

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

34 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

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Photo courtesy of Ilisa Ailis Photography, www.ilisaailis.com

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Let's Work Toward 20% Continuous Living Cover by 2020

By George Boody, Mark Schultz & Terry VanDerPol

Water, as Land Stewardship Project board member Vince Ready says, is vital for life. During Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton's Water Summit on Feb. 27, a lot of innovative proposals for solving Minnesota's water quality crisis were discussed. Several LSP members and staff participated in the Summit, which consisted of numerous small group discussions on various aspects of this important issue. No matter what topic was being discussed during the day, one overarching question dominated: how do we clean up our water and keep it that way for ourselves and our children?

To find solutions to that question in farm country, we have to understand that the corn and soybean system, which dominates the southern part of our state and makes up 75 percent of our cropland, is covering the landscape for only about 110 days annually. For the rest of the year, Minnesota's farmland goes through a long brown season, in which there are no living plants protecting the land's surface, and no living roots feeding the soil's biological life below. That leaves the land vulnerable to soil erosion and runoff for most of the year.

That is a big part of the reason why the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency recently found no lakes and only a few streams in Minnesota's southwestern corner safe to swim in. It is why rural wells are routinely so contaminated with nitrogen that the water they produce isn't safe for drinking. This past year, the Gulf of Mexico's "Dead Zone" was one of the largest ever recorded—the size of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. A major source of this hypoxic zone is excess nitrogen fertilizer running off farm fields in Minnesota and other Corn Belt states. Another troubling trend is the return of destructive soil erosion events that we thought were in the past.

Corn has a voracious appetite for nitrogen, and keeping this nutrient from becoming a pollutant is particularly tricky because of its ability to leach through the soil profile and find its way into water, especially at times when the land is not covered with liv-

ing plants. Conservation efforts such as no-till may reduce erosion, but don't adequately deal with our "leaky" nitrogen situation or the more frequent high-intensity storms that accompany climate change. One estimate is that up to 20 percent of nitrogen fertilizer applied to farm fields doesn't stay to feed the crop, but rather escapes into the environment. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency water sampling shows that 70 percent of nitrogen contamination of Minnesota streams is coming from crop fields.

Water pollution connected to agriculture isn't about individual farmers making decisions in a vacuum. It's driven by a few multinational corporations that sell pesticides and seeds or buy and market huge volumes of a handful of commodities such as corn and soybeans.

Government farm policy also plays a major role in creating a landscape that causes major water quality problems. Programs such as the federally-subsidized crop insurance program encourage the plowing up of pastures and other perennial plant systems, replacing them with corn and soybeans. *A Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* study reported that during one recent five-year period, 1.3 million acres of grasslands were converted to crops in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska. The researchers said such conversion rates haven't been seen since the 1920s and 1930s, and the result of that big plow-up was the Dust Bowl, one of the most severe man-made ecological catastrophes this country has ever seen.

A University of Wisconsin study shows that between 2008 and 2012, 250,000 acres of previously uncultivated Minnesota land was converted to row crops. Most of those acres were former grasslands, but 25,000 acres had been in wetlands. In addition, 13,000 acres of Minnesota forests transitioned to crops during the study period.

Much more federal funding goes for subsidies to maximize commodity crop production than goes into conservation, by a huge margin. It is clear federal farm policy is in need of major reform, and the Land

Stewardship Project is working with our members on that front as discussions around the 2018 Farm Bill begin (*see page 9*).

But there are some significant steps that can be taken right here in Minnesota's watersheds to clean up our water and make good use of limited state dollars while getting the kind of positive impact our state's citizens voted for with the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

Continuous Living Cover

The good news is that it's been shown repeatedly that when more living plants are growing on the land for longer periods of time, our water is cleaner. On farmland, these year-round living plant systems—also called "continuous living cover"—can take many forms, from perennial grasses rotationally-grazed by livestock to annual cover crops grown before and after the regular cash crop growing season. It has long been known that perennial grasses and forbs, with their deep roots and year-round presence, hold more water in the soil and help clean it before it moves to streams, lakes or groundwater.

In recent years, studies show perennials can reduce runoff and erosion by as much as 90 percent. Systems that utilize small grains, brassicas and other cover crops to fill in the gaps around the growing season have also shown great promise for improving water quality, and are being used by increasing numbers of farmers (*see page 24*). Cover crops can reduce nitrogen runoff by 20 percent to 30 percent, according to some estimates. No wonder the *2015 Minnesota Environmental Quality Board Water Policy Report* highlighted establishment of year-round living cover on farmland as a key way to clean up our water.

Community Conservation

For the past several years, LSP has been working with farmers to help figure out ways of maintaining more continuous living cover on the land in a way that's profitable. Specifically, we've been working with farmers in the Chippewa River watershed in western Minnesota to develop systems that keep the land covered year-round while benefiting these producers' bottom lines. Through the Chippewa 10% Project, which is a collaboration of LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project, along with various agencies, educational institutions and conservation groups, we are utilizing watershed mapping technology, computer modeling and people engagement. Individual conversations with farmers and landowners

Continuous Cover, *see page 4...*

help them make decisions that match their stewardship and community values.

Networks of farmers organized around management intensive rotational grazing, cover cropping and soil health identify barriers, as well as opportunities. These networks also connect people with resources such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and others to adopt farming systems that fit their needs. LSP has developed a Conservation Cropping Systems Calculator that helps individual farmers do agronomic and economic calculations of their options.

What we found through this "community conservation" approach is that farmers, landowners, agency staff and others can be extremely innovative in balancing environmental protection with profitable food production. For example, some farmers have determined that replacing a row-cropped field with rotationally-grazed pastures provides a bigger pay-off than raising corn on land that wasn't producing profitable yields most years anyway.

Others have figured out that integrating cover crops into their corn-soybean rotation helps break up weed cycles and creates the kind of soil health that reduces compaction and erosion, while cutting reliance on purchased fertilizer. That's money in the bank—and less pollution and sediment in our rivers and streams.

Through this work, farmers and landowners have chosen so far to shift around 12,000 acres in the Chippewa watershed into new or enhanced continuous living cover, from cover crops and perennial grasses to buffers and management intensive rotational grazing. What's happening in the Chippewa could have major implications for cleaning up water in the rest of the state. After all, this is the single biggest watershed tributary to the Minnesota River, one of the most polluted waterways in the Upper Midwest.

Hitting the Conservation Target

Perhaps the most exciting outcome of this work in the Chippewa River watershed is that we can see major benefits from targeting continuous living cover and other conservation systems on key parts of the watershed. Stream monitoring shows that where at least 34 percent of the land is covered in plants year-round, water quality is good enough to meet standards for clarity and chemical contamination. As it turns out, on average 24 percent of the 1.3 million-acre watershed is covered in grass, hay, trees and other perennials, so adding another 10 percent might do the trick. Modeling shows continuous

living cover provides the most effective reductions in runoff. Positive changes on the land, and in our water, are within reach.

But in order to be effective, that 10 percent of additional continuous living cover must be targeted at the watershed's vulnerable acres—those lands that are the most erosive and otherwise ecologically fragile. Those are often marginal for row crops, too. Farmers in Iowa are showing that by planting native prairie on the 10 percent of a row-cropped field that is the most erosive, a 95 percent reduction in



Cover cropping systems like this one, which is combining soybeans and cereal rye in southeastern Minnesota, can keep the land continuously covered throughout the year. (LSP Photo)

soil and fertilizer runoff can be attained. As Iowa State agronomist Matt Liebman says, "We often pay for practices rather than outcomes." Targeted conservation is a way of making sure the practices being put in place are producing the outcomes we want.

But we must support the entire infrastructure: we need both good bridges and fully functioning roads leading to them. Getting more cover crops established on a particularly vulnerable field does little good if water from bare land upstream overwhelms the system, damaging even the healthiest, most stable soil. If Minnesota is serious about water quality, it needs to support community conservation efforts that not only target our most vulnerable acres with riparian buffers and wetland restorations, but also improve the overall health of the landscape by integrating cover cropping into our corn-soybean rotation and establishing more livestock on the land utilizing peren-

• • •
**Why not pursue a goal of
20% continuous living cover
by 2020?**
• • •

nial forages.

All of this means little unless farmers see that this can work for them, economically and practically, enabling them to reach the goals they have for their farming operations. In the

case of cover cropping, farmers are finding that this technique can reduce the need for purchased fertilizer while boosting corn and soybean yields during times of drought.

Farmers utilizing no-till production systems are finding cover cropping does a particularly good job of reducing compaction, improving soil health and reducing the yield drag that can come with transitioning from one farming system to another. In addition, farmers are using fall cover crops to extend their livestock grazing season, reducing their need to purchase hay.

Managed rotational grazing has long been a cost-effective way to get established in the livestock business, since it relies less on expensive inputs and facilities. An exciting development has been the increased consumer demand for grass-fed livestock products—in fact, it's one of the fastest growing sectors of the specialty food market in the U.S. The 2015 Minnesota Environmental Quality Board Water Policy Report highlights promoting Minnesota as a source of grass-fed beef and dairy products as a way to "drive land use toward perennial crops."

With the resources Minnesota has, why not focus them on helping farmers transition to more continuous living cover systems? It will take research like the Forever Green plant breeding initiative at the University of Minnesota, investment in market development, and focusing cost share funds on continuous living cover systems.

And to provide an incentive for bringing these resources together, we need a goal. That's why LSP is proposing a challenge we call **20 x 20**. That stands for 20 percent of Minnesota's cropland under continuous living cover by 2020. Given that today cover cropping covers less than 3 percent of our state's farmland and pasture is disappearing under the plow, it's an ambitious goal. But we've already seen smaller examples of what innovative farmers can accomplish on the land. Just think of how far we could go when such farmers have the widespread support of communities, good policy and profitable markets. □

George Boody is LSP's executive director and Mark Schultz is the organization's Policy Program director. Terry VanDerPol farms in western Minnesota and directs LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program.

Myth Buster Box

An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

→ Myth: Neonics in Soybeans Make Economic Sense

→ Fact:

For better or worse, agriculture is full of tradeoffs between economic viability and environmental sustainability. Nowhere is that more true than when it comes to the use of the herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and all of the other toxins used to keep crop pests at bay. Whenever a chemical killer is introduced into the environment, there are bound to be negative repercussions for our water, soil and wildlife. But agribusiness often justifies the use of pesticides by arguing that without them, conventional farming would simply not be viable. A whole lot of corn and soybean farmers will go out of business and the grain trade will collapse, goes this line of reasoning. A few eggs must be broken to make an omelet.

Society is constantly weighing the pros and cons of such thinking, and many question whether *any* economic argument trumps environmental health. But sometimes it becomes clear the economic reasons for using an agrichemical are based on a false premise, making the environmental harm it causes even harder to justify. There are times, it turns out, when those eggs are being broken for the sake of a pretty worthless omelet.

For example, in January a report produced by researchers from 12 universities spread across the Corn Belt concluded unequivocally that using a popular class of insecticides on soybeans was in most cases a waste of farmers' money. The insecticides in question are a class of chemicals similar to nicotine called "neonicotinoids." They were introduced to field crop farming in the early 2000s, and quickly became the most widely used class of insecticides, especially in the U.S. Corn Belt. One estimate is that in 2011 more than 80 percent of corn and around 40 percent of soybean acreage nationally was planted with seeds treated with neonicotinoids (those percentages have undoubtedly gone up since then).

One reason they are so popular is that neonics, as they are called, are extremely water-soluble. That means plants can absorb them and circulate them from the root zone up into leaves and other tissues, including pollen and nectar. So seeds coated with neonics can make the plant that emerges

from the soil basically toxic to certain insect pests. From the farmer's point of view, such a systemic insecticide is more efficient and safer, since it does away with spraying standing plants later in the season, when wind and rain can cause such chemicals to go where they are not supposed to go.

The trouble is, making a plant toxic to an insect pest often makes it toxic to beneficial bugs as well. Specifically, neonics have been implicated in the decline of bees around the world. This is a big deal: honeybees, bumblebees and a myriad of other pollinator insects are responsible for every third bite of food we take. Earlier this year, the Environmental Protection Agency announced that one type of neonic insecticide damaged hives and honey production even when "used appropriately."

As the environmental arguments against neonics pile up, the economic justification for using them on at least one crop is collapsing, thanks in large part to the 12-state report released in January. It was based on data gathered from more than two dozen peer-reviewed studies and was co-authored by scientists from universities in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin, among others. What it found was that neonics are a victim of bad timing. The soybean aphid is the most economically devastating insect pest of soybeans in northern states, and neonics are marketed as a way to control them. The problem is, neonics protect soybean seedlings for only about three weeks, which takes care of things into late spring-early summer. But aphid populations become a problem in midsummer, after the neonic's effects have worn off. Put simply: using neonic soybean seeds did not increase yields in most cases.

"For typical field situations, independent research demonstrates that neonicotinoid seed treatments do not provide a consistent return on investment," concluded the scientists, adding that, "The current use of neonicotinoid seed treatments in soybeans and other crops far exceeds pest pressures."

To make things worse, neonics can increase infestations of other pest species by disrupting biological controls. For example, while feeding on plants slugs ingest the neonic insecticide but do not die from it. However, the insecticide makes them toxic to ground beetles, the prin-

ciple natural enemies of slugs. Researchers found that in slug-infested fields, soybeans grown without neonic seed produced higher yields than their treated counterparts. This is significant, since slugs are emerging as a key pest in no-till cropping systems utilized in northern states.

Not surprisingly, Syngenta, Bayer and other makers of neonic products are defending this class of insecticides, saying basically that farmers wouldn't use them if they didn't work. But the economic evidence against using neonic saturated soybean seed is becoming hard to ignore. Even an official with the Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council told the *Star Tribune* newspaper that the 12-state study was "balanced" and helped clarify confusion farmers were having about neonics.

The authors of the January study recommend battling soybean pests with an integrated approach that includes rotating crops, preserving natural enemies of pests, and scouting crops and then applying insecticides in a targeted way.

It should be noted that neonic-treated soybeans aren't always a waste of money. They can be effective for managing early-season pest problems in certain situations, such as when a field is being transitioned into soybeans from pasture or grassland, for example. Given that loss of diverse habitat is another major factor in the demise of pollinators, that's one more argument for not plowing up yet more perennial cover and in the process creating the need for a highly controversial bug killer.

→ More Information

• The 12-state report, "The Effectiveness of Neonicotinoid Seed Treatments in Soybeans," is at https://swroc.cfans.umn.edu/sites/swroc.cfans.umn.edu/files/e-268_the_effectiveness_of_neonicotinoid_seed_treatments_in_soybean_web_15.pdf.

→ More Myth Busters

To download previous installments in LSP's *Myth Busters* series, see www.landstewardshipproject.org. For paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377, bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.



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LSP News

Land Stewardship Project Staff Updates

Rebecca White has stepped down as a Land Stewardship Project Community Based Food Systems organizer. Since joining LSP's staff in 2010, White has worked to organize a community-based food system in Minnesota's Big Stone County. She has been involved in rural food co-op capacity building and farmers' market development, as well as teaching food production, preservation and cooking skills. White also worked extensively with the Women Caring for the Land initiative, where she coordinated workshops on adopting conservation farming practices, among other things. She served on LSP's Long Range Planning Committee and the Performance Management Systems Team.



Rebecca White

Jonathan Maurer-Jones has joined LSP's staff as a healthcare organizer. Maurer-Jones has a bachelor's degree in English and Justice/Peace Studies from the University of St. Thomas. He previously worked as the program manager for TakeAction Minnesota's "Justice 4 All" initiative. Maurer-Jones is based out of Duluth, Minn., and can be reached at 218-213-4008 or jmaurer-jones@landstewardshipproject.org. For more on LSP's Affordable Healthcare for All work, see page 10.



Jonathan Maurer-Jones

Robyn Skrebes and **Josh Journey-Heinz** have joined LSP's staff as major donor fundraisers.

Skrebes has a bachelor's degree in political science and photography from the College of Santa Fe, a master's in public policy from the University of Minnesota Institute for Public Affairs and a master's degree from Central European University. She has worked as an adjunct professor, as well as an organizer for various organizations, including SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, TakeAction Minnesota and Witness for Peace Upper

Midwest. Skrebes is based out of LSP's Twin Cities office and can be reached at 612-722-6377 or rskrebes@landstewardshipproject.org.

