, buildings, facilities, livestock, etc.—to a beginning farmer. There is also a tax credit available for beginning farmers who participate in a financial management program like Farm Beginnings (page 32). For more information, contact LSP's Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

A Grain of Ecological Truth

What a New Twist on an Old Crop Tells Us about the Need for Ag Diversity, Livestock Integration, Public Research & Public Goods

By Brian DeVore

It's March 10th, and winter is definitely not a distant memory in this part of northeastern Iowa. Tom Frantzen navigates his pickup truck past hoop houses full of hogs, grain bins, and narrow pastures tucked between shelterbelts. A cold rain has been falling off-and-on all day and the overcast sky isn't much lighter than the black, saturated soil, creating a dreary, monochrome effect. But the weather isn't dampening the farmer's enthusiasm. As his truck bombs through mud holes full of snowmelt, Frantzen talks excitedly about what's at the end of this field road — he's convinced it has the potential to remake the landscape, not just on his farm, but throughout the Midwest. Suddenly, just past a fast running stream and a thin line of trees, a sign of spring and the source of the farmer's optimism: a green carpet splashed across 16 acres of black soil. Frantzen fords the stream with his pickup and parks at the edge of the field, which was covered in snow just a week before.

The crop growing in this field has reenergized Frantzen's faith in diversified farming to the point where he's spent the past few years evangelizing about it to other farmers in his neighborhood and across the Midwest. He's even co-authored a letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, challenging him to "really change agriculture" by supporting making this particular crop a key part of the Midwestern landscape. Frantzen makes it clear that the hybrid grain rye growing on the backside of his 320-acre farm isn't just a specialty darling or a cover crop — to him, it represents a new way to think about agronomic and economic resiliency in agriculture. And others agree.

"In my 30 years in this business, I think it's the most exciting thing we've ever launched," says Mac Ehrhardt, owner of Albert Lea Seed.

But people like Frantzen and Ehrhardt make it clear this is not about one particular crop riding into town to save the day — that

kind of "silver bullet" thinking has gotten agriculture into bushels full of trouble over the years. And it's not about tweaking the corn-soybean rotation to make it slightly more "sustainable." Rather, the story behind hybrid rye coming to America is a story of taking an ecological, long view approach to agriculture. Whether dealing with the scientific, agronomic, managerial, or marketing



Farmer Tom Frantzen: "I think the people at the coffee shop would argue we were in fairly significant trouble." (LSP Photo)

challenges of getting a new crop established on the land, to Frantzen it comes down to being guided by a key question: "I mean, do we really want a diverse agriculture?"

Monsters of the Midway

Less than a decade ago, Tom and Irene Frantzen's relationship with diversity was being seriously tested. They started farming in 1974, began transitioning to organic in the 1990s, and by 2000 their crop and livestock operation was fully certified. Tom is the first to concede that they rely on the premiums they receive from their organic crop, pork, and beef production to stay profitable on their 320 acres. And since they can't use petroleum-based fertilizers or pesticides on their operation, long-term rotations are key to naturally breaking up pest cycles and building fertility. Over the years, they had developed a five-year rotation — corn, soybeans, small grains like oats, hay, and pasture — that did exactly that. The oats were

the pivot point of this mix: the Frantzens can feed it to their livestock and use its straw for their deep-bedded pork production system. It also serves as a nurse crop for seedings of alfalfa and clover, which fix nitrogen in the soil while providing cattle forage. Plus, like many small grains, oats, with their extensive root systems, help build soil organic matter and disrupt weed cycles. Oats are an example of what University of Minnesota small grains specialist Jochum Wiersma calls "rotational partners" — they may not always have an intrinsic value in the marketplace, but contribute to the overall agronomic and economic success of a rotation.

But by 2012, giant ragweed, which had up until then been a relatively minor nuisance, was seriously disrupting the Frantzens' rotation. For both organic and conventional farmers, giant ragweed is now

considered to be one of the most difficult to manage weeds in a part of the Corn Belt that extends from Ohio through southern Minnesota into northeastern Nebraska. It's the perfect pest: like many weeds, it has evolved a resistance to popular herbicides like glyphosate as their use becomes ubiquitous, it emerges from soil depths of up to four inches, and it has a large seed packed with stored energy, allowing it to get the jump on crops (it can grow up to five feet taller than the crop with which it is competing, blocking out the sun). As climate change produces high humidity and extreme heat, ragweed has thrived.

Frantzen calls giant ragweed an "evolutionary monster." Scientist Matt Liebman says he's not exaggerating. According to Liebman, who is an agronomist and the H.A. Wallace Chair for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, a major reason ragweed transitioned from a nuisance to a crop killer is that in the past it would emerge in March and April, making it vulnerable to being controlled by early season tillage, a cover crop, or herbicides incorporated into the soil at planting. But genotypes of the weed have evolved that extend its emergence window from early spring into the early portion of, for example, the soybean growing season.

By 2013, the Frantzens were in the midst of a major ragweed infestation. It hammered their soybean production, cutting yields in half, in some cases. But it was the small grains that really suffered. Ragweed made it almost impossible to harvest oats for the grain, and the Frantzens were having a hard

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time getting enough straw for hog bedding. With the failure of small grains, the farm was losing a key rotational partner, which impacted everything from the establishment of forages to the productivity of future corn and soybean crops. “I think the people at the coffee shop would argue we were in fairly significant trouble,” says Frantzen.

