

## A Remembrance

### Chris Blanchard's Beginning Farmer Legacy

By Karen Stettler

The sustainable agriculture community lost a passionate beginning farmer advocate when Chris Blanchard passed away recently. From the early days of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course, Chris brought his creative thinking and passion for marketing and numbers to many beginning farmer participants via the classes he led.

The first year Chris presented, he started out covering a small part of one workshop. We quickly realized that he had much more to share and ended up filling the entire three-hour workshop with foundational ideas, thoughts, and tools to help beginning farmers. When he first started leading Farm Beginnings classes, Chris was a successful produce farmer himself, which allowed him to share many practical, on-the-ground tips for making a go of it on the land. In



Chris Blanchard leading a Farm Beginnings class in Goodhue, Minn., in December 2008. (LSP Photo)

later years, beginning farmers continued to benefit from Chris through his work with MOSES, Purple Pitchfork Consulting, and his wildly popular *Farmer to Farmer* podcast ([www.farmertofarmerpodcast.com](http://www.farmertofarmerpodcast.com)). In fact, on a number of occasions beginning farmers shared with me how the *Farmer to Farmer* podcasts educated and sustained them through the long and sometimes lonely hours of farming.

Chris lived his values, prioritizing farmer education that would result in clean water

and soil, as well as healthy communities.

In his last podcast, produced shortly before his death as a result of cancer, Chris made it clear he was thinking of farming's next generation right up until the end. "Thank you for listening," he said. "Be safe out there. Keep the tractor running."

You are already missed, Chris. □

*Karen Stettler works on farm transition issues for the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program.*

## Roots of Justice

### Sovereignty, Sustainability & Social Justice

*LSP's Change to its Land Gifts Program Reflects the Need to Address Historical Injustices & Current Realities*

By George Boody

When I was growing up in rural Minnesota during the 1960s, I was taught in school that settlers of European descent came to this region to occupy open, nearly uninhabited, land. But that popular "settler story" has far more complex roots that include the removal of American Indian people from their land.

For thousands of years, all the land in what eventually became Minnesota was held and had been used in common by various American Indian nations. However, starting in the early 1800s, business interests and the U.S. government increasingly desired these lands to draw white settlers from the eastern part of the country as well as Europe. And so they acted to take it, first through a series of treaties (1805, 1837, 1851, and 1858), which did not protect Indian peoples and intentionally disrupted their cultures. Under pressure from traders and threatened by military force, the Dakota ceded 35 million acres of

land in the 1851 treaty alone.

The U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862, brought on by ongoing deprivations and starvation resulting from U.S. government policy, prompted Dakota leaders, in defense of their people and way of life, to attack and kill white settlers in southwestern Minnesota. After that conflict, which culminated in the mass execution of 38 Dakota men at a gallows in Mankato, the 1858 treaty that purportedly preserved a 10-mile swath of land along the Minnesota River for Dakota tribal members was abrogated by the U.S. government. Dakota people in the area, whether or not they participated in the 1862 conflict, were forcibly moved or fled from the remaining portions of their land.

U.S. federal laws such as the Homestead Act of 1862 then made it possible for my great-grandparents and thousands of other European immigrants to access land inexpensively in the previous home of the Dakota Oyate. From that humble start and through hard work, these immigrant ben-

eficiaries set in motion the gradual increase in wealth and wellbeing that those who descended from them now enjoy. This is a common story throughout the Midwest.

#### Acting on Knowledge

We can no longer claim ignorance of this history. The question is, what should we do with this knowledge? How do we use our values and goals to address this grave injustice? Two key values for the Land Stewardship Project are stewardship and social justice. Stewardship is about a land ethic and respectful way of engaging people and the land. Our organization has understood that we can't have a sustainable food system unless it is equitable for all farmers, workers in the food system, and eaters. Such equity must include American Indians.

In 2003, LSP's board of directors created a "Land Legacy" option to accept gifts of

**Tribal Lands, see page 5...**

real estate. The board's intent was to enable a person who owns farmland or other kinds of real estate to benefit a future generation of stewardship-minded farmers and the wider community through a gift to LSP that would then be sold to beginning farmers or established family farmers. Since 2003, LSP has accepted six parcels of farmland and sold three to family farmers. We continue to manage the others through leases or other agreements.

In recent years, led by staff members Scott DeMuth and Amy Bacigalupo, we have been building relationships with the Upper Sioux Community, the Red Lake Nation, and other tribal entities. Through these relationships, we have learned about the importance of food sovereignty. We approach this as long-term relational work and seek to create mutually beneficial outcomes.

LSP believes that Indian tribes are important allies in our common struggle to steward the land and keep the land and people together.

For the past year, the LSP board's Land Legacy Committee has worked to develop an organizational policy that would align with and assist tribal communities that are working to regain some of the lands that were stolen from them in the early years. The committee felt that by returning land to Indian tribal entities on which they can grow culturally appropriate foods and restore ecological function, we can help the overall movement for sustainable agriculture and healthy communities to become more powerful and successful.

Members of the committee, with the assistance of western Minnesota farmer Audrey Arner, as well as DeMuth and I, have examined maps of treaty boundaries, researched other organizations doing this work and reviewed drafts of policy changes. Most importantly, we have listened to tribal members.

"I am so grateful to the native educators who have helped me to understand the position of privilege occupied by those of us who have farmed indigenous land for our livelihood and benefit," says Arner. "What was a promising beginning for the immigrant settlers was a devastating collapse for

the people who lived here before mostly white, mostly European, people came. Being engaged in this work is an important step for us as individuals and as an organization to begin to repair some of the harms."

