

# 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](mailto:rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org)) or Karen Stettler ([stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org)).

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