Liebman visited the Frantzens when they were in the middle of their ragweed battle, and was struck by how bad things had gotten. “It was eating up their farm. It was pretty grim,” he recalls. The scientist and the farmers agreed: it was an ecological problem calling for an ecological solution.

Winter Warrior

If giant ragweed was getting an early jump in the spring and then staying competitive well into the growing season, why not plant something that could duke it out with the weed during that key period? Such a strategy would require a new crop that didn’t fit into the typical plant-in-spring, harvest-in-fall cycle that dominates the Corn Belt. That’s why Frantzen was so excited when, in 2016, he received a call from Practical Farmers of Iowa asking if he was interested in experimenting with a form of hybrid rye that was being introduced into this country by KWS, a German seed company.

Hybrid rye is a “winter annual” — a crop planted in the fall that overwinters and then is harvested the following summer for grain and straw. If Midwestern farmers are aware of rye, it’s probably as an open-pollinated cover crop with little market value. Open-pollinated rye can be planted in the fall and used to battle early-emerging weeds the following growing season (rye has allelopathic properties that fend off weeds). It’s terminated with chemicals, tillage, or a roller crimper in early spring to make way for the next corn or soybean crop being planted.

But the Frantzens needed something that would produce feed and bedding for their hogs while outcompeting weeds well into summer. Since it’s harvested for its grain, hybrid rye stays on the land up until July or August, providing cover for the land and living roots in the soil for much of the growing season. Cover crops are a way to make the corn-soybean system more sustainable, but they don’t represent a true third crop; it’s the difference between being a rotational *partner* and a rotational *participant*.

“With regular cover crops, you kill it just when it starts to become something,” says Frantzen. “So the big difference with hybrid rye and soil is that I’ve got the full month of May, full month of June, and full month of

July for the root structure to do something in biologically active soil. Instead of killing something as it comes out of the chute, we’ll let the horse make some laps.”

The problem posed by giant ragweed can be traced to how monocultures have come to dominate the Midwestern landscape during the past 70 years or so. Weed evolution thrives in a simple farmscape, and it doesn’t get much simpler that a corn-soybean rotation. Government programs that do everything from penalize farmers for diversifying and emphasize export-driven commodity markets to promote the processing of corn into ethanol while using crop insurance incentives to narrow rotations have wiped out traditional rotations. To top it off, diversified livestock farms, which utilize a mix of crops (as well as pasture) to produce homegrown feedstuffs while providing a place to spread manure, are being replaced by CAFOs, which rely on huge quantities of corn and soybeans, and not much else.

These trends leave little room for small grains such as oats, wheat, barley, and rye, not to mention perennial forages produced on hay ground and pasture. In one Iowa watershed alone, between 1949 and 1997 the percentage of cropland used for wheat, barley, oats, alfalfa, and other forage crops was slashed from 42% to 3% while the percentage in corn and soybeans grew from 57% to 97%, according to a *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* study. By 2017, 85% of the total harvested cropland in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin was sprouting corn and soybeans. Minnesota and Iowa were once major oat producers. In 2020, Minnesota farmers harvested 160,000 acres of oats, a 97% drop from 1950. Iowa has seen a 99% drop in oat production during that same period. Even a small grain mainstay like wheat is being replaced in some places by corn and soybeans. The USDA estimates a little over 46 million acres of wheat will be grown in this country in 2021, the fourth lowest amount since records began in 1919.

With Midwestern agriculture so dominated by two annual row crops, there is little incentive for the rest of the agricultural infrastructure to be diversified. Everything — from transportation and storage to processing and livestock production — is constructed around the corn-soybean system. Even innovation is constricted by this fixation on these two plants — for the past several decades in this country, the bulk of crops research, both public and private, has been focused on improving even more all the elite varieties of corn and soybean genomics farmers have available.

In that kind of climate, there’s little economic incentive or public support for de-

veloping a hybridized small grain in the test plots of universities and seed companies. So maybe it’s not surprising it came from a place where corn and soybeans don’t rule the land: northern Europe.

In many parts of Europe, small grains have remained a key part of cropping systems. And interest in winter annuals like rye has increased in recent years as a result of environmental rules that require farmers to keep 50% to 70% of their ground covered with a living plant throughout the year. Since commercial varieties of hybrid rye were released in Europe in the early 2000s, use has exploded there. Claus Nymand, the product manager for KWS’s hybrid rye division in North America, estimates that 20 million acres of the crop are now grown from Russia to Ireland, and from Scandinavia in the north to Spain in the south.

As it did with corn back in the 1930s, hybrid vigor in rye has paid off in a number of ways. For one thing, by selecting for various traits and doing careful cross breeding, grain yield in hybrid rye can be as much as double that of its unimproved, open-pollinated counterpart. Just as importantly, the new varieties are resistant to ergot, a fungus that resembles rat droppings and is toxic for humans and animals. Ergot can cause abortions in sows and hallucinations in humans. There is evidence that the hysteria that led to the Salem Witch Trials was the result of people consuming ergot-contaminated grain.

Another advantage of hybrid rye is that its stalk is about four-feet-high, considerably shorter than the six-foot conventional rye, meaning it’s less likely to lodge during storms, a significant plus in light of the extreme weather events that come with climate change. “Wow, I get a plant that stands and I get about twice as much grain,” says Frantzen. “Nice work, plant breeders.”

In September 2016, the farmer planted 18 acres of hybrid rye. By November, the crop was six inches tall, and when the Frantzens hosted a Practical Farmers of Iowa field day the following June, it was three-to-four feet high. A few ragweed plants could be seen, but they were significantly outmatched. By mid-July, when they harvested a bumper crop of grain and straw off a field that had previously been a riot of ragweed, the Frantzens were convinced: they had brought their rotation back from the brink.