Journey-Heinz has a bachelor's degree in design illustration from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and has worked as a community organizer and canvass director for various organizations, including Take Action Minnesota, Iowa Citi-



Josh Journey-Heinz has been working in LSP's southeastern Minnesota office with the Policy and Organizing Program. She is assisting with LSP's effort to ban frac sand mining and development in Winona County (see page 12). Pfohl previously served an internship with LSP and served as a co-chair of the organization's Winona County Organizing Committee.

Julie Arnold is serving an internship in LSP's Policy and Organizing Program. Arnold has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Concordia College and has worked as an assistant teacher and environmental educator, as well as on various vegetable farms in the region. She currently is helping operate her family's Community Supported Agriculture farm, Shepherd Moon, in Lindstrom, Minn. As



Robyn Skrebes

zens for Community Improvement and Clean Water Action. Journey Heinz is based in LSP's Twin Cities office and can be reached at 612-722-6377 or jjourney-heinz@landstewardshipproject.org.

Lynnea Pfohl has been working in LSP's southeast-



Lynnea Pfohl

part of her internship, Arnold coordinated LSP's Family Farm Breakfast and Lobby Day at the Capitol on March 31 and is helping with rural organizing related to state policy.

Connor McCormick recently helped organize a pair of LSP soil health meetings in southeastern Minnesota and conducted interviews with farmers about their use of cover cropping and other techniques for building soil health. McCormick is a senior at St. Olaf College, where he has been involved in an on-farm research project related to cover cropping (see No. 2, 2015, Land Stewardship Letter, page 25). □



Julie Arnold



Connor McCormick

Kroese Named Ag Systems Endowed Chair

Land Stewardship Project co-founder Ron Kroese has been named an endowed chair in Agricultural Systems by the University of Minnesota's Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). The endowed chair is "intended to serve as a catalyst for innovation and progress on agricultural and rural issues," according to MISA.

While serving as the endowed chair, Kroese is conducting a series of video-recorded interviews to document the formation and evolution of

sustainable agriculture policy efforts in the Midwest as well as on the national scale.

Kroese co-founded the Land Stewardship Project with Victor Ray in 1982 and served as its first executive director for a decade. □



Ron Kroese

Terra Testing

Farmers gathered at the Land Stewardship Project's southeastern Minnesota office in December to discuss their experiences with cover cropping and other methods for building soil health. This was a follow-up to the 2015 growing season, in which participants in LSP's Southeastern Minnesota Cover Crops Network completed the first of a two-year research program to explore some of the issues related to cover crop establishment in the region.

During the December meeting, farmers discussed their experiences utilizing early maturing corn varieties as a strategy for getting cover crops established earlier in the fall, as well as utilizing interseeding and modified seeding equipment.

In addition, Dan Nath, a soil scientist with the region's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), was on hand to talk about the Haney Soil Health Test, a sampling method that goes beyond just determining how much nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium — what's called N-P-K — is present in the soil and supposedly available to help crops grow. Such limited testing for N-P-K and other elements has served crop farmers well over the years, providing them a sense of how much nitrogen fertilizer they need to apply in the spring to get a profitable corn yield in the fall, for example.



LSP's Caroline van Schaik led a discussion on how tools like the Haney Soil Health Test can help farmers determine what cover crops to plant. (LSP Photo)

But the standard soil test does not measure the overall biological health of a soil — the microbes, living roots and fungi that go into making soil a living ecosystem that can remain productive in the face of harsh conditions such as drought and flooding, while providing valuable ecosystem services such as cleaner water and greenhouse gas sequestration.

Members of the Southeastern Minnesota Cover Crops Network, representing livestock, vegetable and row crop production, are utilizing the Haney Test. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for more coverage of LSP's use of this and

other soil health tests in southeastern as well as western Minnesota. (LSP Photo) □

Give it a Listen

Episode 176 of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast features a discussion about the Haney Soil Health Test and how LSP is using it to provide farmers deeper insights into their soil's productive capacity: <http://landstewardshipproject.org/posts/805>

Frantzens Given Spencer Award

Long-time Land Stewardship Project members Tom and Irene Frantzen were presented the 2015 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture

on March 23.

The Frantzens have operated their family farm near New Hampton in northeastern Iowa since 1976 and started transitioning to organic in the late 1990s. They were certified organic in 2001. Over the years, they have conducted pioneering on-farm research related to everything from sustainable swine production to building soil health in a row crop rotation. The Frantzens have also been innovators in helping develop markets for farmers who are utilizing organic and sustainable methods.

The Frantzens have worked with LSP and other groups to host numerous field days for farmers, environmentalists and scientists. They frequently share their time with journalists and policymakers, and Tom is a popular speaker at regional

and national conferences.

The Spencer Award, administered by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, annually recognizes farmers, teachers and researchers who have made significant contributions to the environmental and economic stability of the Iowa farming community. The award was presented to the Frantzens during the Iowa Water Conference. □



Irene and Tom Frantzen (Photo courtesy of Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture)

Give it a Listen

On episode 45 of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Tom Frantzen talks about how he and Irene's farm dealt with change over the years and eventually became sustainable from an economic, environmental and quality of life point of view: <http://landstewardshipproject.org/posts/233>.

In Need of an Upgrade

The Nation's Top Organic Dairy Research Herd is Producing Cutting-Edge Science, but its Facilities are Behind the Times

Members of the Land Stewardship Project's State Policy Steering Committee recently got a firsthand look at one of the nation's leading organic dairy research facilities. The facilities, which are housed at the University of Minnesota's West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) in Morris, include a 120-cow certified organic cowherd, as well as 140 "conventional" milk cows. The WCROC facility is home to one of just two certified organic dairies at a U.S. land grant research university, and it's the only university experiment station with an organic and conventional herd side-by-side. The research herd was set up under the leadership of Dennis Johnson, who was the station's dairy scientist until his retirement in 2010.

In 2007, LSP worked to convince lawmakers that establishing an organic dairy herd at WCROC was a public good worth supporting. There was a precedent: LSP had already helped get legislative funding for alternative swine research at the station.

In 2010, WCROC shipped its first load of certified organic milk. Johnson's successor, Brad Heins, has since been leading cutting-edge research endeavors on everything from pasture improvement and the use of alterna-

tive forage species, to winter outdoor housing using straw packs and the economics of grazing. Heins and others are also experimenting with crossbreeds to find out what genetic mixes in cows do well on grass.

The WCROC facility is also helping pro-



U of M dairy scientist Brad Heins (right) talked to members of LSP's State Policy Steering Committee about the organic dairy research being done at the West Central Research and Outreach Center. (LSP Photo)

duce the next generation of scientists. Two graduate students have completed research through the program, and four are currently working with Heins. According to Heins, the organic dairy research work at WCROC has also leveraged a lot of other funds for the station. For example, WCROC has

received almost \$2 million from the USDA to conduct a four-year study researching, among other things, the economics of grazing and wintering systems, as well as fly control. Part of the grant is helping fund Extension outreach to farmers.

"This is the premiere organic dairy research being done in the country," says Johnson, who now serves on LSP's State Policy Steering Committee.

Out-of-Date Facilities

But at one point during the tour, it became clear that for more innovative research to continue, some upgrading of facilities is needed. Heins showed the LSP group a milking parlor that dates to the 1970s. In fact, it was put together from parts scavenged off a facility at the Northwest Research and Outreach Center in Crookston, Minn., which stopped doing dairy research in 2010. WCROC recently got a grant to put in solar panels and a system for re-using the dairy parlor's wastewater, but the milking facility itself is showing its age.

The LSP group, which was accompanied by David Bly, a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives who serves on the House Agriculture Finance Committee, discussed the need for making sure at least some of the funding that goes to the U of M's College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences during the current legislative session be directed at upgrading the dairy facility. □

Give it a Listen

Episode 81 of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast features dairy scientist Dennis Johnson talking about how working with innovative farmers influenced his research: <http://landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/197>.

Take Action this Session: Restore the MPCA Citizens' Board

By Bobby King

Since 1968, the Citizens' Board of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency had stood for people over corporate interests. This Board put citizens in a critical decision-making role and gave them a place to have their voices heard. That is what happened in August 2014 when its members listened to farmers and rural neighbors opposed to a proposed 8,850-cow factory farm that was to be built in western Minnesota and ordered an in-depth environmental review. It was then that corporate interests began their attack on the Board.

This attack culminated during the final

hours of the regular session of the 2015 Minnesota Legislature when a provision was inserted into the Omnibus Environment Finance Bill late at night. Many other rollbacks on bedrock environmental policy were included in this finance bill, making the 2015 session the worst in a decade for our environment.

Take Action Now

But there is a good chance we could get the Citizens' Board reinstated, once again giving Minnesotans a voice in projects that impact their communities. The 2016 state legislative session began March 8 and on the first day four Senate bills were introduced to

reinstate the Citizens' Board. By the end of the first week of the 2016 session, a Senate hearing had already been held to discuss bringing back the Citizens' Board (LSP members testified at that hearing). LSP is tracking this issue closely. To find out more about how you can get a message to the Minnesota Senate that we need a Citizens' Board that puts people's interests before corporate interests, contact me or see the **Action Alerts** section at www.landstewardshipproject.org. □

LSP Policy Program organizer Bobby King can be reached at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

Building a Better Farm Bill

LSP Members Discuss Ag Policy that's Good for the Land & People

By Kaitlyn O'Connor

Members and supporters of the Land Stewardship Project from around Minnesota met this winter to shape our organizational 2018 Farm Bill policy platform. The Farm Bill is the largest piece of legislation that governs how our national food and farming system works. It impacts everything from farm loans, nutrition programs, farmland conservation and crop insurance to agricultural research, international trade, commodity subsidies, food stamps and rural development.

Josh Reinitz, a beginning farmer from Henderson, Minn., was one of the 50 or so folks who came to our first meeting, which was held in New Ulm, Minn.

"It's frustrating to me, because I look at this colossal piece of farm policy and there's almost nothing that applies to my family farm," said Reinitz, who, along with his wife Sally, raises produce. "The Farm Bill overlooks me and my needs. How can we create federal farm policy that works for a diverse set of farmers working on all different kinds of farms?"

A version of that same question was asked by other participants at the winter meetings, which were each located in the district of a member of Congress that sits on the House Agriculture Committee: Representative Tim Walz of Congressional District 1 in southern Minnesota; Rep. Collin Peterson of Congressional District 7 along the western side of the state; and Rep. Rick Nolan of Congressional District 8 in northeastern Minnesota. Members of the Ag Committee are a particularly influential group in Congress when it comes to the Farm Bill, so it is especially important these elected officials hear from farmers in their area.

Our current Farm Bill, which was passed in 2014, contains some encouraging elements like modest increases in funding for programs that support beginning farmers, lo-

cal and regional food systems, organic production methods and rural development. But this funding increase isn't even 1 percent of overall farm-focused spending. When considered as a whole, this legislation continues to perpetuate inequalities in our food and agriculture system and falls brutally short in providing for stewardship of the land and our nation's fiscal resources.

One prime example is the Bill's massive expansion of a highly flawed crop insurance program that encourages the plowing of environmentally sensitive land while consolidating acreage into the hands of fewer mega-operators. At a time when the USDA and agricultural policy-makers give lip service to getting more farmers on the land, Farm Bill programs like crop insurance are set up to push beginning farmers and farm-



Farmers representing a variety of enterprises, ages and backgrounds gathered for a federal agriculture policy meeting in New Ulm, Minn. (LSP Photo)

ers utilizing diverse systems out of business.

LSP's members want the next Farm Bill to deliver on many fronts when it comes to sustaining our land, people and communities. For example, in New Ulm the conversation among meeting participants was focused on promoting environmental conservation and crop insurance reform, as well as supporting independent livestock operations and the next generation of farmers. Farmers, small business owners and government officials all had important perspectives to share.

"What we have now is federal policy that puts up road blocks in the path to healthier soil, cleaner water and locally grown food," said Jon Jovaag, a member of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee who operates a diversified farm in Austin, Minn. "We should

have programs that prioritize the protection of soil and water and promote growing fruits and vegetables to feed our local community, not just promote commodity crops for export markets."

Loretta Jaus, a Sibley County dairy farmer and LSP board member, said that if federal policy is to support a viable food and farm system, it needs to do more than promote the production of just a handful of crops.

"If we're going to create a more sustainable food and farming system that is adaptable and resilient, whether we're talking about nutrition or insurance, markets or the environment, the solutions are rooted in embracing diversity," said Jaus, who was named a White House Champion of Change for Sustainable and Climate Smart Agriculture in 2015.

LSP members on the Federal Farm Policy Committee will work with LSP staff to use the feedback gathered during these winter meetings to shape LSP's policy priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill. This spring, LSP members and staff will travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with members of Congress to address our concerns, and discuss potential policy solutions.

Right now, the majority of federal farm policy favors the big over the small, the industrialized over the diversified, and maximum crop yield over soil health. As we move forward toward the next Farm Bill in 2018, we have an opportunity and

a responsibility to fight for a more sustainable food and agriculture system that is good for people and the land. □

Kaitlyn O'Connor is an LSP organizer focused on federal policy issues.

More on Federal Policy

For more information on the Land Stewardship Project's federal policy work, contact Kaitlyn O'Connor (koconnor@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-722-6377) or Tom Nuessmeier (tomn@landstewardshipproject.org, 507-995-3541); or check out the **Federal Farm Policy** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

A Cleaner Bill of Health(care)

LSP Members Convey a Key Message to Minnesota's Health Care Financing Task Force: Make Quality Care Affordable & Accessible

By Paul Sobocinski & Heidi Morlock

The 29-member Minnesota Health Care Financing Task Force recently wrapped up its five-month long process of advising Governor Mark Dayton and the state Legislature on strategies to increase access and improve the quality of healthcare for Minnesotans. The Task Force represents a diverse group of interests: Republican and Democratic legislators, healthcare providers and advocates, corporate insurance companies and corporate healthcare systems. During the past several months, LSP members and staff testified numerous times before the Task Force, calling for reforms that would make affordable, quality healthcare accessible to everyone.

On Jan. 15, the Task Force approved a draft summary of recommendations that will be passed onto the Legislature and Governor. Those recommendations can be found at <http://mn.gov/dhs/hcftf/meetings>. The draft recommendations reflect much of LSP's input. Following is a summary of some of those recommendations.

Making MinnesotaCare More Accessible

The Task Force is making a key recommendation that could help make MinnesotaCare, a state subsidized healthcare program, available to more Minnesotans. It recommends setting the income level that qualifies someone for MinnesotaCare to 275 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (\$33,000 a year for a single adult). This represents an increase from the current 200 percent level and a return to what the level was before the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was passed (\$24,000 for a single adult).

During the Dec. 18 Task Force meeting, long-time LSP farmer-member Barb Pumper testified about the importance of making MinnesotaCare available to as many working families as possible.

"We want MinnesotaCare to still be an option, a seamless system in which we pay more for premiums as our income rises, without the hassle or worry of getting kicked off and trying to find really affordable cover-

age again," she told the Task Force. "MinnesotaCare needs to be expanded to fill the gap the ACA is leaving for too many working families."

Continuous Enrollment

The Task Force also proposed 12-month, continuous eligibility for Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare enrollees, meaning



LSP members met with Rose Roach, executive director of the Minnesota Nurses Association, during the Dec. 18 Health Care Task Force Meeting in Eagan, Minn. Roach is a member of the Task Force. Pictured (left to right): Roach, Al Kruse, Heidi Morlock, Barb Pumper, Joe Kriegl, Paul Sobocinski and Darwin Dyce. (Photo by Sharon Schmidt)

eligibility only needs to be verified once a year. Currently people have to submit any changes that may affect enrollment—such as income or household size—at any time of the year. This means people are moving between programs or going on and off insurance more often. It is particularly difficult for folks with seasonal employment or income fluctuations within a year.

This recommendation guarantees 12 months of continuous health insurance, improving continuity of care and patient-provider relationships, especially for folks with chronic conditions. Longer periods of eligibility also reduce administrative costs and paperwork for the Department of Human Services and the counties that administer these programs.

Having continuous eligibility for Medi-

cal Assistance and MinnesotaCare would help eliminate situations where a paperwork snafu ends up sending people into panic mode after receiving an incorrect notice of being dropped from Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare.

Lowering Deductibles

Another much-needed recommendation to improve affordability of coverage requires insurance companies in the marketplace to offer no- or low-deductible Qualified Health Plans. The problem of high deductibles was addressed by a number of testers, including LSP Healthcare Organizing Committee member Al Kruse.