### LSP Land Gifts Policy Change

These discussions have resulted in an exciting change in the way LSP can handle land gifts. Under changes approved unanimously by our board of directors in March, we have now made selling or donating gifted farmland to Indian tribal entities one of our priority options. This amended policy seeks to address, in part, the issue of corrupt land treaties as well as the actions of land speculators who purchased parcels from individual Indian landowners under duress on terms that were unfavorable to the tribal members.

"Returning land that was theirs is an act of stewardship," says Andrew Ehrmann, an LSP board member who farms in southeastern Minnesota and was involved in the recent decision.

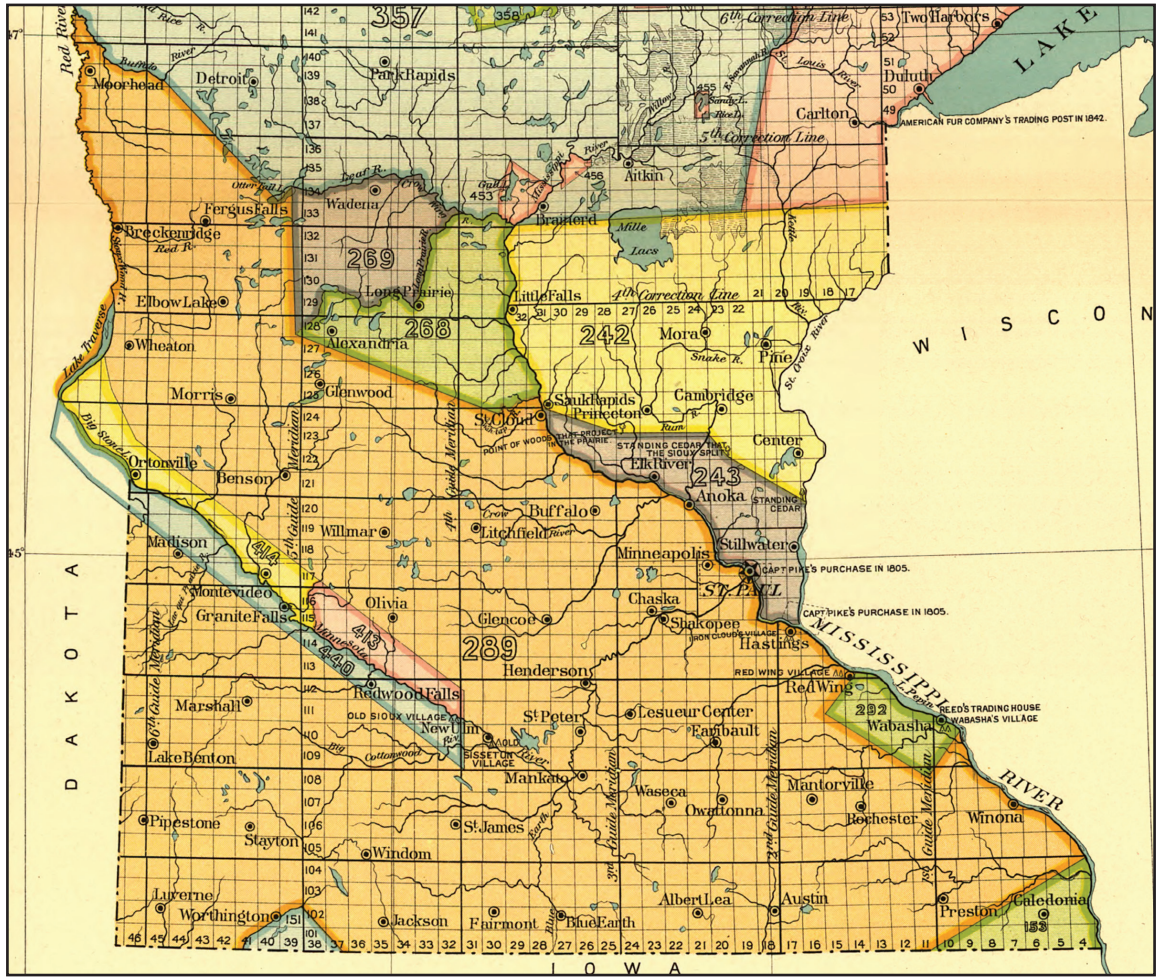
"As we move forward as an organization

and as Midwesterners, we must reckon with the history of injustice that connects tribal nations, settlers, and who controls the land," says Mark Schultz, LSP's executive director. "There is much to do, but changing LSP's policy regarding land that is given to our organization is a step forward." □

*Former LSP executive director George Boody is the organization's Science and Special Projects Leader. For details on LSP's Land Legacy initiative, contact Boody at 612-722-6377 or gboody@landstewardshipproject.org.*

### Give it a Listen

For more on the issue of the taking of tribal lands and how it relates to farming, stewardship, and justice, check out a recent *Ear to the Ground* "Living on Stolen Land" podcast series—episodes 224, 225 and 226—that was developed by staff member Elizabeth Makarewicz: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast).



**This map shows the land — the orange area labeled "289" — covered by the Minnesota portion of the 1851 treaty between the U.S. Government and the Dakota. The Dakota ceded 35 million acres of land as a result of that treaty. Source: U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology, obtained through Wikimedia Commons**