Five years down the road, the Frantzen rotation looks like this: plant hybrid rye in September, harvest it the following July and plant a nitrogen-fixing cover crop such as peas, which is grazed off. The next spring, that field is planted to corn, and the subsequent rotation years involve soybeans, oats,

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hay, and pasture.

In a sense, a crop like hybrid rye is prying open a critical window during the growing season that is shut tight under a corn-soybean regimen that ties up the land until well into the fall. By being able to plant a nitrogen-fixing cover after harvesting the rye in the middle of the summer, the Frantzen farm is able to provide key fertility for crops grown the following year.

“What kind of planting window do you have with corn and soybeans during the growing season? None,” says Tom. “With a winter annual like hybrid rye, you get to have a crop that opens that window up.”

And it's not just the rye straw that benefits the Frantzen swine herd — PFI trials show the processed grain competes with corn as a feed source for their hogs. Because it can be harvested for grain, hybrid rye provides the farm with significant marketing flexibility: while the Frantzens have walked it off the farm in the form of pork, they have also sold it to a specialty miller that's less than an hour's drive away. They are also growing a forage version of hybrid rye, which provides a key feed source for the cattle herd when grazed or cut as silage. University of Wisconsin research shows the forage version of hybrid rye is highly digestible for cattle, another result of hybrid vigor.

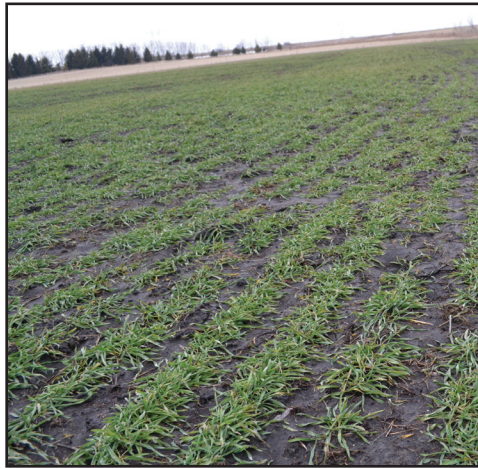
American Inroads

KWS's Nymand estimates that 40,000 acres of hybrid rye are grown in the U.S. — a drop in the bucket compared to the almost 180 million acres of corn and soybeans planted this year. Planting it is not a minor investment — the per-acre cost of seeding hybrid rye can be almost double that of its open-pollinated, conventional counterpart. The majority of farmers who are growing hybrid rye here have contracts with specialty millers or whiskey distilleries.

One of those farmers is Richard Magnusson, who farms 11,000 acres with two nephews near Roseau in northwestern Minnesota. At the prompting of the U of M's Wiersma, he planted 60 acres of hybrid rye in 2016. He has expanded his acreage every year since — in 2021 he's set to harvest over 900 acres of the crop. He was the first to plant hybrid rye in his area, and now a dozen farmers in surrounding counties raise a total of around 5,000 acres of the crop.

“At times, it's one of our best crops,” says Magnusson. Because he focuses on

raising small grains in a part of the state known for such crops, managing hybrid rye was not a big stretch for the farmer. He likes that it is winter hardy and requires far less chemical inputs than other crops. At first, he had to haul his harvest several hours to the Twin Cities. But now, with more acres in the area, a local elevator is shipping it by rail. The per bushel price has ranged from \$4 to \$8, and Magnusson says he can make money when yields exceed 100 bushels to the acre — his yield monitor shows he's produced 140 bushels per acre in spots, over double what he's gotten with open-pollinated rye. Becca Brattain, the country manager for KWS, says the crop has a wide geographic range, doing well in Canada and from



By early March, the hybrid rye on the Frantzen farm is already getting a jump-start on weed pests. (LSP Photo)

coast-to-coast (yields drop off significantly when it's planted as far south as Kentucky and Tennessee). She says hybrid rye is not competitive in areas that can produce 250 bushels of corn per acre. “But we are competitive with those guys who are getting 200 bushels to the acre of corn.”

That's good news for the environment: because hybrid rye cuts reliance on pesticides, reduces nitrogen fertilizer pollution, and, in general, builds soil health, its carbon footprint is about a third that of corn, according to research in Europe.

Walking it Off the Farm

Hybrid rye grows well here, has multiple uses, and leaves a lower carbon footprint. It's ripe for a major breakthrough in American agriculture, right? This is the part of the story where many “third crops” and other innovations hit a wall. They generate a lot of excitement, and then the reality sets in: how will farmers make them consistently pay?

This is hybrid rye's fifth growing season in the U.S., and Ehrhardt's company is seeing demand for the seed increasing

every year. But he estimates that the U.S. is already raising about 90% of the rye needed for the milling and distilling industries. Magnusson says it faces the same “chicken and egg” dilemma a lot of specialty crops face. “Production and use have to kinda balance each other out. You can't just produce a whole bunch and hope it sells,” he says.

Everyone interviewed for this article — farmers, researchers, agronomists, and seed dealers — agreed on one thing: hybrid rye's road to mainstream success runs straight through the barn. U of M Extension crops educator Jared Goplen has crunched the numbers for corn-soybean farmers looking to diversify, and come to one conclusion. “There are ways to make small grains like hybrid rye pay, but it's going to take livestock as part of the system,” he says.