"High-deductible plans are more like buying a lottery ticket than insurance," he told the Task Force. "No one on a fixed income will be able to utilize such policies

because they are unaffordable."

The Task Force also recommended requiring companies to offer Qualified Health Plans that exempt certain services from deductibles, like primary care and high-value preventive services. People shouldn't have high deductibles and co-pays get in the way of them seeing their doctor for basic needs.

Reaching More Communities

Another Task Force recommendation promises to help remove barriers to both accessing coverage and receiving care. This recommendation includes asking the state to provide additional resources to effectively reach communities that are culturally diverse

Healthcare, see page 11...

by addressing language barriers, among other things. Another recommendation provides access to coverage for uninsured, low-income individuals who, due to immigration status, are ineligible for Medical Assistance, MinnesotaCare and Qualified Health Plans through MNsure.

The Bad News

LSP and our allies also fought for a key provision that would have required all insurance companies to offer standardized plans, making choosing a plan easier for the average Minnesotan. Unfortunately, this proposal was scuttled through the efforts of Health Care Financing Task Force Member Scott Keefer of Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

In addition, the Task Force recommended a healthcare payment change from our current “fee-for-service” system to one called “value-based purchasing.” Although it sounds good on paper, this new payment method would essentially increase administrative costs, add unneeded complexity and potentially increase health disparities. Basically, “value-based purchasing” would punish providers whose patients have negative outcomes.

Realizing that under-served and low-income communities oftentimes have poorer health outcomes due to socioeconomic factors—which are not under the control of a doctor nor can be addressed in a clinic visit—it would be a mistake to financially penalize these providers, taking resources away from places where they are needed most. State Senator John Marty and Minnesota Nurses Association executive director Rose Roach—both members of the Task Force—voted against “value-based purchasing” in their workgroup.

Fortunately, Marty and Roach were able to get a recommendation passed that calls for a study to compare a publicly financed, privately-delivered universal healthcare system (like other countries have) to the current market-based approach used in Minnesota.

Next Steps

Overall, LSP is pleased with the number of good, thoughtful recommendations proposed by the Minnesota Health Care Financing Task Force, and we appreciate all the hard work of our members who testified, as well as wrote blogs and newspaper letters-to-the-editor. Our members, our allies and key task force members made a significant difference in developing a list of recommendations that, if adopted by the Minnesota Legislature, will definitely improve healthcare in Minnesota.

The Key Role of Healthcare Stories

It's quite clear that lack of access to affordable healthcare is a barrier for beginning as well as established farmers who want to devote their full attention to the land and not have to take a town job in order to qualify for insurance. Lack of access to affordable healthcare is also a problem for rural business owners and rural workers where employment that offers health benefits is harder to find. There has been a lot of discussion over the obstacles these groups face.

But one group that continues to be left out of the affordable healthcare debate is people with no documentation. If you fall into the income bracket that qualifies you for one of Minnesota's two main subsidized plans—Medical Assistance or MinnesotaCare—but have no documentation, you only get subsidized healthcare in the emergency room or when you are pregnant.

At a Minnesota Health Care Financing Task Force meeting in December, compelling testimony was provided by Emilia Avalos, executive director of Navigate MN, a small nonprofit assisting immigrant young adults. Avalos, because of her lack of documentation, has never had access to affordable health insurance or healthcare, except when pregnant. People in her community are literally dying because of lack of affordable healthcare, she said. Task Force member Mónica Hurtado of Voices for Racial Justice, a Land Stewardship Project ally organization, said such testimony was key to the Task Force's work.

“The stories of people made a huge difference....Instead of delivering policy in the abstract, stories were very successful at keeping people at the heart of the conversation,” said Hurtado.

As the representatives of insurance corporations on the Task Force kept talking about “consumers of healthcare products,” LSP and our allies spoke about real people—people whose ancestors were immigrants and people who have immigrated recently to this state. If we want rural Minnesota and Minnesota as a whole to thrive with independent farmers, healthy workers, small-business owners, entrepreneurs and a contributing citizenry, then we need an inclusive healthcare system taking care of all people.

People's stories, many of which came from LSP members, made a positive difference in the outcome of the Minnesota Health Care Financing Task Force's recommendations. As LSP moves forward on this work, we need more healthcare stories. If you have one you'd like to share, contact LSP's Paul Sobocinski or Heidi Morlock (*see sidebar below for contact information*).

At LSP we will continue to fight for these recommendations to be adopted by the Minnesota Legislature. We are also mindful that to have real healthcare reform we must fix the underlying problem of having a system that is run by corporate America, where profit is number one and people's health is secondary. LSP member Craig Brooks, who has over 44 years of experience working in Minnesota's public social service system, said in a recent LSP blog, “This is why I am calling for a major overhaul of our healthcare system — eliminating the red tape and the central role of the profit-making corporations.”

Healthcare is about human life. Healthcare should be a human right. □

*Paul Sobocinski (507-342-2323, sobopaul@landstewardshipproject.org) and Heidi Morlock (952-492-5314, heidim@landstewardshipproject.org); are LSP organizers focusing on healthcare. More on LSP's healthcare work is at the **Affordable Healthcare for All** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org.*

Healthcare at the 2016 MN Legislature

The Land Stewardship Project will be working during the 2016 session of the Minnesota Legislature—it convened March 8—on key healthcare reform measures, as well as other state policy issues.

Help Us Reform Healthcare

If you want to be part of the Land Stewardship Project's efforts to create a real fix for our broken healthcare system in Minnesota, then join with us in working for a system in which everyone is in and no one is out. You can get signed up for LSP's “Healthcare Hot List” and we will connect with you at key times to take action at the local and state level.

To join our Healthcare Hot List, e-mail Paul Sobocinski at sobopaul@landstewardshipproject.org or call 507-342-2323.

Letters from the Frac Sand Front

Land Stewardship Project members in Winona County in southeastern Minnesota are organizing to pass a county ban on new frac sand mining, processing and transportation operations. Here's what a few of these members have had to say in recent letters-to-the-editor about why they support a ban. For more information about the Winona County ban campaign, contact LSP organizer Johanna Rupprecht at 507-523-3366 or jrupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org.

Neighbor vs. Neighbor

"One reason I am suspect of the intentions of the industrial frac sand industry is its ability to pit neighbor against neighbor... The neighbor who wants to keep his place is left with a large industrial operation and a resulting lower value on the land that person owns. The impact of the large sand company ends up negatively affecting the whole neighborhood."

— Sharon Ormsby,
Wiscovy Township
(*Winona Daily News*, 1/27/16)



Hilltop removal, such as what is pictured here in western Wisconsin, is a common form of frac sand mining. (LSP Photo)

After the Gold Rush

"Mining creates a gold-rush mentality. The materials being mined are not limitless, especially frac sand. Once the hill or bluff is flattened, the sand is gone, and the scar is forever, not reclaimable."

— Frank Bures,
Winona (*Winona Daily News*, 12/29/15)

Wrong from Start to Finish

"There is no way to make something that is so wrong right. From the start, altering irreplaceable bluffs and habitat that have existed for thousands of years, to the final product produced, oil, frac sand mining is wrong. The problems of dust, noise, transportation, destruction of natural resources, public health and safety are only the tip of a huge iceberg."

— Dale Schauer, Goodview
(*Winona Daily News*, 12/17/15)

Take Advantage of the Pause

"Once oil prices go back up, you can bet that aggressive corporations will be back, trying their best to strip-mine our bluffs for their profit. The lull offers us the time to step back and reassess whether the few jobs this corporate strip-mining gives us are really worth the costs we and future generations will have to bear. We want to protect our precious groundwater and keep the rural, agricultural nature of our county, so we reject the noisy, polluting and dangerous heavy industry of strip-mining for frac sand."

— Jim Gurley, Hillsdale Township
(*Winona Daily News*, 12/15/15)

Whole Hog

"Too little attention is paid to the spiritual and aesthetic elements in the frac-sand debate. I got interested in this issue because I was raised on a farm in Crystal Valley near Houston, Minn. It wasn't a big farm, nor

was it highly profitable, but it was beautiful. And if frac sand were found on it, a company from Texas or Oklahoma or somewhere else would happily cut it up like a butchered hog. Frac-sand companies don't give the tiniest fraction of a damn about the land they destroy."

— Steve Schild, Winona
(*Winona Daily News*, 12/24/15)

Sucking the Land Dry

"I believe that we are using water from our aquifer faster than nature is replenishing it. We have to take our dropping water table into consideration when contemplating new water-use permits."

— Lorraine
Redig, Warren
Township
(*Winona Post*,
12/14/15)

Keep it Simple

"Mining interests give lip service to respecting the environment and protecting people's health. But it, ultimately, is the people (government) who need to regulate mining so as to protect health, property and

the land. Mining companies often ignore or legally fight protective regulations, costing all of us in increased taxes. Let's make it simple. Let's not quibble with the mining companies over rules and regulations. Let's save some tax dollars. Just say no to future frac sand mining in Winona County. We need a ban!"

— Mike Knutson, St. Charles
Township (*Winona Daily News*, 11/18/15) □

LSP Frac Sand Facebook & Web Page

For more on the Land Stewardship Project's work related to frac sand mining and processing in southeastern Minnesota, see the **Frac Sand Organizing** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

If you're a Facebook user, check out the new page: "Ban Frac Sand Mining: LSP's Winona County Campaign."

LSP's Farm Beginnings Accepting 2016-2017 Applications

Classes Offered in Northfield, Minn., & Glenwood, Minn.

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program is accepting applications for its 2016-2017 class session. The early bird discount (\$100) application deadline is Aug. 1; the final application deadline is Sept. 1. Separate classes will convene in Northfield, which is near Minnesota's Twin Cities, and Glenwood in west-central Minnesota.

LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its 19th year of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is designed for people of all ages just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers looking to make

changes in their operations. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial planning, enterprise planning, marketing and innovative production techniques.

This 12-month course provides training and hands-on learning opportunities in the form of classroom sessions, farm tours, field days, workshops and access to an extensive farmer network. Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the area. The classes, which meet approximately twice-a-month beginning in the fall, run until March 2017, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 750 people have graduated from the Minnesota-Wisconsin region Farm Beginnings Program. Graduates are involved in a wide-range of agricultural enterprises, including grass-based livestock, organic vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture and specialty products.

Besides Minnesota and Wisconsin, Farm Beginnings classes have been held in Illinois, Nebraska and North Dakota. Farm Beginnings courses have recently been launched in South Dakota, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, New York and Maine.

The Farm Beginnings class fee is \$1,500, which covers one "farm unit"—either one farmer or two farming partners who are on the same farm. A \$200 deposit is required with an application and will be put towards the final fee. Payment plans are available, as well as a limited number of scholarships.

For application materials or more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org, or contact LSP's Karen Benson at karenb@landstewardshipproject.org, 507-523-3366. □

'LSP Local' Listserv Shares Ag Information

The Land Stewardship Project has launched "LSP Local," a series of regional e-mail listservs to help farmer-members share information and communicate around production and management issues.

Information on signing up is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/lsplocalnetwork. For more information, contact LSP's Dori Eder at 612-578-4497 or dori@landstewardshipproject.org. □

FB Collaborative Website Launched

The Farm Beginnings Collaborative (FBC) has launched a website: www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org. The FBC is the national alliance of regional groups who are offering the Farm Beginnings course, which was originally developed by the Land Stewardship Project.

Through the Collaborative, LSP is sharing the Farm Beginnings curriculum with other farmer training peers, and Farm Beginnings is now a licensed program in which all partners trained to offer the course become members of the FBC. The Collaborative includes 10 organizations with programs serving beginning farmers in 13 states.

For more information on the Farm Beginnings Collaborative, contact LSP's Amy Bacigalupe at 320-269-2105 or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Farm Dreams: Is Farming in Your Future? Find Out July 31

Farm Dreams is an entry level, four-hour, exploratory Land Stewardship Project workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether farming is the next step for them. This is a great workshop to attend if you are considering farming as a career and are not sure where to start. Farm Dreams is a good prerequisite for LSP's Farm Beginnings course (*see above*).

LSP holds Farm Dreams workshops at various locations throughout the Minnesota-Wisconsin region during the year. The next class is scheduled for Sunday, July 31, at LSP's Minneapolis office. The cost is \$20 for LSP members and \$40 for non-members. For more information, see the **Farm Dreams** page at www.farmbeginnings.org. Details are also available by contacting LSP's Dori Eder at 612-578-4497 or dori@landstewardshipproject.org. □

LSP's Journeyperson Course Takes Farming to the Next Level

The Land Stewardship Project's two-year Journeyperson Course is designed to support people who have a few years of farm start-up and management under their belt and are working to take their operation to the next level. Participants get assistance moving their farming plans forward through advanced financial plan-

ning and one-on-one advising, production assistance via mentorship with an experienced farmer, and guidance on balancing farm, family and personal needs. Participants who develop and execute a comprehensive financial plan are eligible to have their savings of up to \$2,400 matched to invest in a wealth-generating asset for their farm.

The deadline for the next course session is Oct. 1. For details, see the **Journeyperson** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers. You can also contact LSP's Nick Olson at 320-269-1057 or nicko@landstewardshipproject.org.

Labor Pains on the Farm

An LSP Survey Unearths a Significant Barrier to Sustainable Growth

Since launching their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) vegetable farm in western Wisconsin almost a decade ago, Mike and Jody Lenz have methodically grown in size. Threshing Table Farm grew from 25 to 40 share members between its first and second years. The next growing season, the farm had 75 members and later expanded to 100. Three years ago the Lenzen expanded their market by adding sales to a hospital, a school, a restaurant and two small farmers' markets. If it seemed like they were on a growth trajectory it was for a reason: the Lenzen had penciled out that their farm needed to sell 175 to 200 shares annually in order to generate enough income for Mike to quit his full-time job as an engineer.

They had all the makings for reaching that goal: access to good farmland with room to increase vegetable plantings; a solid infrastructure for packing, washing and delivering produce; and a loyal customer base. But two years ago, Threshing Table came face-to-face with a barrier they hadn't counted on: lack of consistent labor. For two years in a row they unsuccessfully tried to hire an intern, offering a salary, hands-on training, even a mobile home on the farm to live in.

"When we started CSA farming, we always heard about interns," says Jody. "I didn't want to just hire anyone—I wanted someone I can teach farming to, and it would be a mutually beneficial experience."

What the couple discovered was that it was an incredibly competitive market. The Lenzen put the word out through Internet intern/job posting sites and heard back from some excellent candidates looking for production and marketing experience in preparation for their own farming careers. But by the time they finalized their job offers, the prospective interns had accepted positions elsewhere.

As a result, Threshing Table has turned to filling in its labor needs with young people from the neighborhood who are looking for temporary summer employment. Also helping them out are their teenaged daughter and people utilizing "work shares"—arrangements where CSA members pay for their vegetables by working a few hours a

week. The Lenzen have dropped the number of shares they offer to 80 and have put plans for Mike to come back to the farm full-time on indefinite hold.

The Lenzen aren't alone, according to Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings organizer Dori Eder. Farmer-members of

tion," says Eder. "You will need labor if you are going to grow to a profitable scale."

What they have discovered is that prospective farm interns are now going on national searches and are willing to move when the right opportunity comes up. That often puts small- and medium-sized farms at a disadvantage when competing with larger produce operations on the West and East coasts.

The survey showed this is a source of stress for a range of operations. Farms with annual gross sales ranging from under \$10,000 to over \$100,000—and everything in-between—participated in the survey. The majority of the farms that responded were vegetable operations, but livestock and grain producers also participated in the survey.



Jody Lenz of Threshing Table Farm: "One of the most stressful things about being a CSA farmer is never knowing who your employee is going to be from year-to-year." (Photo courtesy of Ilisa Ailts Photography, www.ilisaailts.com)

the Farm Viability Steering Committee Eder helps coordinate have expressed major concerns about the availability of labor, particularly in the case of produce operations that are looking to expand. As a result, this winter Eder sent out a survey to farmers associated with LSP and its Farmer Network, asking them about labor issues.

She says the 96 people who responded were pretty much unanimous: good interns and other employees are very difficult to find these days, an issue that's limiting the ability of these operations to expand to the point where they can provide more of a full-time income for the farm owners.

"I think it's difficult for people who are used to working for free contemplating paying someone for labor, but eventually you will hit a wall as far as vegetable produc-

Eder says the survey and follow-up conversations with farmers make it clear that this is not about finding the "cheapest" unskilled labor available, a strategy that has become a mainstay of industrial agriculture.