Around 70% of the hybrid rye grain raised in Europe is fed to livestock, mostly hogs. Feed trials in Illinois and South Dakota reinforce what the Frantzens have discovered: it can work as a good feed source for swine that are currently being fed mostly soybeans and corn. One estimate is that it has 90% to 95% the feed value of corn.

Farmers in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota are feeding hybrid rye grain to conventional and organic hogs on a trial basis. Even CAFOs are showing interest in raising it as a feed source — since it can be harvested in the summer, it provides a wider window for manure applications. Because local feed mills may not be used to processing rye as feed, the livestock farmers it works best for are those that have access to their own milling facilities. For example, the Frantzens' son, James, operates a specialty feed mill a few miles from the farm.

A Public Good

One barrier to making innovative crops a consistent reality on farms is lack of support for not only developing and adapting local varieties, but helping farmers get them established. Hybrid rye was developed by KWS working with university researchers in Europe. Tom Frantzen is thrilled that he has a new tool, but concerned that it's not based on homegrown science. “Why isn't this work being done in the Midwest?” he asks.

The 2017 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll asked what it would take for farmers to plant more small grains. The farmers surveyed agreed that extended rotations involving small grains were good for soil health and helped break up pest cycles, but just 28% felt that such rotations could be as profitable as corn-corn or corn-soybean rotations. Lack of viable markets for small grains was a

Grain of Truth, see page 27...

major reason for the farmers' concerns. And half of the respondents said the "culture of Iowa agriculture" is not supportive of crops other than corn and soybeans. "Culture" can mean many things, including what kind of science is there to back diversification. Two-thirds of respondents rated lack of small grains varieties with "elite" genetics as a major impediment. Lack of technical support was also an issue.

"In Iowa, we haven't had a small grains breeder for 14 years and haven't had a forage breeder for 15 years," says ISU's Liebman. "It's a self-fulfilling prophecy — we can't diversify rotations because we don't provide what farmers need when it comes to elite genetics."

Minnesota is in a slightly better position. Small grains are an important part of the Forever Green Initiative, a U of M project that is developing crops that can be integrated into corn-soybean systems as "relays" for providing continuous living cover. The U of M's Wiersma, who is based out of the Northwest Research and Outreach Center in Crookston, has been doing trials on hybrid rye and his part of the state is still a major producer of small grains. Goplen, who is based out of the West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris, is working with farmers who may be focused more on raising corn and soybeans, but would like to diversify. Goplen says there is a lot of potential to do research based on a life cycle analysis of how the crop could reduce a farm's carbon footprint.

The problem is, when one starts considering things like the carbon footprint of a cropping system, that's research related to public goods, and an agricultural public good requires public support in the form of land grant research. With the exception of initiatives like Forever Green, which has received funding from the Minnesota Legislature thanks to pressure from the Land Stewardship Project and its allies, public support for sustainable ag research is hard to come by. And in general, public plant breeding — conventional and sustainable — is in a "crisis" funding wise, according to numerous studies. The journal *Crop Science* has concluded that the field "is in a state of decline." The loss of public funding for land grant plant research is particularly troubling at a time when private seed firms are focusing on creating varieties that boost their bottom line, not providing wider societal benefits like a lower carbon footprint.

Albert Lea Seed's Ehrhardt says making hybrid rye a big part of Midwestern agricul-

ture would require publicly-funded research and technical support that takes an interdisciplinary approach. Such efforts should go beyond involving agronomists and include economists and ecologists, among others, he says, adding that they should be guided by difficult questions such as, "What's it worth to reduce nutrient leaching in the Minnesota River Valley watershed?"

KWS's Nymand says one motivation U.S. agriculture may have to make a crop like hybrid rye a key part of its rotation is the threat of regulation. After all, the pressure to keep cover on the land in parts of Europe has made a winter annual very popular there. "And this is also coming in the U.S., I'm pretty sure," he says of such regulations.

Nymand is a native of Denmark, so he can be forgiven for not being aware of just how difficult it would be to implement such



By summer, the hybrid rye is completely dominating the giant ragweed on the Frantzen farm. "I've got the full month of May, full month of June, and full month of July for the root structure to do something in biologically active soil," says Tom Frantzen of hybrid rye. (LSP Photo)

restrictions in this country. But even his American colleague, Becca Brattain, who lives on a farm in Indiana, recognizes the benefits such requirements have produced.

"As a farmer, I know none of us love regulations, I get that 110%," she says. "But it certainly promotes crop diversity in Europe. It certainly promotes this concept of soil health, things like that."

Liebman says as long as agriculture is not required to pay for "externalities" like nitrogen pollution and increased use of toxic chemicals because of herbicide-resistant weeds, even the most exciting third crop opportunity may not catch on.

"Probably the biggest factor that keeps the existing corn-soybean duopoly in business is the lack of costs for environmental damage or what might be happening to human health," he says. "If you don't charge for that and you get subsidies for doing more of the status quo, it's difficult to change."

Give it a Listen

Episodes 195 and 254 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast feature farmer Tom Frantzen talking about how his struggle with giant ragweed forced him to revamp his rotation. Check out episode 195 at www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1006 and episode 254 at www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1404.

The Discomfort of Diversity

Back in northeastern Iowa, Tom Frantzen has never been afraid to disrupt the status quo. After all, he's what social scientists call an "early adopter" — someone who enjoys pushing the envelope. He knows that to make a game changer like hybrid rye part of mainstream farming, it will mean reaching farmers, who, for various reasons,

do not feel they are in a position to make major changes to the way they do things. That will require operating on many fronts: locally, regionally, and nationally. As he drives his pickup near the town of Alta Vista in early March, he points out an example of a "local" effort: the fields on several small Menonite dairy farms are sprouting hybrid rye. At Frantzen's prompting, the farmers seeded the rye after taking off corn as silage in early fall. Land that has been exposed by silage harvest is particularly vulnerable to erosion.

The farmer also talks about the letter he recently helped pen to the USDA chief, and how he hopes it will make it clear to policymakers that this is not just about hybrid rye, or any third crop, for that matter. This is about accepting the reality that agriculture must evolve if it is to stay viable. After all, for years, Frantzen thought his previous rotation was the ultimate answer — evolutionary biology said otherwise.

Paraphrasing Alan Nation, the late editor of the *Stockman Grass Farmer*, he puts it bluntly: "Comfortable people don't create change — uncomfortable people do. And people need to honestly answer a question: are you comfortable or uncomfortable?" □

Join the Soil Builders' Network

Join the Land Stewardship Project's Soil Builders' Network to get regular updates on workshops, field days, and on-farm demonstrations, as well as the latest soil health and cover crop research. For more information on joining, see the Soil Builders web page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders, or call 507-523-3366.



Meditations with Cows What I've Learned from Daisy, the Dairy Cow Who Changed My Life

By Shreve Stockton
272 pages
Penguin Random House
www.penguin.com

Reviewed by Gina Johnson

Having two parents raised on dairy farms in south-central Wisconsin, I have fond, though brief, memories of interactions with dairy cows. Their size was intimidating to a 5-year-old, but their large, soulful eyes and gentle demeanors drew me in on visits to grandpa, Uncle Gerry, and their Jersey cows. Since my parents went on to non-farming careers and my grandparents moved from their farms to town when I was very young, I had limited time with these gentle creatures, but these memories, and the heritage they represent, drew me to Shreve Stockton's book, *Meditations with Cows*.

Stockton spent her early adulthood as a wanderer, living in multiple cities and crossing the country on a solo Vespa scooter trip. While on this excursion, she fell in love with Wyoming and determined to move there after satisfying her wanderlust. There, she found herself the caretaker of a menagerie of animals, small and large, including dairy and beef cows. In this book, she weaves in stories of ranching — breeding, feeding, birthing calves, helping mothers accept their calves or orphans of other cows, learning to milk, and dealing with untimely and expected deaths in the herd — with researched information about the American food system and her own, personal experiences finding solace with the animals in her care.

This mix of memoir and technical, informative writing takes the reader on a journey both emotional and factual. At times, her writing verges on romanticizing life on the land, but Stockton's interspersing of the realities of ranching into the storytelling make the reader aware of the hard truths related to this vocation.

As difficult as it can be, she loves what she does and has found a place in the universe. Stockton's place, it seems,

is complementary to the mission of the Land Stewardship Project, as she writes, "How different our environment and our health might be if we could trace all our food to origins of love. How nourished our bodies, spirits, and planet could be if all our food was raised and made with love — grown by people empowered by fair wages and safe working conditions, from land honored by sustainable and regenerative practices, with animals respected and cared for throughout the entire course of their lives."

The book covers close to 10 years of the author's life in Wyoming, beginning with a description of her arrival there and her purchase of Daisy, the dairy cow noted in the book's title. The reader follows bovine generations as Daisy ages and her offspring and *their* offspring are born and cared for by the author, mixing the bloodlines of the dairy cow with the beef cattle of the author's partner. Stockton shifts from hobby rancher and farmer to producer of grass-finished beef as she develops a direct-to-consumer business to improve the lives of her partner's cattle and share healthy food with consumers in Wyoming and its neighboring states. And Stockton does not hide the difficulties and stress involved in such an endeavor. In presenting some of the federal policies that make our food system unhealthy for the animals, the planet, and the people who produce and consume the food, she highlights ways in which our food system should be changed for the better.

Many of the statistics and technical information shared in this book will be familiar to regular readers of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, but Stockton's presentation of the information within the structure of her memoir made it meaningful in ways a policy brief cannot. Through her vulnerable writing, she brings the technicalities and policy implications to life and helps the reader understand how impactful these flawed policies are to individual animals, people, and communities. Current

agricultural incentives make it challenging for farmers and ranchers to change practices. Willing farmers and ranchers ready to learn new methods are one part of the equation necessary for meaningful change, but they must also have federal and state supports and incentives to make changes in ways that will not bankrupt them or put them at risk.

My parents moved away from their farming roots in Wisconsin to a new life in Minnesota and I, in turn, left my life in Minnesota for work in Colorado after graduate school. I, like Shreve Stockton, did at one point feel like a wanderer in search of roots.

She found hers with cows on a ranch and in mountain pastures. As she shares, "When you belong to a place, you are in a relationship with the land. Being in a relationship requires attention. It entails understanding what that land holds, what it gives, what it needs. Relationship with a place, with an ecosystem, is like any other relationship. Attention grows into familiarity. Familiarity grows into intimacy. Intimacy elicits a reflexive urge to care for, protect, and defend that place, and to protect everything else that belongs to that place."