"Their concerns were around compensating people fairly and making it a fulfilling experience," she says. "They expressed a real interest in having a relationship with the employees and have it be a chance for them to gain skills."

Indeed, several survey comments addressed ways of balancing profits with compensating employees fairly. As one typical response put it: "If we are promoting farming, then it needs to be sustainable on ALL fronts."

Farm Labor, see page 15...

During the recent Midwest CSA Conference (see pages 21-23) the issue of finding good employees and figuring out how to compensate them well while keeping share prices affordable was a hot topic.

"We struggle with wanting to give our workers fair wages," said CSA farmer Mike Jacobs during a conference panel discussion. "But we really feel like we will be a stronger, more resilient farm when we figure out this labor issue and make it more just and equitable."

Good Models

It's also become clear in recent years that there are certain farms that consistently attract and keep good labor. Eder says farmers are talking about ways to set their operations apart, and thus make them more attractive to experienced workers. One strategy some have tried is to develop an "incubator program"—essentially an opportunity for workers to cultivate a little bit of a farm's land for themselves, and keep the profits from what they sell off those borrowed acres.

"We have some farms that are just excellent at this—they have more applicants than

positions," says Eder. "I want to know why."

That's why as a follow-up to the survey, she is doing interviews with farmers, and LSP is holding a workshop on labor issues April 17 (see sidebar). The workshop will feature area farmers who have had good luck consistently finding and keeping good employees. It will also feature an important discussion around legal issues, something Jody Lenz concedes farmers "bury their heads in the sand" around.

As the result of a court decision a few years ago, a farm can no longer have "interns" do the same labor as paid "employees" would and not pay them at least minimum wage. In the survey, several respondents expressed concern that they were competing against farms that were skirting the law when it came to use of interns, putting them at a competitive disadvantage.

"The rules have changed," says Eder.

"Now you can't just provide an intern room and board. The room, board and stipend must add up to at least a minimum wage."

For Jody Lenz, she's hoping this kind of workshop can help her business determine at what point does it pencil out financially to hire labor and then how to fill that need with a good intern. It's not lost on her that one of the biggest ironies of their situation is

that they got into CSA farming as a way to eliminate the uncertainty of marketing their product, but they are still dealing with a huge question mark around how to get those vegetables produced in the first place.

"One of the most stressful things about being a CSA farmer is never knowing who your employee is going to be from year-to-year," says Lenz. □

LSP Labor Issues Workshop April 17

The Land Stewardship Project will hold an "Addressing Labor Issues on Your Farm" workshop April 17, from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., somewhere in the Twin Cities area.

The legal, practical and financial issues surrounding the management of labor on small farms will be discussed. The workshop will feature attorney Rachel Armstrong from Farm Commons and LSP member-farmers sharing their experiences related to being employers as well as employees.

For details, contact Dori Eder at dori@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-578-4497.

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 LSP's *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse*. To fill out an online form and for more information, see www.landstewardshipproject.org and look under the **More Farmers on the Land** section. You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Dori Eder at dori@landstewardshipproject.org, or by calling her at 612-578-4497. Below are excerpts of recent listings. For the full listings, see www.landstewardshipproject.org.

Farmland Available

◆ Ed Lysne has for rent 9 acres of farmland in *Minnesota's Rice County, south of the Twin Cities*. The land has not been sprayed for several years; there are 5 tillable acres. The tenant needs to have a solid business plan emphasizing multi-use land stewardship and environmental responsibility. Contact: Ed Lysne, edriclysne@gmail.com.

◆ Henry Meuwissen has for rent 150 acres of farmland in eastern *Minnesota's Pine County, one hour from Saint Paul*. The land includes pasture and it has not been sprayed for 12 years; it is eligible for organic certification. Contact: Henry Meuwissen, 952-484-0710, henry@gcm-online.com.

◆ Mairi Doerr has for sale 20 acres of farmland in *southeastern Minnesota's Goodhue County*. The land has not been sprayed for 30 years. There are outbuildings and a house. There are 8 acres fenced with

New Zealand-style steel tensile electric, plus interior steel tensile electric and Electro-net. The water system serves 30 grazing paddocks. A rent-to-own or long-term lease arrangement would be considered. Contact: Mairi Doerr, dancingwindsfarmstay@gmail.com, 507-250-2144.

◆ Bob Walser has for rent 55 acres of farmland in *southeastern Minnesota's Goodhue County (near Dennison)*. It includes a strawberry patch, as well as berms and swales in progress with the beginning of an orchard. There are two barns with a farm office. Contact: Bob Walser, farm@youngwalser.net.

◆ Douglas Piltingsrud has for rent 66 acres of premium pasture in *southeastern Minnesota's Olmsted County*. It is set up for rotationally grazing cattle (can stock 50,000 pounds). There is high-tensile woven wire perimeter fence with hot top wire. Contact: Douglas Piltingsrud, 507-272-9050, [\[ingsrud@gmail.com\]\(mailto:ingsrud@gmail.com\).](mailto:dougpiilt-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

◆ Peter Kastler has for rent 3.5 acres of farmland in *Minnesota's Washington County, near the Twin Cities*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it includes pasture and access to a barn. The land has been dormant, so the fence needs mending, which Kastler is willing to do for the right renter. Contact: Peter Kastler, 612-382-9385, peter.kastler@gmail.com.

◆ Dennis has for sale 37 acres of farmland in *east-central Wisconsin's Winnebago and Fond du Lac County (near Ripon)*. There are two farms, both possibly for sale, or Dennis is open to finding a way to form a farm-to-table cooperative and the cooperative buys the two farms. The 32-acre Christmas tree farm is managed with no chemicals or fertilizers. There is also available a 5-acre

Clearinghouse, see page 16...

vegetable farm/orchard in a small town. Contact Dennis, growsureease@gmail.com, 920-203-1054.

◆ Lea Karlssen has for sale a 10-acre farm in *southeastern Minnesota's Winona County*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it includes a quarter-acre of upland field ready to be certified organic and 4 acres coming out of CRP in 2018. Contact: Lea Karlssen, 507-429-0746.

◆ Steven Abel and Mary Maier-Abel have for sale 30.83 acres of certified organic farmland on the *Pierce/Pepin County line in western Wisconsin*. There are two parcels: 24 acres and 6.5 acres (second parcel has buildings). Contact: Steven Abel, 715-448-0876, bloominghill1593@yahoo.com.

◆ Chris and Rebecca Newhouse have for sale 36 acres of farmland in *western Wisconsin's Dunn County*. There are fruit trees and perennial flower gardens, with 10 acres of woods and 20 acres of pasture fully fenced in 2014. An organic certification plan is in place for transition. Details at www.lostviewfarm.com. Contact: Chris Newhouse, chrisnewhouse@gmail.com.

◆ Jessi Wood has for sale a 9.91-acre farm in *western Minnesota's Chippewa County*. The land is surrounded by 200 acres of restored prairie land. The land could be certified organic immediately. The asking price is \$75,000. Contact: Jessi Wood, jwoodstout@gmail.com.

◆ Kelly has for sale 10 acres of farmland in *Michigan*. The land includes pasture and fencing, with water running to all the paddocks. The land has not been sprayed for several years. There is a new pole barn, several outbuildings and a 3-4 bedroom farmhouse. The asking price is \$143,900. Contact: Kelly, 989-385-4854.

Seeking Farmland

◆ Terri and Scott Norris are seeking to purchase or rent at least 20 acres of farmland in *southeastern Minnesota*. They would like land suitable for establishing a rotational grazing enterprise on. Contact: Terri Norris (tnorris313@yahoo.com) or Tom Norris (scottish3760@yahoo.com).

◆ Dara Xiong is seeking to rent 20 tillable acres in *Minnesota's Dakota County, near the Twin Cities*. No house is required. Contact: Dara Xiong, 651-468-1488.

◆ Bonnie Stone is seeking to lease or purchase .5 to 2 acres of farmland *within 30 minutes of Stillwater, Minn. (including Wisconsin)*. She wants land not sprayed for several years. Contact: Bonnie Stone, 651-283-1217, Bonpstone@gmail.com.

◆ Leighton Knisley is seeking to purchase 15-80 acres of farmland in *central Minnesota*. Land with pasture and a house and that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred. Contact Leighton Knisley, 775-442-0579, or Kaitlyn, 77-442-1932.

◆ Tarah Swope is seeking to buy 1 acre of farmland in *Wisconsin*. Land with forest is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Tarah Swope, 920-221-2317, swopetarah@gmail.com.

◆ Holly is seeking to purchase 15+ acres of farmland in *Minnesota*. She prefers land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has water, a barn and a house. Contact: Holly, holspearson@yahoo.com.

◆ Jarrett Pridal is seeking to rent 80+ acres of tillable farmland in *southwestern Minnesota's Yellow Medicine, Lyon or Lincoln County*. Contact: Jarrett Pridal, 605-690-3128.

◆ Steve Krieg is seeking to buy 5-20 acres of farmland in *Minnesota's Twin Cities region (within 30-40 minutes of Plymouth)*. He prefers land that has not been sprayed for several years. Contact: Steve Krieg, skrieg@integra.net, skrieg@dailyprinting.com, 612-719-3173.

◆ Jake Haack is seeking to buy 10+ acres of farmland in *south-central Wisconsin's Dane County*. Contact: Jake Haack, 608-669-6798, jake.haack@yahoo.com.

◆ Brian is seeking to rent farmland in southeastern or *south-central Minnesota*. He would prefer certified organic farmland but will consider conventional land. Farmland set up for dairy would be good. Contact: Brian, 507-259-8235, brian.dohrn@gmail.com.

◆ Jordan Bohlman is seeking to rent 200 acres of farmland in western *Minnesota's Big Stone, Chippewa or Lac Qui Parle County*. Land with pasture and water is preferred. Contact: Jordan Bohlman, 320-760-7075.

◆ Shona is seeking to buy 10-30 acres of farmland in southeastern *Minnesota's Fillmore or Houston County*. Land with pasture and fencing, and that has not been sprayed for several years, is preferred. Contact: Shona, 507-458-0319.

◆ Nolan Calisch is seeking to buy 10-25 acres of farmland in the *Driftless Region of southwestern Wisconsin*. Land with pasture and that has not been sprayed for several years preferred. Contact: Nolan Calisch, nolan.calisch@gmail.com.

◆ Lauren Carr is seeking to purchase 5+ acres of farmland in *southern Minnesota*. Contact: Lauren Carr, lbl3rf@gmail.com.

◆ Sarah is seeking to rent 5-20 acres of farmland in *east-central Wisconsin (Manitowoc, Sheboygan, Calumet or Fond du Lac County)*. Land not sprayed for several years is preferred. Contact: Sarah, 239-292-0510, sleong89@gmail.com.

◆ Josh Holzl is seeking to rent 40-250 acres

of farmland in *Wisconsin*. He is seeking land with water, fencing and outbuildings (he wants to start a beef cow-calf operation). Contact: Josh Holzl, 715-427-3636; N7362 Wellington Lake Dr., Rib Lake, WI 54470.

◆ Hannah Bernhardt and Jason Misik are seeking to purchase 15-100 acres of farmland *within 90 minutes of the Twin Cities region*. They are enrolled in LSP's Farm Beginnings course and have a business plan and down payment available. They plan to rotationally graze sheep and cattle as well as raise pastured pork and chicken. They are willing to work with a farmer who wants to sell the home and land together and see the land farmed. Contact: Hannah Bernhardt (hannah.bernhardt@gmail.com) or Jason Misik (262-758-1061).

Seeking Farmer

◆ Spring Hill Community Farm in *western Wisconsin* is seeking full-time help for the 2016 growing season (mid-April to Nov. 1). Spring Hill is a long-established CSA that grows produce on 5 acres. This is an opportunity for a couple looking to take the next steps on the road to full-time farming. Housing is available. Contact: Michael Racette or Patty Wright, 715-455-1319, springhill@chibardun.net.

◆ Nancy Lunzer is seeking a farmer to develop a CSA on land in *east-central Minnesota's Kanabec County (near Ogilvie)*. There are 10 acres of unused land (80 acres total), and it has not been sprayed for several years. Lunzer would like the focus of the operation to be organic, and is open to discussing options. Contact: Nancy Lunzer, Beerstreetranch@gmail.com.

◆ Jan Kenyon is seeking an organic farmer(s) with a deep appreciation for sustainable use of the land. Kenyon's farm is in *southwestern Wisconsin's Vernon County*. There is a cabin and outbuildings. There are 20 tillable acres and 5 acres in pasture. There are 20 acres of woods. Contact: Jan Kenyon, 608-337-4578.

◆ Peter Middlecamp is seeking a farm manager to implement annual vegetable production for wholesale and retail sales on 3 acres of land in *Afton near Minnesota's Twin Cities*. It has not been sprayed for four years and long-term plans include organic certification. Submit a resume and two references to Peter Middlecamp, peter-middlecamp@gmail.com, 651-587-2386.

◆ Ken Raspotnik is seeking a farmer to join his operation in *northwestern Wisconsin's Bayfield County*. It is a beef and horse operation, with rotational grazing and hay. Contact: Ken Raspotnik, 715-682-9240, Ken@raspotnikfarm.com.

Gratitude: The Heart of Stewardship

The Connection Between Mindful Eating & Farming

By Dana Jackson

Buffet Lunch Menu (locally sourced):

*roast beef, spaghetti puttanesca (vegan)
green bean salad, greens salad with cherry
tomatoes and roasted garlic vinaigrette,
rolls and butter, brownies.*

Brilliant red cherry tomatoes topping a lush green, organic lettuce salad were stoplights in the middle of the buffet table, but none of the delegates to the meeting of the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (MSAWG) stopped to appreciate their beauty, freshness and nutrition as they filled their plates.

Members of the Innovative Farmers of Ohio served the above lunch menu at the MSAWG gathering held at the Stratford Ecological Center near Columbus in July 2003. The menu featured fresh vegetables produced in the area and beef raised on pasture by local Ohio producers. The cooks had purchased organic ingredients from a local food cooperative and breads and cookies from a local bakery to round out the meals.

But during this lunch break, participants continued intense discussions about the Organic Cost Share Certification Program, the Conservation Security Program, the Farmers' Market Promotion Program and other 2002 Farm Bill issues as they loaded plates and sat down to eat. There was, of course, some small talk about their personal lives, but only a few references to the food they were eating. The meal had no formal beginning or ending, except for a reminder for all to wash their

own dishes. Then we reconvened for the afternoon sessions.

For about 10 years, I represented the Land Stewardship Project at MSAWG meetings in various places throughout the Midwest. The MSAWG, now the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), was organized in 1988 so that sustainable

But during these meetings, I found that the connection between agricultural policy and food was very thin, if made at all.

The working group had its share of co-op shoppers and vegetarians, and some members raised backyard gardens or chickens. A few earned their living on family farms. But when they were away from home talking farm policy, they didn't really connect the food they ate to the work they were doing for MSAWG. They just mindlessly fueled up on what was available and got back to the serious business that brought them together.

I wondered why my wonderful colleagues who knew so much about farming and agricultural policy were not exclaiming about the delicious, beautiful, healthful food the hosts placed before us? Where was the expression of gratitude?

Food & Faith

If anyone had asked our MSAWG group to gather and give thanks before the meal that July day, they would have been uncomfortable, partly because they had different ideas about whom or what they would be thanking. But I believe it's important for humans to stop before eating and show gratitude for food as a regular ritual, even in secular settings, like the MSAWG meeting.

It's a step away from human self-centeredness, an acknowledgement of our dependence on food to "get up and do what needs to be done," as Garrison Keillor puts it. But an expression of gratitude for food before meals can be a wider acknowledgement of the natural world that makes food possible and a renewed commitment to the protection of biodiversity on our planet. I believe that gratitude is the heart of stewardship.

Saying thanks is really about survival, about acknowledging that what we have around us on Earth is a fragile life support system. In my Unitarian Universalist faith, it is about the seventh principle: "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." We need to remind ourselves that food is a result of plants, animals, microbes, sunshine, rain and soil, and we eat because of photosynthesis, water cycles, pollination



Illustrations by James Adkinson

agriculture would have a voice in Washington, D.C., and members met with a small D.C. staff twice-a-year to plan strategies for getting legislation favorable to family farmers and conservation passed or implemented.

Gratitude, see page 18...

and evolution. We need to appreciate these natural ecological systems in order to be motivated to keep them healthy. As evidence mounts that climate change is caused mostly by humans burning fossil fuel, and crops are at risk from climate change weather extremes, we must start from a place of appreciation and chart a different path to survive.

"Bless this food for our use," is a short blessing often said before meals. By itself it is not really an expression of gratitude for the food, but more of an acknowledgment of human need. It asks a higher power to make the food do its work to fuel humans. To some it affirms that the biological, chemical and geological processes that made food possible, all the plant and animal evolution that resulted in edible food, exist for only one end, to serve humans, the pinnacle of creation. Soil loss, water pollution, hunger and food waste reveal the folly of that structure.

Recently churches have authorized Creation Care Committees to lead their congregation into making smaller, greener footprints on their property and in the community. They promote stewardship, which challenges the presumption of human superiority and authority to use the Earth's resources. A steward is charged to skillfully and responsibly manage someone else's property so that it brings rewards to the owner.

For those with faith in a Creator, the entire Earth belongs to the Creator who has given humans the responsibility of taking care of the Earth they don't own. In 1980, 72 Catholic bishops from 12 Midwestern states issued a pastoral statement about land and land tenure called "Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland." The title comes from a passage in Leviticus in which God says, "Land must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land belongs to Me, and to Me you are only strangers and guests." The bishops taught that humans are just allowed to use what God created and then must pass it on undamaged to future generations.

This understanding was important to founders of the Land Stewardship Project in 1982 when the new organization began holding meetings about soil conservation in counties where erosion rates were the highest. Many rural churches already observed Soil Stewardship Sunday each spring with sermons by priests and pastors expressing appreciation for farmer-members they assumed were caring for the land.

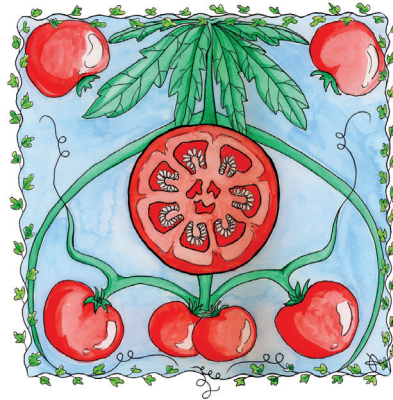
They didn't know, or often didn't address, the reality that rich prairie soils of the Midwest were being carelessly depleted by

industrialized farming practices to produce high yielding crops. LSP held meetings in churches to talk about the seriousness of soil loss and teach that land stewardship is everyone's responsibility.

Stewardship & Ecology

Nancy Paddock wrote a play called *Planting in the Dust* that LSP used in the late 1980s to draw women to these meetings and create an awareness in everyone about soil loss and other environmental and social problems caused by industrial agriculture. Thousands of people and over 500 different audiences saw this one-act, one-woman monologue, in which "Annie" talked about her family's struggle to be good stewards and make a living farming the land that had been in her family for four generations.

Most farms had gardens then, but the local food movement was not yet underway. Like their neighbors, Annie and her husband were raising corn and soybeans, and they



were diligently applying all the best conservation practices.

Most audiences were familiar with the position stated by Annie's neighbor Jordan, who refused to feel guilty when soil left his farm. "It's my land and I'll do what I want to on it," he said. Annie was disgusted by this attitude. "His land," she says. "The land doesn't belong to him. It belongs to itself. If anything, we belong to the land. Borrow our lives from it."

At another point, Annie says, "...this soil is made up of the bodies of all the beings that have ever lived—and died—in this place—over millions of years. And it's the whole life of all the years to come, too. In this dirt!" The lines were delivered reverently, and audiences felt reverence for soil. Annie understood land as Aldo Leopold described it in the conservation classic, *Sand County Almanac*: "By land is meant all of the things on, in or over the Earth."

Leopold didn't write about the connection between land and food. In the whole of *Sand County Almanac*, I can't remember

one paragraph about food. Leopold, the patron saint of ecology, wrote about the folly of not connecting agriculture to nature. He described energy and water cycles that follow natural laws equally applied to native plants and cultivated fields. Yet, the product of those cultivated fields, food to nourish humans, was not discussed.

I've been in the Leopold shack near Baraboo, Wis., with his daughter Nina Leopold Bradley, warming soup over a fire in the same smoky fireplace that the family used. Nina told how her father and siblings usually prepared the meals at the shack instead of their mother Estella. Leopold was known for his skills with Dutch oven cooking. Perhaps the connection to food was obvious in Leopold's time as most meals were prepared from roots, stems, fruits, seeds (or ground seeds), and animal parts, not from substances in freezer packages or boxes and cans.

Leopold's knowledge of ecology and its application in a land ethic is important to understanding what stewardship of the land and stewardship of the table require. In the natural world, plants covering the land hold nutrients and water in the soil, a process to be maintained in farm fields. A biologically diverse landscape provides nectar plants for bees, and so must land used for pollinator-dependent fruit and vegetable crops. As extremes of weather increase with climate change and crops are at greater risk from droughts and downpours, building resilience in food production is imperative. Resilience will be based upon working in harmony with ecological processes that create soil health and conserve water.

Patiann Rogers includes a poem in her book of verse, *Eating Bread and Honey*, called "Service with Benediction," and the excerpt below makes a reverent connection between food and its source in the land and nature:

*So I eat sun and earth by the slice
and spoonful, suck yeast breads soaked
in alfalfa honey, dip crusts dripping
from the dish to my mouth, lick gold
sugar from my fingers. I swallow
pure flower syrup brought from the sky,
chew the kneaded spike and germ of fields
and gardens. Surely I become then
all the arabesques of bee dances
and the cultures of beebread balls rolled
from nectar pollen. I comply easily
with the lean of heady buds and grasses
waxing and waning at their cores
sunk in the earth.*

Gratitude, see page 19...

The Practice of Gratitude

The practice of praise and reverence for food became most meaningful to me through Buddhist friends. Several times I was fortunate to be a guest at the Buddhist Green Gulch Farm near Sausalito, Cal. Guests ate the same, simple food as the monks: whole grain cereals, breads, soups, rice and bean dishes, all made colorful and nutritious from fresh, organic vegetables, fruits and herbs grown at Green Gulch. We ate bread baked at the Zen Mountain Center in the Tassajara Valley near Monterrey and were introduced to humility by baker Ed Brown, who writes in the dedication of *The Tassajara Bread Book*:

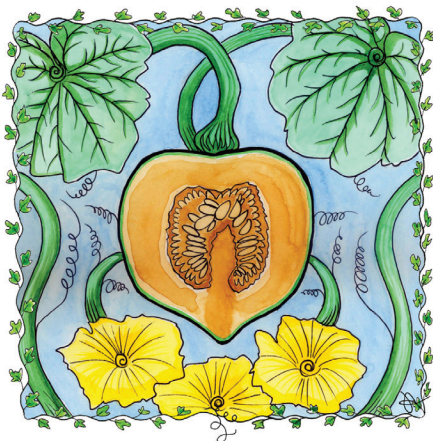
*Rock and Water
Wind and Tree
Bread Dough Rising*

*Vastly all
Are patient with me.*

Buddhist poet Gary Snyder described eating as a sacrament in *The Practice of the Wild*:

"The grace we say clears our hearts and guides the children and welcomes the guest, all at the same time. We look at eggs, apples and stews. They are evidence of plenitude, excess, a great reproductive exuberance...Innumerable little seeds are sacrifices to the food chain. A parsnip in the ground is a marvel of living chemistry, making sugars and flavors from earth, air, water. And if we do eat meat, it is the life, the bounce, the swish, of a great alert being with keen ears and lovely eyes, with foursquare feet and a huge beating heart that we eat. Let us not deceive ourselves.

"We too will be offerings—we are all



edible. And if we are not devoured quickly, we are big enough (like the old down trees) to provide a long slow meal to the smaller critters."

Many cultures have songs or prayers or ceremonies to demonstrate appreciation of food. But the practice of gratitude implies deliberate acts and patterns of living that develop and nourish gratitude. I offer the following recommendations for developing a practice of gratitude in American families, fully aware that some Americans might first need jobs and houses with kitchens before they can practice gratitude:

◆ **Experience hunger.** We are most thankful for food when we are hungry and it is served to us. Americans can experience hunger by breaking our national habit—frequent snacking—and satisfy hunger at meal times.

◆ **Remember those who are hungry.** Volunteer in a community kitchen or food shelf and help serve food to hungry people. Buy an extra Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share to be used by a low-income family.

◆ **Don't waste food.** Plan meals, shop thoughtfully, prepare the right amount of food. Get used to smaller portions at home and eat at restaurants where the word "jumbo" is not on the menu.

◆ **Buy good quality, not cheap, food.** Local organic tomatoes do taste better than orange tennis balls from Florida and probably cost more, but they are worth it. Meat from livestock raised on pasture instead of in confinement will cost more, but that motivates us to eat less and waste none.

◆ **Have "family style" meals.** When a bowl of mashed potatoes is passed around a table, each person counts on everyone else to take a portion and leave enough for the rest. Each member will be poised to feel gratitude when the bowl reaches his or her hands.

◆ **Set an attractive table and share food with courtesy.** Celebrate food by making at least one meal a day special at the family table. Continually eating fast food on the run or consuming sandwiches and chips in front of the TV causes obesity, malnutrition and ignorance of where food comes from.

◆ **Talk about the food and where it came from.** Buy fresh produce, meats and dairy products grown locally or regionally

and, as much as possible, learn the names of growers. Acknowledge that animal lives are sacrificed for meat, that picking strawberries is back-breaking work, and late spring frosts reduce fall apple harvests.

◆ **Begin each meal with verbal expressions of appreciation.**



Saying Grace

All cultures and religions have feasts for special occasions and accompanying rituals to express gratitude for food, but the business of everyday, modern life often causes people to forgo the practice of saying grace. Sometimes we don't know any special prayers and are afraid of embarrassing ourselves or offending someone else. In his essay on grace, Gary Snyder reassures readers that "Anyone can use a grace from their own tradition (and really give it meaning)—or make up their own. Saying some sort of grace is never inappropriate...It is a plain, ordinary, old fashioned little thing to do that connects us with all our ancestors." (Snyder doesn't mean only human ancestors.)

Because I live alone, I seldom have an opportunity to say grace with friends or

Gratitude, see page 20...

...Gratitude, from page 19

family. But while I'm cooking, I silently thank those who produced the ingredients. Organic Valley milk and cheese bring to mind the faces of dairy farmers I know. If I have shopped at River Market Co-op and bought cabbage that Roger grew on Rising Sun Farm, or apples from Charlie's Whistling Well Orchard, or sausage from the VanDerPols' Pastures A Plenty farm, I recall the faces of the producers. I know it is healthful food and that the people who grew it are working to keep their land healthy. I want them to earn a decent living and keep farming.

The MSAWG member representatives at the Ohio meeting I referred to earlier felt loyalty to the family farmers using sustainable practices in their communities and their states and wanted to help them succeed. However, it seemed to me that their policy advocacy work could be more mindful and joyful if they paid more attention to the food such farming produced. At the next MSAWG meeting following the one in Ohio, I asked for some time to bring everyone together just before our dinner in the evening.

We were meeting at the Heartland Presbyterian Center in Parkville, Mo., close to the border of Kansas, and dinner was described on the agenda as "Kansas Barbecue—all food local and organic, where possible." I asked the group to form a circle around the sumptuous spread on the buffet table and the host to tell us the names of the growers or farms that produced what we were about to eat. Then I read the dinner meditation that's in the box on the right side of this page. There was some surprise and embarrassment in the beginning—concern that I was going to force my religion on them—but it disappeared during the reading.

Anyone can write this sort of grace. It isn't necessary that it be a publishable work of art. It can be short, like the old Jewish blessing: "Let us bless the source of life that brings forth bread from the Earth." Instead of teaching children to mutter memorized prayers, we could help them make up their own words of thanks for the food and the natural world it depends upon.

LSP has always striven to bring rural and urban people together as advocates for healthy soil and clean water. Connecting stewardship of the land with stewardship of the table clarifies and enhances this ef-

Dinner Meditation

Let us take time to savor this food that has been prepared for us.

Look at the food — its colors, designs, textures, shapes.
Smell the food, breathe in attentively,
experience the aromas of the seasonings and spices.
Feel the warmth of the sun, the coolness of the rain
falling on the plants and animals that became this food.

Imagine the multiple microbes helping roots
take nutrients from the soil.
Hear the hum of pollinating insects.
Imagine the communities of diverse, six-
legged creatures,
eating leaves and roots and flowers and fruits
(and each other),
seeking a balance of existence.

Think of cows — chewing their cud,
their amazing, switching tails keeping flies at
bay.
Envision the bent backs of planters and weed-
ers and harvesters;
feel the aching arms and shoulders of those
who wielded the hoes and steered the tractors.

Hear the knife thump the cutting board,
chopping the crisp flesh of potatoes and
carrots,
Hear the rhythmic kneading of bread,
the bump of the stirring spoon on the side of
the bowl,
and the boiling, bubbling kettle.

Praise it all.
Praise the life — and death — that is in this food.
Praise the workers and the work that brought it to us.
Bless this food for our use, to give us strength to create a food system
that is environmentally sound and socially just.

Let us savor this food.

—Dana Jackson



fort. Gratitude is the heart of stewardship, stewardship of the land and stewardship of the table. □

Dana Jackson is a former Land Stewardship Project associate director and board of directors member. She co-edited the 2002 book, The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems. This essay was partly inspired by the gratefulness practice of Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast.



30 Years of Community Supported Ag

The CSA Movement Acknowledges the Past & Looks to the Future

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the arrival in the U.S. of a revolutionary model of agriculture. In 1986, two vegetable farms were launched in New England that were organized around the idea of “Community Supported Agriculture.” Called CSA for short, this type of farming creates a relationship between the farmer and the eater that is rarely found in other aspects of our food system.

The CSA concept had existed for several years in other countries, particularly Japan. And when it arrived in the U.S. in the mid-1980s, there was a pent-up demand for a system that allowed eaters to know where their food was coming from and how it was being produced. (In the Upper Midwest, the CSA movement has been around for more than 25 years.)

At their most fundamental level, CSA farms provide a weekly delivery of sustainably produced food to consumers during the growing season (approximately June to October). Those consumers, in turn, pay a subscription fee. But CSA consumers don’t so much “buy” food from particular farms as become “members” of those farms. CSA operations provide more than just food; they offer ways for eaters to become involved in the ecological and human community that supports the farm. CSA members are sharing in the bounty of the growing season, and, just as importantly, they are sharing in the risks that come with raising food.

Trending Upward

Since those humble beginnings, thousands of CSA farms have popped up across the U.S. The latest U.S. Census of Agriculture statistics show that in 2012 there were 12,617 farms that identified themselves as in some way marketing products through a “Community Supported Agriculture” arrangement. That’s up slightly from 2007, when 12,549 farms were identified by the Census as utilizing a CSA arrangement.

There are well over 100 CSA farms now delivering to the Twin Cities. When the Land Stewardship Project’s annual *CSA Farm Directory for the Twin Cities, Minnesota and Western Wisconsin Region* (see page 23) was first published two decades

ago, around a dozen farms were included. The 2016 edition includes 73 farms of varying sizes offering a variety of foods.

CSA operations now range in size from a dozen or so members to several hundred. Traditionally, these farms tended to deliver almost exclusively to urban communities where food co-ops have traditionally had a big presence. But in recent years an increasing number of CSA farms have emerged in regional centers and rural communities far from the “foodie” capitals that spawned the organic movement in the 1990s.



Members of CSA operation Threshing Table Farm in western Wisconsin helped plant potatoes during a spring work-day. Many families see membership in a CSA farm as a way to help their children learn more about the source of their food. (Photo courtesy of Ilisa Ailts Photography, www.ilisaailts.com)

More than Veggies

Many CSA farms are also evolving from exclusively being sources of vegetables from June to October. There are now CSA operations that offer meat, cut flowers, dairy products and eggs, just to name a few products. Some provide winter shares. There is also a trend toward several CSA farms in a region banding together and sharing transportation, storage and packing resources.

No matter what their size, offerings or locations, for many people CSA farms remain at their core a way to have control over

one of the basic necessities of life: food. Membership in a CSA is truly a way to put your money where your mouth is in terms of supporting an agricultural system that’s good for the land and our communities.

As Twin Cities region CSA pioneer Dan Guenther of Common Harvest Farm likes to say: “Our members often tell us that their participation in the farm is something that gives them hope.”