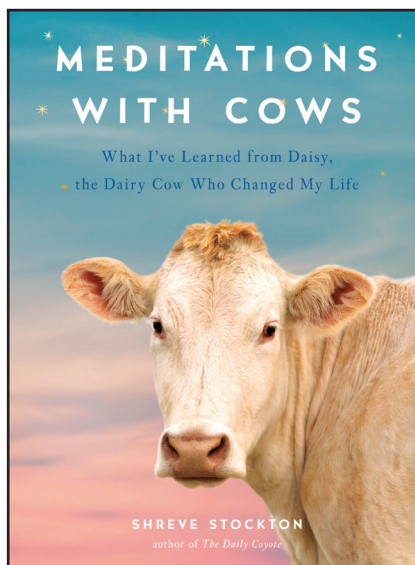
Learning from and living vicariously through Stockton's life with her cows allowed me to feel that sense of place and reinforced the importance of careful land stewardship. □

Gina Johnson first discovered the Land Stewardship Project when a copy of the Land Stewardship Letter appeared in her La Finca CSA weekly share in the early 2000s.

LSP History Out Loud

The Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast series now includes over 250 episodes and features the voices of farmers, scientists, organizers, local community members, and other folks talking passionately about everything from soil health and beginning farmer issues to fair policy and economic justice. You can find all the episodes at www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

We've recently launched a special "LSP History Out Loud" podcast page that features episodes focused on the historical roots of the Land Stewardship Project's work. Check it out at www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/lsphistoryoutloud. □



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"When you belong to a place, you are in a relationship with the land. Being in a relationship requires attention. It entails understanding what that land holds, what it gives, what it needs."

— Shreve Stockton
...

Watershed

Attending to Body and Earth in Distress

By Ranae Lenor Hanson
200 pages
University of Minnesota Press
www.upress.umn.edu

Reviewed by Suzanne Swanson

In 2015, at age 64, Ranae Lenor Hanson developed an unquenchable thirst. There were other symptoms, too, but she chalked all of it up to stress. She had been intensely worried about global warming and the tepid response to it — from friends and colleagues, corporations and government. A good friend was convinced that if she would just lighten up, she'd feel better. Maybe so, she thought.

But in a few weeks, the thirst and exhaustion had grown, and when she hauled herself to urgent care, hoping for help so that she could teach the next day, she was instead hospitalized for diabetic ketoacidosis, a life-threatening condition — and soon diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. *Watershed: Attending to Body and Earth in Distress*, is, in part, the story of Hanson's coming to accept that diagnosis, and learning about the disease itself and how to work with her own body to return to health. But only in part.

Hanson finds parallels between the tasks thrust upon her via a health emergency and a chronic health condition, and the challenges of facing climate crises, educating ourselves, and making choices to act. *Watershed* weaves her personal story of home, activism, and illness with the stories of her students — many of them immigrants or people of color — as well as with the story of an ailing planet.

The book, writes Hanson, “follows multiple arcs, not a single straight line. Consider it a braid with varied story strands woven together.” The reader, then, can pick up whichever strand calls for attention: stories of Minnesota land and water; stories of climate change in Yemen, Kabul, and Ethiopia; meditative reflections and questions; and suggestions on how to turn those reflections to action. Most importantly, Hanson encourages us to examine our own experiences of place, home, landscape, and watershed.

Land Stewardship Project members, farmers and non-farmers alike, know how deeply soil and water are intertwined. To

know a landscape, a watershed, is to build a relationship with it, to recognize how critical it is for humans — individually and collectively — to steward that land, that water.

Watershed begins with a section of beautifully and clearly written glimpses of the Hanson family moving from western Minnesota farm country to Birch Lake, near Babbitt Minn., on the Minnow Lake watershed. Season-by-season, we sense Hanson feeling her way into a life, learning the woods and animals and waters, knowing herself to be part of nature, not separate from it. We accompany her as she makes her way in the dark to a favorite rock in the woods. We sense her shock when, at 16, she travels east for the first time, and wonders how people live when they cannot walk freely, prevented by fence-after-fence.

Then *Watershed* introduces us to Hanson's students at Minneapolis College, where she taught for 31 years. It brings us their attachment to home as well as their despair over droughts and famine and disease, and the inequities they face in this country. We hear from many, among them Martina, from Mexico, and Amina, from Somalia, who discover how climate disruption catalyzed similar trajectories in their countries: crops failing, men fighting, women leaving land and animals, the cutting down of beloved trees for firewood.

Essential to the book are the ideas of home and homeland — and of being attentive to the details of what makes a place feel like home. Hanson asks us to get to know our places. In her classes, each student is required to choose one nearby tree to spend time with weekly, and to report on how that relationship develops. She asks readers to

identify their watershed, to acknowledge the Indigenous people who lived on that land. From that knowledge and love of the land, Hanson encourages each reader to take on at least one new step to protect it or revive it. Farmers are already deeply knowledgeable about their fields and pastures, their watersheds; they may begin to learn more about

soil health. Urban dwellers might compost food waste or plant pollinator-friendly native plants. All can plant, can create soil, can map their watershed.

Weaving in and out of the stories are the ways body and Earth mirror each other. For example, she writes: “Blood flows through the body. Ocean circles the lands. Both are awash with nutrients and salts. If the pH of either is off, life falters...My body has a small ocean of blood, one that was aided by ICU drip infusions and shots. Insulin brought my body back into balance. What can bring balance to the sea?”