Midwest CSA Conference

In early December, approximately 225 people gathered in Eau Claire, Wis., for the 2015 Midwest CSA Conference. The Wisconsin Farmers Union-sponsored conference was an opportunity for farmers to share practical nuts-and-bolts information on everything from financial management and land access strategies to making labor more efficient and utilizing equipment modifications, or “hacks.”

But the conference, which was held two years ago in Eau Claire as well, was also an opportunity to assess how far the CSA movement has come and where it’s headed. Towards that end, Steven McFadden, who co-authored the first books on the U.S. CSA movement, gave a keynote on its role in empowering people to “put their high ethical, moral concerns into action” when it comes to doing something about the problems industrial agriculture has caused.

“There is something very real, very practical you can do,” he said. “If you yourself are not someone who can grow food, then you can band together with those who know how to do it. They’re your ambassadors to the Earth...and if you empower them appropriately, they will touch the Earth and bring forth not only bounty, but beauty.”

There was also a panel discussion involving CSA farmers representing a range of experience and size. During the panel, Guenther asked the participants a set of questions related to the theme, “The Changing Landscape of CSA.” What challenges do CSA farms face?

Can CSA farms be at the forefront of a new way of producing and consuming food? How can we make the CSA movement more inclusive of people of color and people with low incomes?

The members of the panel didn’t produce any definitive answers on these or other questions they fielded, but some interesting insights into where the movement stands and where it is headed emerged. See pages 22 and 23 for excerpts of this discussion. □

Some Thoughts from the CSA Front

EDITOR'S NOTE: During the 2015 Midwest CSA Conference in Eau Claire, Wis. (see page 21), several farmers representing a diverse range of experience, size and structure participated in a panel discussion called "The Changing Landscape of CSA." The panel was moderated by Dan Guenther of Common Harvest Farm, one of the first CSA operations to serve the Twin Cities region. The panel participants were:

• **Josh Bryceson of Turnip Rock Farm in Clear Lake, Wis.** Bryceson, along with his wife Rama Hoffpauir, has been operating Turnip Rock, which has 250 members, for eight years. Before that, he operated a CSA farm for the nonprofit Minnesota Food Association for four years. Turnip Rock has recently started offering a "Whole Diet CSA" to its members, which, along with vegetables, includes cheese, meat and eggs.

• **Sarah Woutat of Uproot Farm in Princeton, Minn.** Woutat is entering her sixth production season and the farm had 80 full share equivalents in 2015. Woutat, who had worked for other vegetable operations before starting her own business, also sells through a farmers' market and via wholesale accounts.

• **Mike Jacobs of Easy Bean Farm in Milan, Minn.** Jacobs, along with his wife Malena Arner Handeen, have operated Easy Bean for 20 years. Approximately 265 families belong to the farm, which also sells wholesale and rotationally grazes beef cattle for Arner Handeen's parents.

• **Lauren and Caleb Langworthy of Blue Ox Organics in Wheeler, Wis.** They are beginning their fifth growing season at Blue Ox. After operating a traditional summer CSA, the couple has switched to offering winter CSA shares that are a mix of storage crops, greens raised in high tunnels, dehydrated foods and value-added goods. They also raise grass-fed lamb for meat.

Pages 22 and 23 include a few excerpts from the panel discussion.

The Diversity Balancing Act

"Our strength is probably in the diversity of the farm. We have different income streams, which is in response to us coming at it from a homesteading perspective, where we wanted to have a more self-sufficient farm. Demand from customers drives us as well. They would ask, 'Do you also do eggs? Do you also do meat?' And you start

saying yes to everything, which is kind of crazy. So that's probably a weakness there too, saying yes to everything."

— Josh Bryceson

A Foundation of Underpaid Labor

"I really think one of the things we're going to have to address is the fact that we have built a movement on underpaid labor

in general. And so we create this quick turnaround year-after-year with people with no jobs other than early internships that don't pay very well. We struggle with wanting to give our workers fair wages. As you all know, there are economic pressures of selling in a market that has an upper limit of what people are willing to pay. But we really feel like we will be a stronger, more resilient farm when we figure out this labor issue and make it more just and equitable."

— Mike Jacobs

Connecting CSA to a Larger Food Movement

"I got into farming because I saw a large disconnect between myself and the modes of production in general. I'm a very tactile person. I really like to get to the root of problems. I really enjoy that work. And I think that seeing that disconnect was what drew me in and really motivated me to get involved in the larger food movement."

— Caleb Langworthy

"I think when farmers like Dan Guenther started, for example, it was a movement, and it was seen as such, and the community was small and committed. And I think now local foods, organics, where your food comes from, know your farmer, natural, any buzzword you can imagine—it all has meaning. I think people want to jump in, but no one's explaining what CSA is. I've been talking to people about a kind of re-education of the public. We work hard on our newsletters and we work hard on our Facebook posts, integrating new types of technology into our already busy days, in order to get members engaged, keep them engaged. But there still seems to be a disconnect. That's part of my challenge in marketing, honestly, is making that connection."

—Sarah Woutat

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Participants in the "Changing Landscape of CSA" panel discussion (left to right): Lauren Langworthy, Caleb Langworthy, Mike Jacobs, Sarah Woutat and Josh Bryceson. (LSP Photo)

"It's been really interesting for us on our farm trying to get a CSA up and running, because you start with, 'Hi, we're a farm, and this is why we're neat, and this is why you should eat well.' And they say, 'That sounds great, so what do you give me? What am I signing up for here?' And I think there's a disconnect with a lot of the consumers, not all, by any means, but especially a lot of the newer consumers. They've heard of CSA, it's a great idea. These vegetables just magically appear on their doorstep like Amazon, and they don't necessarily understand all the work that's going into it behind the scenes. They're not necessarily prepared to sign up for the community aspect of it. Some get really responsive and become friends and become continual members.

"But it's amazing to me how many fall off the map, like really quickly. And I think maybe that's on me for the way I describe what we're trying to do. Maybe I'm just doing something wrong, but I also think there are consumer-wide things going on and people just don't have that depth of understanding that maybe they did earlier in the movement. So I think that's something we all need to jell around—what does this community mean when we look at the longevity of this movement and how people integrate themselves into the farm and get to know the farm outside of pictures on Facebook. You can get all the Facebook likes in the world and they're not going to buy anything from you."

—Lauren Langworthy

Making CSA More Inclusive of All Communities

"So when I look at making the CSA movement more inclusive of people who aren't white with disposable income, there's two aspects. For one, there's what we do on our farm that is small scale. It's helping a few people get our shares at a discount and using a sliding fee scale. That's one thing.

"But that isn't addressing the bigger issue of why is this community so homogenous in general, and why is it people don't have access to food in large parts of our state, in our country? If we want people to be able to afford our food, we have two ways to approach it. We can either make our food cheaper, which we can't do, because that makes us poor. Or we can make sure other people have more money in their pockets.

"And so what I really come to is we can't address the big problem with the economic model of our farm. But if we want other people to follow our agricultural causes we need to get outside of our own head and say

these issues of healthcare and living wages are agricultural issues. We need to make other people's issues our issues. Just soil erosion is not the only farm issue. A \$15 minimum wage is a farm issue."

—Mike Jacobs

The Power of the CSA Movement

"I look around the room and I think 20 years ago, there were very few people and a very few CSA members. We're well over a hundred CSAs that deliver to Minneapolis-Saint Paul alone. I think the average membership is 100 people. You got 10,000 constituents right there, the ears of 10,000 people.

"And motion happens—I don't care how jaded you are about politics, motion will happen when a legislator gets a letter or a phone call from 10,000 people. I do think that we are ready; it's time. I think it's time to coalesce around a set of issues. I think we should come together in some way to pick some issues that we're going to take on. I think it's time to take some of the energy and the power we have with our members and do something. I think you'd be surprised at how much power that we have that we have not yet tapped as a group. What's

something we can tackle together that we can win as a group that we can agree on?"

—Mike Jacobs

• • •

"The local food movement really did take off 10 years ago. I think now it's at a kind of plateau point, and we'll see where it goes from here. It's not going away, because it's too real, it's too important and too many people feel it in their bones. They just know how necessary this is for a whole host of reasons."

—Steven McFadden, co-author, with Trauger Groh, of *Farms of Tomorrow: Communities Supporting Farms, Farms Supporting Communities*; McFadden keyed the 2015 Midwest CSA Conference

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Want to Join a CSA Farm in 2016?

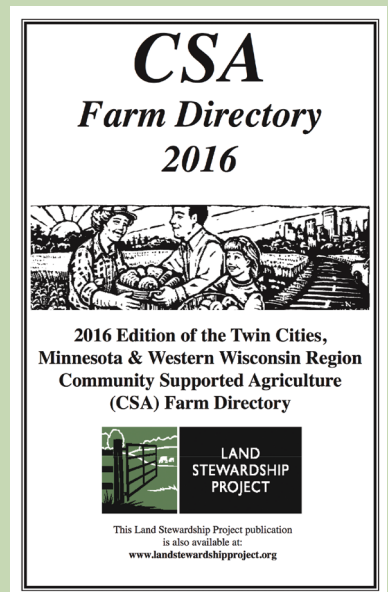
Spring is here and eaters in Minnesota and western Wisconsin who want to receive fresh, sustainably-produced food on a weekly basis during the 2016 growing season can reserve a share in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm today. The Land Stewardship Project's 2016 *Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory* provides detailed information on 73 farms that deliver to locations in the Twin Cities, Minnesota and western Wisconsin.

For a free copy, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/csa. Free paper copies are also available at the Land Stewardship Project's South Minneapolis office (612-722-6377), as well as the organization's offices in Montevideo (320-269-2105) and Lewiston (507-523-3366).

Community Supported Agriculture is an arrangement where consumers "know their farmer" by buying shares in a farming operation on an annual basis. In return, the farmers provide a weekly supply of fresh produce throughout the growing season (approximately June to October). Most of the farms focus exclusively on fresh produce, although a few also offer shares for other food items such as meat, eggs, dairy

products and cut flowers.

Subscriptions are often sold out by early spring, and eaters are encouraged to reserve their shares early. The details of the share arrangements such as how much and what kind of food is offered vary from farm-to-farm.



A Hub of Soil Health Activity

Early Adopters Attempt to Take Their Message to the Next Level

By Brian DeVore

It's an overcast August morning in northeastern Indiana, and in a massive machine shed well stocked with the tools of a modern row crop operation, some 60 farmers are being reminded that growing corn and soybeans is about more than iron, oil and chemistry. The reminder comes in the form of a question from Dan DeSutter, who raises corn and soybeans in the west-central part of the state.

"How many of you raise crops with no livestock?"

The majority of hands in the room shoot up.

"So you say," responds DeSutter. "We're all livestock farmers when it comes to soil biology."

He is a key component in an integrated approach to saturate Indiana farmers with a simple, and yet in some ways radical notion: your soil is alive and all those microbes need to be fed with living roots and biomass 365-days-a-year, or it will starve, producing fields that are too sick to resist wind and water erosion, prone to drought and eventually unable to produce decent yields even when receiving heavy applications of petroleum based fertilizers.

DeSutter is one of a dozen "Hub Farmers" around which one of the most innovative soil health initiatives in the country revolves. Over the past seven years, the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI) has spread the gospel throughout the Hoosier State that soil health is integral to the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture. The clearest evidence that CCSI's message is hitting home is the amount of Indiana farmland planted to soil-friendly cover crops in just a few short years. According to transect surveys, by fall 2015 around one million acres of land in the state was planted to small grains, brassicas or other

non-cash crops as a way to protect (and feed) the soil before and after the regular corn-soybean growing season. A decade ago, around 20,000 acres of Indiana's farmland was cover-cropped, and as recently as 2013, that figure was roughly half-a-million acres. One million acres represents about 8 percent of Indiana's total crop acres, and is more than double the percentage of cover crops found in any other Corn Belt state. That's exciting: cover crops have shown they allow fields to make

better use of precipitation and build organic matter, producing resilient soils that reduce dramatically the amount of fertilizer runoff and sediment sent into our water. Research is also starting to show that cover cropping can increase yields in corn and soybeans, particularly during years when excessively

2nd of 2 articles



NRCS soil health specialist Barry Fisher (left), shown with "Soil Hub" farmers Dan DeSutter and Michael Werling at a recent CCSI field day. "Presenting all the data in the world does no good unless a farmer you respect is sharing his own experience," says Fisher. (LSP Photo)

dry or wet weather predominates. Farmers utilizing no-till production also find cover crops reduce the "yield drag" that comes with converting from a tillage-based system.

Despite the multiple benefits produced by cover cropping, overall U.S. farmers have been reticent to adopt it on a widespread basis, citing everything from narrow planting windows and ignorance around how to handle the crops to lack of seed and equipment. One estimate is only around 2 percent to 3 percent of U.S. cropland is regularly cover cropped. That's a concern—although cover crops are only a single tool in the soil health

toolbox, they are considered a key "gateway practice" into a more holistic approach to managing soil biologically. Cover the land all year-round, and other ecologically-based arts will follow.

That's why Indiana's success with getting so many acres planted to continuous living cover in a relatively short amount of time is seen as a national model for replacing the philosophy of treating soil as simply a stand for holding up a plant, rather than as a living entity. As a sign of its potential to influence conservation on a national scale, Barry Fisher, who helped coordinate CCSI from its inception, was recently promoted to be the Central Region Leader for the Soil Health Division of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), where he coordinates a soil health technical exchange for conservationists, farmers and partners throughout the Corn Belt and Northern Plains.

The arrival of the CCSI model onto the national farm conservation stage offers an opportunity to examine how exactly the initiative has succeeded in getting so many farmers to take a key step away from simply "feeding the plant" and toward "feeding the soil." At the core of the initiative are the Hubs, which are basically multidisciplinary teams spread across the Hoosier State. These Hubs are made up of local and state govern-

ment conservationists, Purdue University extension educators, soil scientists, agronomists, and, just as importantly, representatives of agribusiness firms: implement and seed dealers, crop services providers and crop advisers. The last issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter* examined the role partnerships with agribusinesses play in helping farmers act on new information they are gleaming from the exploding field of soil health science. But the key members of these Soil Health Hubs are farmers like DeSutter. They serve as models of what soil health can look like on the ground, as well as a reality check that improving soil biology isn't about throwing some rye seed on the ground—it's ultimately an integrated approach that can drive how decision-making is done on a farm.

The Farmer Next Door

As a soil health specialist for the NRCS, Fisher is well aware of the importance of building soil biology. However, it's become evident in recent years that even when individual farmers acknowledge that fact, it's easy to get overwhelmed with all

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the information out there. Plus, much of the information on practices such as cover cropping is from parts of the country with different climate conditions, soils and crop mixes. North Dakota's Burleigh County, for example, has become the center of the soil health universe, with farmers like Gabe Brown becoming YouTube and lecture circuit stars talking about how they raise organic matter utilizing a combination of no-till, cover cropping and mob grazing. But the growing conditions in North Dakota are dramatically different from what's found in a state like Indiana.

"Presenting all the data in the world does no good unless a farmer you respect is sharing his own experience," says Fisher.

That's why when CCSI was created in 2009, one of the first things Fisher and the other organizers did was recruit farmers who had a particular interest in soil health and kept good records they were willing to share. These farmers had to agree to host field days and travel to events to talk about their own experiences. CCSI trained them in presentation skills and pays a stipend to cover transportation costs and other expenses. There are also "affiliate" farms that host field days, further helping tell the story.

The added component to the Hub concept is that member-farms are involved in an ongoing study where information is being collected from their operations on economics, fertilizer use, yields, and, of course, the health of their soil. Beyond that, CCSI is collecting information from affiliate farms, as well as research farms operated by Purdue University and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The Hub Farmers represent a wide range of acreage, methods and growing conditions. DeSutter farms 5,000 acres near the Illinois border, so he has many of the conditions found throughout the middle of the Corn Belt. Michael Werling, on the other hand, raises 320 acres of corn and soybeans, as well as oats for the local Amish market, on the opposite side of the state near Ohio, putting him in the eastern Corn Belt.

But no matter where they are located, the Hub Farmers share a similar passion for improving soil health. To stay connected they usually meet face-to-face for two days every year. The first day is just the farmers; the second soil experts and agency people are invited to join the discussion.

"Somebody starts a topic and it goes onto something else, then those ideas go out to the wider world and other farmers," says Werling. "I love that."

The Hub network can serve as a sounding

board for proposals that might seem a little "out there" for the conventional ag community, a not-ready-for-prime-time safe place for ideas generation, according to Werling. One topic Hub Farmers are discussing these days is the idea of seeding cover crops at the same time that nitrogen fertilizer is applied as a side dress during the growing season.

Werling, who has been using a combination of cover cropping and no-till (he calls it "never-till") so successfully the past several years that he has actually changed the soil type on some of his more marginal fields, acknowledges that he is more fixated on the biology beneath his feet than the average Indiana farmer. That's why he appreciates the chance to throw new ideas around amongst a group of people who are as committed to soil health as he is.

Like a support group?

"That's a good way to put it," Werling says with a laugh.

Agents of Change

In some ways, the Hub concept is similar to how farm innovations have been germinated and broadcast in farm country for generations. A famous 1941 study conducted in Greene County in central Iowa traced the adoption of hybrid seed corn during the 1930s. On the face of it, the adoption of this new technology appeared to be a relatively overnight success—in 1927 it was considered an experimental product not seen outside of college research plots; a decade later it was almost universally planted by Iowa farmers. But through extensive interviews, rural sociologists discovered that the majority of farmers did not accept the innovation immediately, but rather "...delayed acceptance for a considerable time after initial contact with innovation."

Awareness of an innovation does not always result in immediate adoption—many Iowa farmers who put off planting hybrid seed for years were first made aware of its existence at the same time as their early-adopting neighbors. Although the widespread acceptance of hybrid seed corn over a few year's time is impressive, it's striking that some farmers did not adopt it until a full 10 years after their innovative neighbors.

It turns out these early adopters served a key role: they were willing to jump in feet first and test this innovation on their own land almost as soon as they heard about it, and they shared the results with their neighbors in a kind of community laboratory setting. Seed salesman may have been "introductory mechanisms" for hybrid seed, but early adopting farmers were the "activating agents," according to the researchers.

Another important lesson from Greene County is that even after hybrid seed had

proven itself on a neighbor's farm, later adopters insisted on experimenting with it personally on just a few acres before making a full conversion.

CCSI's Hub Farmers are early adopters: people who are trying something new because of a love of innovation and personal goals they've set for their operations. But they don't necessarily have a vested interest in seeing their neighbors make a conversion.

"I talk about what I do as a farmer," says Werling of his presentations at workshops and field days. "I don't sell seed. I don't sell fertilizer. I don't work for the government. I think that's an advantage."

Werling's passion for soil health is palpable, and one can't help but catch his excitement when he talks about using crop rotations, no-till and cover cropping to make even his poorest fields productive.

But passion about the soil universe isn't enough, and he knows it. If the majority of Indiana's farmland is going to be planted in continuous living cover, CCSI needs to reach the bigger farmers out there. At one recent field day the farmers present represented control of some 300,000 acres, according to an impromptu survey. When the co-op agronomists and crop advisers attending were included, a total of 600,000 acres was represented.

"I don't know if they understand the soil health so much," says Werling of some of the larger farmers. "But there is a lot of excitement over cover crops."

Those bigger operators may not be watching YouTube videos on mycorrhizae fungi, but we all have to start somewhere, says Fisher. A farmer starts seeing that a cover cropped field requires less nitrogen or yields well in droughty conditions, and then maybe later takes other steps to avoid doing the kind of damage that impedes soil health. What CCSI is doing is not only supporting the early adopters out there, but providing an infrastructure for those later adopters who are being activated by those early examples and want to start experimenting on their own farms. Technical expertise, connections with agribusinesses that can provide the seeds, equipment and even planting services for cover cropping, on-farm monitoring, cost-share funds to get started on a small scale—these are all offered through the CCSI Hub system.

Ryan Stockwell, a senior agriculture program manager for the National Wildlife Federation who has been involved in soil health trainings in Indiana, says that larger acreage farmers showing up at field days is a sign that CCSI's "saturation coverage"—it puts on around 60 field days annually—is

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Continuous Living Cover

...Soil Hub, from page 25

starting to change the culture.

“What the Hub Farmers do by bombarding farmers from every angle is make it impossible for them to ignore the message,” he says. “The late to middle adopters are being reached.”

Unearthing Economics

Maybe those later adopters are being reached, but as Greene County’s hybrid corn example shows, awareness does not guarantee full adoption. Fisher says the majority of farmers agree a practice like cover cropping makes conservation sense, but it also has to pencil out financially. That’s why the Hub Farmers were chosen not only for innovative attitudes toward soil management, but also for their ability to track financials and willingness to talk about them.

Dan DeSutter, the west-central Indiana farmer, fits the role perfectly. A former financial analyst and commodity broker, he knows how to track trends, talk numbers and sniff out inefficiencies.

One day while standing in a trench fixing a tile drainage line, DeSutter noticed that roots from the rye cover crop a Purdue University researcher was studying on his family’s farm were boring at least four feet deep into the soil. Such “bio-drilling” was impressive, given that over the years the DeSutters had been putting a lot of effort into using a ripper to break up compaction.

“That was my aha moment,” recalls DeSutter. “We were spending all this money on ripping when for a few dollars per acre worth of seed, this plant would be doing it for us. You tell me what’s going to do it better: the plant or the seed?”

To DeSutter, that was the “physical” economic argument for building soil health. As he has gotten deeper into cover cropping and talked to other leaders in the field (he traveled to Australia recently as an Eisenhower Fellow to study soil health building techniques there) DeSutter has also been convinced about the “biological” benefits. Namely, the conventional system of growing corn or soybeans, which covers the land only a few months out of the year with living plants, is actually very inefficient at

utilizing all the free sunlight above ground and biological activity below ground.

DeSutter provided a mini-soil economics lesson recently while giving a presentation at a CCSI field day at a cropping operation in northeastern Indiana. During the presentation, he explained to the gathered farmers that over the past two decades he has doubled his organic matter to 4 percent on many of his acres. DeSutter then went into a simple calculation showing that the nitrogen he is gaining from this increased organic matter is basically a source of fertility he doesn’t have to purchase.

“That’s like a \$40 per acre annuity that keeps paying us,” he said at one point.

DeSutter also pointed out that 1 percent



Although cover-cropping is just one tool for building soil health, it is by far drawing the most attention at CCSI field days, like this one being held in northeastern Indiana last August. It’s hoped such a practice will serve as a “gateway” into a more holistic view of soil management. (LSP Photo)

of organic matter in the top 12 inches of the soil profile is worth an inch of water storage. “How much is a two-inch rain worth in August?” DeSutter asked the farmers rhetorically, following up with an answer in the form of more math: “Let’s say it’s worth 20 bushels extra per acre. With corn going for \$4, that’s \$80 per acre added value. That’s resilience.”

At another CCSI meeting, central Indiana farmer Jack Maloney talked about how since he started using cover cropping and no-till together, his inputs of nitrogen fertilizer have gone down, but yields have continued to increase. He finds cover crops provide fertility to his fields at a more consistent level throughout the growing season—he

compared it to a steady sine wave. Applying petroleum-based fertilizer, on the other hand, provides roller coaster-like peaks and valleys, which don’t always match when the crop needs nutrients most. This kind of talk gets a farmer’s attention, particularly at a time when corn and soybean prices are in a slump.

Such financial lessons may be directed at conventional farmers, but they may be packaged in a way that isn’t recognizable to producers who automatically equate the highest yields with the highest profits. One of the biggest differences between early adopters like Michael Werling and Dan DeSutter and the next wave of farmers who are interested in improving soil health is the role yields play in their decision making. Werling makes it clear that he does not make a direct connection between high yields and profitability—if he has few bushels per acre less come fall, that’s more than made up for by the fact that he spent less money on inputs as a result of good soil health. DeSutter takes a similar holistic view.

“I think there’s way too much focus on per acre yield, and not enough on profit,” he says during an interview. “As a finance guy I look at what do I need to do to make a profit in the long term, to gain a long-term advantage. It’s the gift that keeps on giving.”

However, the bushels-per-acre trap is a hard one to escape. During a series of tours last August, more than one farmer expressed the goal of getting record-breaking yields while using cover crops.

“We’ve got to get back to science, fellas, if we’re going to get to 300-bushel corn,” said an Indiana farmer at one point during a CCSI presentation.

New Lease on Life

It’s become evident in recent years that another critical demographic to reach with a soil health message is non-farming owners of agricultural lands. The fact is farmers are increasingly raising crops on land that’s not their own: in Indiana, 60 percent of farmland is rented, and more than half the crops in Minnesota and Iowa are produced on leased land. Farmers who rent land on a cash basis from year-to-year often don’t have an economic incentive to put in long-term practices that build soil health. But if

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non-farming landowners knew how much long-term value vibrant soil biology added to their property, they would be more than happy to seek out farmers who are utilizing good conservation, argues DeSutter.

The 2015 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll of 1,159 farmers found that just 22 percent believed landlords have a good understanding of soil health, and only 28 percent felt landlords know what farming practices can improve soil health.

DeSutter sees huge potential in this area. He says in some ways non-farming landlords are an easier audience for the soil health message, since they aren't always so invested financially and emotionally in doing things the same as they've always been done. Landowners have sought out DeSutter because of his reputation for taking care of the soil. If more landowners saw the value of building soil biology, a farmer who, for example, combines cover cropping and no-till would have a competitive edge as far as getting access to rental land.

"Why wouldn't landlords want a renter who isn't mining their soil?" DeSutter asks.

That's why Fisher was thrilled after one recent CCSI workshop when he took a look at the registration list and realized several landlords were present. "They will be part of this decision making as well," he says.

A Conservation Ethic

One thing that can get lost in all this talk about making soil health pay economically is that for many early adopters the main motivation is care of the land itself. The 2015 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll showed that "stewardship ethics" was the most influential factor in farmers' decisions to change how they manage their soil—48 percent said it was a strong or very strong influence, with economics, at 43 percent, a close second.

And the agro-environmental stakes have been raised. There has been a flood of water quality problems associated with runoff from farmland in recent years. The "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico has long been linked to excessive fertilizer leaving Midwestern farm fields. In addition, algal blooms in Lake Erie during 2014 contaminated the water for 400,000 people in the Toledo, Ohio, area, forcing a shutdown of the city's drinking water system for three days. The agriculture community is awaiting with trepidation the results of a case in which the Des Moines Waterworks has sued three northwestern Iowa counties, claiming drainage districts there act as conduits for nitrates to move from farm fields into the Raccoon River, a major source of water

for 500,000 residents in the city (that case is slated to be heard by a federal judge in August).

Michael Werling, the northeastern Indiana farmer, is acutely aware of the impact his farming activities have on the environment. He farms along the St. Mary's River, which is one of biggest contributors of phosphorus to Lake Erie.

"I've been to Toledo Bay," he says. "I'm often the only farmer on those tours. It makes you aware of the algal bloom."

During a series of CCSI field days last summer, the often contentious relationship between production agriculture and water quality hung over the proceedings like a dark cloud. Numerous speakers—whether they be farmers, scientists or soil experts—made the point that building soil health is one way to be proactive on the issue of protecting the environment and perhaps dodging the inevitable hammer of stricter regulation and/or lawsuits.

"I hear you have a million acres of cover crops in this state, and you did that without someone putting a gun to your head," said University of Maryland soil scientist Ray Weil as an opening to his presentation at a restaurant in southwestern Indiana.

Maybe Indiana farmers don't have a gun to their head, but many conceded they felt some sort of regulation of farming practices to protect water quality is inevitable. Watersheds that supply drinking water for the Indianapolis metro area are contaminated with agrichemicals such as the corn herbicide atrazine.

"They want someone to pay for it," says hydrologist Robert Barr, referring to Indianapolis officials. Not surprisingly, farmers are working with Barr to show how building soil health can reduce runoff.

An argument could be made for the short-term effectiveness of a top-down approach to cleaning up water when one considers the example of Maryland, where agricultural runoff has decimated fisheries in the Chesapeake Bay. It was determined several years ago that cover crops were the cheapest, most efficient way to capture nutrients before they made it to the water. So state officials there instituted a "Flush Tax"—basically a fee all residents hooked up to public water works systems pay. Revenue from that tax is used to pay farmers outright to plant cover crops, usually in the form of a single species such as rye. Maryland farmers can receive as much as \$90 per acre to plant a cover crop, with other economic incentives added on for planting it earlier, etc. Maryland farmers have an added incentive to plant cover crops because the state requires nutrient management plans for any producer who generates more than \$2,500 in annual sales.

The result? Around half of Maryland's one millions acres of cropland is now regularly cover-cropped and nutrient runoff has been reduced. On the face of it, the program has been a resounding success.

But Weil, an internationally known soil ecologist who has worked with farmers in numerous states, is concerned that most Maryland farmers are narrowly focused on the minimum they can do to adhere to regulations and ways they can qualify for cover crop payments. He prefers what he calls the "rock star farmer" model, where leaders in soil health are driving innovation within their communities.

"The conversation is different in my state, which I think is sad," the scientist says. "At farmer meetings in Maryland, farmers talk about how they can qualify for higher payments—they don't talk about how they can improve their systems and build soil health."

When such a reductionist view boils soil health down to planting a minimum amount of a single cover crop, it becomes easy to drop that practice once it doesn't pay or it otherwise becomes too big a hassle. The key is for soil health to become the driver of all other farming decisions, rather than one side effect of a few isolated practices.

For example, DeSutter has added wheat to his corn-soybean rotation. The small grain long ago fell out of favor in much of the Corn Belt, but since it's harvested earlier than row crops, having it in the rotation gives DeSutter an opportunity to get cover crops planted earlier, providing a jumpstart on winter. Building soil health has to be put on the same level as other farming practices if it's going to weather mercurial markets, shifts in farm policy or the desire to return to old habits, according to DeSutter.

"It's all about priorities." □

Give it a Listen

Three recent episodes of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast (www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast) feature the voices of people involved with Indiana's Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI):

- **Episode 173:** Soil health specialist Barry Fisher talks about the team approach that anchors CCSI.

- **Episode 174:** Soil scientist Ray Weil discusses why Indiana's "bottom up" approach to soil health is preferable to the "top down" strategy being used in his home state of Maryland.

- **Episode 175:** Indiana farmer Gordon Smiley describes his experience with cover cropping and why he's so excited about the latest science related to soil health.



Woman-Powered Farm Manual for a Self-Sufficient Lifestyle from Homestead to Field

By Audrey Levatino

2015; 344 pages

W.W. Norton & Company

www.wwnorton.com

Reviewed by Betsy Goodman

Eighty pages into her book, *Woman-Powered Farm, Manual for a Self-Sufficient Lifestyle from Homestead to Field*, Audrey Levatino cites a *New York Times* article on Little League Baseball phenom Mo'ne Davis that takes on the derogatory term “throwing like a girl.” The writer references the work of philosopher Iris Marion Young, who explains that the source of the weak throw is the way a woman “rarely uses the whole arm, the whole body, or the extended space around the body that is necessary to execute the throw.” It seems women are more apt to concentrate their efforts on those parts of the body most immediately connected to the task. They do not “bring to the task the power of the shoulder, which is necessary for its efficient performance.”

Although Levatino includes the reference in her discussion of body mechanics to encourage care for the body and prevention of injury, she also recommends using the passage as motivation. By that point, she has established that women can and do power farms, and her theme holds to the last page of *Woman-Powered Farm*. Levatino “farms like a girl,” as she defines it. In other words, she recruits all the parts of her body needed to execute the physical work of farming, as well as the intellectual curiosity, openness and rigor that have allowed her farm business to succeed.

Audrey Levatino and her husband, Michael, bought their 23-acre farm in Virginia 12 years ago, moving from Oakland, Cal., to the country, where she could pursue her love of gardening. Ultimately, Levatino quit her teaching job to farm full time, growing cut flowers that she sells at a farmers' market, to restaurants and to customers for special events. *Woman-Powered Farm* is the book she would like to have been able to read when she started farming.

The author breaks down barriers and helps readers dismiss any summary statement that women are inherently unable to run a farm. Her book encourages women farmers—active and prospective—not to accept limitations set on them and gives them the tools, knowledge and models to gain experience and confidence. These models are provided in the form of stories and photos featuring a wide diversity of female-led farm operations. In fact, Levatino's step-by-step instructions are demonstrated by these women. In Levatino's view, women “approach farming differently than men do, both physically and emotionally.” Writing from her perspective allows her to address issues that are unique to women. Given the increasing number of women farmers, her book is ripe to reach a rapidly growing, eager and appreciative audience.