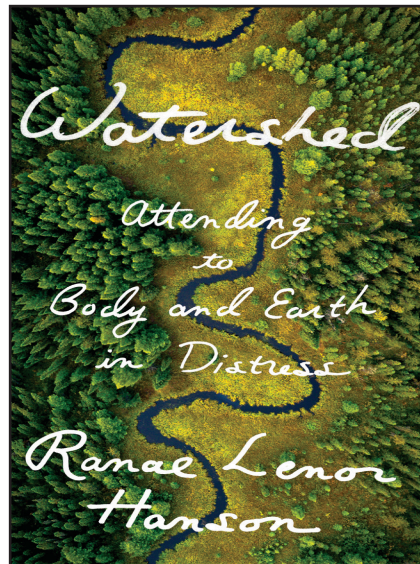
Hanson presents plenty of solid and fascinating information in *Watershed*: facts about diabetes and the discovery of insulin; a primer on climate change in Minnesota; research showing that climate disruption has increased incidences of asthma, diabetes, and Lyme disease; evidence that climate catastrophe and health issues affect people of color disproportionately. Hanson makes this material accessible. When we can grasp the issues, we are less likely to dismiss them. “Like a diabetic crisis, climate trauma numbs

our brains. The threat is too big to conceive, so we relegate it to the background. There it sits, unsettling everything, while most of us focus with increasing intensity on whatever task or diversion is at hand,” she writes.

Watershed challenges us to go beyond the numbing. Hanson asks us to listen. From the stories we hear, we can build a vision of community across barriers.

Recognizing fear and despair and griefs and longings can mobilize us to action, especially when we are not alone. When we seek company to create ideas, projects, and campaigns, we can regenerate our soil and protect our watersheds. Hanson encourages us, writing: “Remember that from the unknown, joyous possibilities may flow.” □

LSP member Suzanne Swanson's poems have appeared recently in *Water-Stone Review*, *Salamander*, and *Poets Reading the News*. She has roots in southwestern and northwestern Minnesota and now lives in Saint Paul, in the Saint Anthony Falls-Mississippi River watershed.



• • •
Essential to the book are the ideas of home and homeland — and of being attentive to the details of what makes a place feel like home.
• • •



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Membership Update

Unique Ways You Can Support LSP

By Josh Journey-Heinz

The Land Stewardship Project's work for the land and our communities is fueled by the people power that our members and allies provide. Your participation in workshops, field days, and organizing meetings is part of this support, as well as the various ways you make your voices heard on the local, regional, and national level.

And part of the support that makes LSP's work possible comes via financial donations. That comes in the form of membership dues, of course. But there are numerous other ways to support LSP financially. Here are just a few examples:

Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs)

If you have been able to contribute to a tax-deferred 401(k) or IRA, income tax is due on that money when you take withdrawals in retirement. Annual withdrawals from these retirement accounts are typically required after age 70½, and the penalty for skipping a required minimum distribution is 50% of the amount that should have been withdrawn. Why not avoid that penalty by donating that money directly to LSP? If you are over 70½ and have an IRA that requires a minimum distribution, ask your IRA broker or tax planner how your retirement account can be used to help grow LSP's work and reduce your tax bill.

Stimulus Checks

The America Rescue Plan saw stimulus checks issued to millions of Americans recently. For those who do not require this payment for day-to-day living expenses and are interested in investing in a more just and sustainable future, consider donating some or (if able) all of your stimulus disbursement to help make LSP's mission possible. Contributions to LSP are 100% tax deductible and would be put to good use.

Include LSP in Planned Giving

LSP has been making a positive impact for nearly 40 years, and many want to see the organization flourish for another four decades. To ensure that LSP thrives in perpetuity, we hope you'll consider making a planned gift to us. The most common planned gifts are made through wills or trusts, but many choose to make legacy gifts to LSP through retirement accounts, pension plans, life insurance, charitable trusts, securities, gift annuities, and even gifts of real estate. LSP is set up to accept any of these types of gifts and it simply requires that you contact and direct those in charge of your finances to include a bequest to LSP. Our Individual Giving Program has resources to aid in this process. These planned gifts may take a bit of legwork and planning, but the impact on LSP in the long-term is massive.

Questions?

If you have any questions about ways to financially support the Land Stewardship

Membership Questions?

If you have questions about your Land Stewardship Project membership, contact LSP's membership coordinator, Clara Sanders Marcus, at 612-722-6377 or cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org. To renew, mail in the envelope included in this *Land Stewardship Letter*, or see www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate.

Has Your Address Changed?

Has your address recently changed, or do you anticipate moving in the next few months? Take a moment to update your address with the Land Stewardship Project so that you can continue receiving the *Land Stewardship Letter*, event invitations, and other updates. To update your address, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/addressupdate. Make sure you use the same e-mail address you have on file with LSP to ensure your data updates correctly.

Volunteer for LSP

The Land Stewardship Project literally could not fulfill its mission without the hard work of our volunteers. Volunteers help us do everything from stuff envelopes and make telephone calls to enter data and set up logistics for meetings. Remote opportunities are available.

If you'd like to volunteer in one of our offices, call 612-722-6377 or fill out the form at www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/opportunities.

Project, contact me at jjourney-heinz@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377. Thanks for all your support! ☐

Josh Journey-Heinz is the Land Stewardship Project's major gifts officer.

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). Our latest addition to the LSP store is an 8 x 10 metal barn sign (\$20). All of these items can be ordered from our online store at www.landstewardshipproject.org/store or by calling 612-722-6377.



T-shirt



Window Decal



Tote Bag



Metal Barn Sign



Bumper Sticker

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 at 612-722-6377.

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 Larry Jay Hempeck

- ◆ Jean Hindson

In Honor of Mark Schultz

- ◆ David M. Nocenti & Andrea Shapiro Davis

In Honor of Dana Jackson

- ◆ Sue & Wendell Fletcher

In Memory of Dennis Johnson

- ◆ Sandy & Doug Olson-Loy

In Memory of Joseph

Ian Marxhausen

- ◆ Diane Knust

In Memory of Lawrence

Wendell Peterson

- ◆ Diane Knust

In Memory of Allen Ostenso

- ◆ Karen Ostenso

In Memory of Charles

Meredith Bend

- ◆ William & Merodie Seykora

In Memory of Jo Ann Thomas

- ◆ Paula Stephens
- ◆ Jane Redig
- ◆ John Williams
- ◆ Blandine M. Berthelot
- ◆ Mike & Jennifer Rupprecht
- ◆ Aimee Ebersold Schultz
- ◆ Dale Hadler
- ◆ Gregory Schmidt
- ◆ Susan & Mike Snater
- ◆ Diane & Michael Kennedy
- ◆ Daniel Olson & Nancy Baker
- ◆ Kay Shaw
- ◆ Jenel & Stephen Briggs
- ◆ Kathy & Robert Redig
- ◆ Gregory & Catherine Schmidt
- ◆ Karen Stettler & Ted Wilson
- ◆ Thomas Parlin & Mary Hansel Parlin
- ◆ Lynda Homess & John Carmody
- ◆ Joan Redig & Wayne Purtzer
- ◆ Karen Schneewind

In Memory of JoAnn Thomas & in Honor of Doug, Ellie & Sylvia

- ◆ Bill & Beth Moe

In Honor of the Prairie Drifter Olsons: Joan, Nick, Abe & Freya

- ◆ Peter & Sue Walby

In Memory of Elgin Schmidt

- ◆ Sharon Schmidt

In Memory of Kenneth Matties

- ◆ Diane O'Mara

In Memory of Joel Walsh

- ◆ Ruth Kewitsch
- ◆ Diane Calabria
- ◆ Ken & Eileen Appel
- ◆ John & Marie Johnson
- ◆ Marlene Atkins
- ◆ Jeff Montgomery
- ◆ John Temple

In Memory of Louis Van Abnurg

- ◆ Jasna Tomic

In Honor of Rupert Russell

- ◆ Jennifer Russell

To donate to the Land Stewardship Project in the name of someone, contact Clara Sanders Marcus at 612-722-6377 or cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org. Donations can be made online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate.



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Stewardship Calendar

For the latest LSP events, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops.

→ **JULY 17—CURE-LSP Tallgrass Prairie BioBlitz**, 8 a.m.-8 p.m., Lac qui Parle State Park, Watson, Minn. Contact: Robin Moore, LSP, 320-321-5244, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org, www.landstewardshipproject.org/events/item/1550
→ **JULY 20—Soil Health Equipment Demo & Drought Resiliency Field Day**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., Martin Larsen farm, Byron, Minn. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366, www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops
→ **JULY 22—Pasture Walk (EQIP fencing, goats, organic transition)**, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Jordan & Rachelle Meyer farm, Caledonia, Minn. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366, www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops

[landstewardshipproject.org/workshops](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops)
→ **JULY 27—Strip-Till & No-Till Field Day**, Chris Gunderson farm, Spring Valley, Minn. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366, www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops
→ **JULY 28—Pasture Walk, Kaleb Anderson farm (grazing cattle on Kernza)**, 5:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m., Goodhue, Minn. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366, www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops
→ **AUG. 13—Pasture Walk, Zach Knutson farm (grazing annuals, converting cropland)**, 5 p.m.-8 p.m., Zumbrota, Minn. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366, www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops

→ **AUG. 15—Early Bird Discount Deadline for 2021-2022 Farm Beginnings Course** (see sidebar below)
→ **AUG. 18—Field Day with Ray Archuleta**, Mervin & Cherlyn Beachy farm, St. Ansgar, Iowa. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366, www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops
→ **SEPT. 7—Soil Health Field Day**, Jon & Ruth Jovaag farm, Austin, Minn. Contact: LSP, 507-523-3366, www.landstewardshipproject.org/workshops
→ **SEPT. 15—Final Application Deadline for 2021-2022 Farm Beginnings Course** (see sidebar below)

LSP's Beginning Farmer Program Accepting Applications for 2021-2022 Course

Farm Beginnings Marks Over 2 Decades of Training Ag's Next Generation

One of the most successful beginning farmer training programs in the country is now accepting applications for its 2021-2022 course session. The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings classes will take place in an online setting December 2021 through March 2022, with on-farm educational events to follow later in 2022. The class fee is \$1,000, which covers up to two individuals per farm. Applications are due Sept. 15, and applications that are accepted before Aug. 15 will qualify for a \$100 discount. Scholarships are available as well as a Minnesota Beginning Farmer Tax Credit for the cost of the class. More information and application materials can be found at www.farmbeginnings.org or by contacting LSP's Annelie Livingston-Anderson at 612-217-0553, annelie@landstewardshipproject.org.

For over two decades, Farm Beginnings has been providing community-based training that focuses on the goal setting, marketing, and financial skills needed to establish a successful and sustainable farm business in the Upper Midwest. The course uses a mix of farmer-led sessions and an extensive farmer network, coupled with practical, on-farm training experiences. More than 1,000 people from the Minnesota, western Wisconsin, and northern Iowa region have completed the Farm Beginnings course.

Applicants from Minnesota, western Wisconsin, and northern Iowa will be given priority for the 2021-2022 course. If you are located elsewhere, check out the Farm Beginnings Collaborative website at www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org to determine if there is a community organization near you offering Farm Beginnings.