Woman-Powered Farm is a comprehensive work that covers everything from the big picture issues of why to farm, how to select a property and how to conduct the business, to the basic skills needed to operate a farm once you have one—from changing a chainsaw blade and setting a fencepost to disinfecting a well.

The author's motivation shows; her passion for living in the country, for farming, and for being true to her values are evident in each chapter and aspect of farming she describes. Levatino clearly enjoys running tractors, raising animals, growing flowers in raised beds and building a loyal customer base with thoughtful attention to what makes her products desirable and keeps her buyers happy. She also is honest about the hazards and challenges she has faced: falling overboard while attempting to clear a pump in a frigid pond, rescuing

an escaped llama, and toiling daily to keep equipment, animals, plants and structures healthy and operative.

Levatino's scope is appropriately broad: her chapters cover the history of women in farming as well as the business of farming, from finding a farm to selling its products. She also goes into the basics of a farm like tools and equipment, growing vegetables, raising animals, and maintaining physical

and spiritual health as an operator.

Chapters two and 10 address the many ways to learn about farming, both informal and formal, as is apparent from the titles: “Learning About Farming—Internships, Classes, Resources, Neighbors and Associations,” and “Farm Education and Farm Schooling.” Levatino's style is engaging and easy to read. She provides just enough explanation and personal narrative to give readers context and foundation.

Her straight-forwardness and willingness to share her failures as well as her successes make the work approachable and effective in portraying farming as achievable, if not always easy. Levatino's humility shows in her thoughts on where a novice will find the best help: “All the manuals in the world aren't as valuable as the knowledge living right next door.... Your neighbors are the resource to which you will inevitably turn. So, get to know them.”

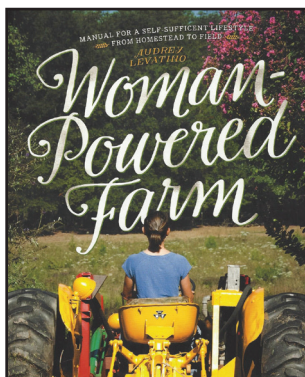
While the author makes a strong case for women's ability to do things men have done traditionally, she is not polemical. She points out in a good-spirited tone ways in which men have no inherent knowledge or superiority when it comes to farming. Technique is more important than sheer strength in performing some actions, and expertise is often found through reading. Her husband told her the “secret” to maintaining equipment: “Men are not born with some advanced knowledge of mechanics. When something breaks, they crack open the owner's manual and try to figure out what's wrong.”

The author does, however, recommend specific strategies for women, such as siting a garden in a way that it minimizes distances for walking, hauling tools and supplies, and purchasing tools designed for women.

Woman-Powered Farm is a useful resource at every level. It is a great reference book to consult before buying or leasing land or starting a farm business. It is also a reliable guide for the many hands-on activities it presents. It would be smart to own two copies, one to keep in the library and one to bring to the field. While meant for newcomers, it is informative for women with some experience. I learned from the book more and better practices for felling, limbing and bucking a tree and for splitting wood than I had been taught.

This book is worthy of updating and expanding as Levatino's experience continues to grow and her practices and resources evolve. It is bound to be a favorite. □

LSP member Betsy Goodman divides her time between her home in Portland, Ore., and her family farm in southeastern Minnesota, where she dabbles in powering a farm.



*Levatino helps
dismiss the myth that
women are inherently
unable to run a farm.*

Comeback Farms

Rejuvenating Soils, Pastures & Profits with Livestock Grazing Management

By Greg Judy
2008; 275 pages
Green Park Press
www.greenpasturesfarm.net

Reviewed by Robin Moore

If you are interested in high density grazing, diverse species herds, pasture improvement or holistic planning, Greg Judy's book, *Comeback Farms: Rejuvenating Soils, Pastures and Profits with Livestock Grazing Management*, provides an excellent starting point and a lot more than I expected from one slim book about a family and their farm. Judy's story proves entertaining, encouraging and thought provoking without ever being heavy-handed.

Judy has made a name for himself in the grazing community by launching a successful livestock production enterprise literally from scratch. He's known for taking marginal land in central Missouri that has been inundated by invasive species and otherwise allowed to become an eyesore—land that no one else wants to bother farming—and improving it utilizing high-density, short-duration, “mob” grazing.

Anyone who has heard Judy speak will recognize his easy, accessible writing style—it makes for a fast, painless reading. He clearly states his goals, his biases, his advantages and disadvantages and goes on to describe his operation, how it grew, the improvements he's seen in his pastures, and all the equipment hacks he's managed along the way. Judy describes choices he has made, including poor ones such as grazing too heavily in drought, haying depleted pasture and custom calving. He lists the consequences and uses that as a launching point for the better decisions he's learned to make and how those have worked well for him. He talks about the pros and cons of contract grazing, about risks taken and lost leases, and describes victory-after-victory over unproductive pasture and drought. The book contains good advice on landowner and general public communication and describes Judy's preferences on fencing reels, fence, and other equipment both purchased and homemade—all in a manner of suggestion rather than prescription.

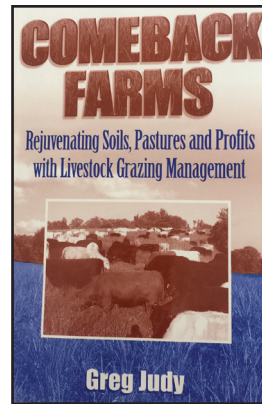
It's not just about cattle, which is what Judy started out with. He describes how he diversified his herds to include horses, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens, giving practical advice, anecdotal warnings, and a step-by-step description of integration into

his systems, and the results of that integration. Even guard dogs are covered—choosing, training and feeding them. There are descriptions of field days, café conversations, dealings with neighbors, marketing and watering systems. Just as importantly, wildlife and native species Judy has brought back to the various parcels he manages are given space in his book. It's clear this is all part of one big connected whole for the farmer.

This big picture view is no surprise, given that Judy clearly understands how critical Holistic Management has been for him. He outlines his introduction to it, his struggles with it, and ultimately, the benefits using holistic planning and holistic managed grazing have brought to himself, his family and his operation.

Finally, *Comeback Farms* is funny—more than once, the author throws in a yarn that marginally underlines the point he's making just because it's a good story. I found myself cracking up when I least expected it. He's a skilled storyteller, and many of the funny episodes are at Judy's expense—like the 2,500-pound rodeo bull he shot from his living room window before it charged his house.

Here is another snippet that had me laughing: “Never leave children unattended around hogs. The first thing a kid wants to do is pet one. This can be disaster. A child



holding out their fingers to pet one is an invitation to a hog to take off their fingers. The hog thinks that the kid is offering something to eat (fingers).”

Maybe it's my macabre humor, maybe it's because I grew up in Missouri, but the blunt humor rings throughout and made it a joy to read and learn from.

I really appreciated that Judy, rather than take a pedantic tone divulging information from on high, tells his own

story in his own easy style. He's a good writer, and even if you have no interest in cows, sheep, goats, pigs, guard dogs or mob grazing, it's a read that compares with James Herriot's tales of veterinary misadventures and Garrison Keillor's stories about small town charm. He's the kind of farmer you'd like to have as a neighbor. Whether you are looking for a grazing manual or a good belly laugh, this book will satisfy. □

Robin Moore coordinates the Chippewa 10% Project out of the Land Stewardship Project's western Minnesota office. On March 19, LSP co-sponsored a Greg Judy workshop in Morris, Minn. See page 32 for information on an April 22-23 LSP course on Holistic Management Grazing Planning.

Support LSP in Your Workplace

The Land Stewardship Project is a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, which is a coalition of 20 environmental organizations in Minnesota that offer 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, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For details, contact LSP's Mike McMahon (mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org) or Abby Liesch (aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org) at 612-722-6377.



LSP & the Annual Audit

Stewarding the Fiscal Resources of a Nonprofit Organization

By Amelia Shoptaugh

The Land Stewardship Project's fiscal year runs July 1 to June 30, and every year we are required by state law to file an audited financial statement. This means that when the fiscal year ends, the work is just beginning for the administrative staff.

We've worked on our audits with the CPA firm Mahoney Ulbrich Christiansen Russ P.A., for several years. They come

to our Twin Cities office for about a week every year to do their fieldwork, and we provide them with all the financial information and documents they need to compile the financial statement and the Internal Revenue Service form 990, which is the tax form we file as a nonprofit. In addition to the financial statement and 990, the auditors also help us prepare reports to send to Minnesota and Wisconsin so that LSP can be designated a charity in those states.

Timothy Kenney, LSP's director of finance, works with me for several weeks

leading up to the audit fieldwork, closing the fiscal year and preparing all the documentation the auditors need. After the fieldwork is completed, the auditors have several follow-up questions for me, Timothy and LSP executive director George Boody as the reports are put together. In 2015, the audit fieldwork took place at the end of September, and the reports were completed in time for LSP's board of directors to approve them at the beginning of December.

As you can see, the audit is a big part of the job of the director of finance, and Timothy came through his first one at LSP with no trouble. ☐

Amelia Shoptaugh, LSP's operations manager, can be reached at amelias@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.



LAND
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Membership Update

Brightening Corners Near & Far

How LSP Members Bring Light to Their Communities

Josh Journey-Heniz

My grandmother had an age-old Mennonite saying: "Brighten the corner where you are." The spirit of that adage was clear in its call for community members to do positive works within environments that are near and dear. When looking for ways to "brighten the corner," it is natural that many of us look for connectivity with others who share our view of what makes a corner bright.

The Land Stewardship Project has long provided this sort of connective vehicle for individuals to bring light to their communities, in togetherness. LSP members know, collectively, that urgent reforms within agriculture are needed if the future is going to be bright. It stands to reason that most of LSP's members reside in the farming regions most affected by the work of LSP, however,

I'm struck by how many of its members DON'T. What about those members who apparently don't have a direct connection to the communities LSP works in? How



Farmer Phil Specht and Mary Damm on land she purchased from the Dan Specht estate. "Now I own 120 acres of farmland in northeastern Iowa. So now the mission of LSP, and its work, is even more pertinent to my personal life," says Damm. (Photo courtesy of Practical Farmers of Iowa)

do they see LSP's corner as their own to illuminate through active and engaged membership? I decided to ask a few of these out-of-region members in order to find out.

The Importance of Being Asked

Every member I talked with recalled the same surprisingly simple reason for their becoming an LSP member: being asked. From there, the stories of immersion into LSP's mission differ greatly, regardless of where they live. Mary Damm, a prairie ecologist in Bloomington, Ind., has one such tale of owing

her LSP involvement to the influence of an already existing member. She used to spend her summers doing prairie research in Iowa and it was there that the conservation-minded Damm met Dan Specht, a pioneering sustainable farmer who, until he was killed in a farm accident in 2013, had served on LSP's board of directors and its Federal Farm Policy Steering Committee. He showed her how a farm could be a model for both growing food and providing habitat for native species.

"From Dan I really learned that it's possible to work land and produce food for people but also the land can have conservation value," Damm told me over the telephone recently. "My background was conservation and so I always thought

Membership, see page 31...

you needed to go to a pristine area to see native organisms, and that was where they lived. I thought farmland was farmland, and that was where food was made. Conservation was always really important to Dan. He worked with careful farm management to provide habitat for grassland birds. The last few years that he was alive, he was trying to keep the bobolinks around. The way that he and his brother Phil would [rotationally] graze kept pastures from being overgrazed. Dan really instilled in me the Aldo Leopold land ethic. There needs to be a working ecosystem in order for the birds to be there.”

It was then that she saw the work of the Land Stewardship Project as being vital to a larger picture of conservation. Damm became a member and maintained her relationship with LSP even after she moved on to her current position at the University of Indiana, keeping in touch with Dan and his efforts on the land. After the farm accident took Dan’s life, she decided to continue his legacy by eventually purchasing the property when it came up for auction. Damm says that before she owned farmland she appreciated the work LSP was doing as a consumer of food and a prairie ecologist. But now she feels even more deeply connected to the organization.

“Now I own 120 acres of farmland in northeastern Iowa. So now the mission of LSP, and its work, is even more pertinent to my personal life,” she says.

For Mary, the work of LSP hits, if not literally “close to home,” at least close to the land she is now the steward of.

A Connection to the Midwest

Another unifying theme among our geographically distributed members is that many have spent significant amounts of time in the upper Midwest and see LSP and its *Land Stewardship Letter* as an essential way of keeping up with the agricultural issues that affect where they used to live. Brianna Lloyd used to work and live in Minneapolis and has subsequently moved to Connecticut to study religion and ecology at Yale Divinity School. She appreciates that LSP keeps her rooted in the movement against the industrial-scale system of farming that threatens her former homeland. Lloyd also sees her membership as essential to bolstering her education.

“The LSP newsletter and website have been useful resources wherever my feet have been planted,” Lloyd told me. “The e-mail updates and calls for action have kept me abreast of policy issues. The notably grass-roots attention and work of LSP has helped

In Memory & in Honor...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gifts made to honor or remember loved ones, friends or special events:

In Honor of Sister Gladys Schmitz SSND

◆ Sister Kathleen Mary Kiemen

In Memory of Karen Perish

◆ Sister Kathleen Mary Kiemen

In Memory of Keith Groth

◆ Lizzy Haywood

In Memory of Dan Specht

◆ Mary Damm

In Memory of Dewey Ringham

◆ Kristen Ringham

In Memory of Chris McDonnell

◆ Carolyn McDonnell

In Memory of Curtis L. Larson

◆ Mark Larson

In Memory of Ron Desens

◆ Mindy Desens

In Memory of Tom Taylor

◆ Catherine Settanni

In Memory of Paul Holt

◆ Linda Holt

In Memory of Charles Traxler

◆ David Grams

In Memory of Gordon King

◆ Mike & Jennifer Rupprecht

In Memory of Gail Sells

◆ Don Sells

In Memory of Stephanie Henriksen

◆ Gwen & Mason Myers

In Honor of Friends & Clients at Field Guide Inc.

◆ Mary McCallum

In Honor of Sharing of the Heart

◆ Joan Wittman

In Honor of Anne Sawyer-Aitch

◆ Judith DeLaittre

In Memory of Joe Verkinderen

◆ Anne Archbold

In Memory of Cloe Klinkner

◆ Ingrid & Lowell Liedman

In Memory of Henry Rieck

◆ Ileen Rieck & Family

In Memory of Claude Patzner

◆ Joe & Donna Speltz

In Honor of Elspeth Cavert

◆ NAS Fund of the Mpls. Foundation

For details on donating to LSP in the name of someone, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org. Donations can be made online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate.

keep thought and conversations I’ve had around sustainable agriculture grounded. There seems to be a large gap between the study, or rhetoric, of sustainable agriculture and the practice or living reality of it. LSP often bridges that gap for me.”

She also appreciates that LSP creates structural change without being derailed by infighting. Lloyd is convinced that corporate, industrialized agriculture is unified in its motive and desire: to maximize profit. Conversely, she asserts, “...the counter-movement is often so much more divided in missions, visions and concerns. The priorities are so much more diverse. In any case, I see LSP as having its finger on the pulse of several aspects of the alternative movement, while articulating a clear vision of what it is working towards.”

Perhaps this is the way that LSP retains

so many members who at first glance have no connection to the region; by providing a model for unity against a correspondingly unified industrial scale model that if left unchecked would continue to extract wealth and other resources from our rural communities. LSP members share a desire to be at the vanguard of that struggle, and that means being a part of a community that is not always defined by geography. Regardless of where they reside, they feel ownership of the discussions around creating lasting change, and it is this common cause that makes their corner a little brighter. □

Josh Journey-Heinz, a major donor fundraiser for LSP, can be contacted at jjourney-heinz@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377 (see page 6 for more on Journey-Heinz).



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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **APRIL 16—Twin Cities Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Fair**, Seward Co-op Franklin Store, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: <http://seward.coop>, 612-338-2465 (see page 23 for information on *LSP's 2016 Edition of the Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Directory*)

→ **APRIL 17—LSP Workshop: Addressing Labor Issues on Your Farm**, Twin Cities area, 1 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Contact: Dori Eder, dori@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-578-4497 (page 15)

→ **APRIL 22—Earth Day Benefit Breakfast for the Land Stewardship Project**, 7 a.m.-11 a.m., Red Stag Supperclub, 509 1st Ave. NE, Minneapolis. Contact: Dylan Bradford Kesti, LSP, 612-722-6377, dylank@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **APRIL 22-23—LSP Holistic Management Grazing Planning Course with Ralph Tate**, Willmar, Minn. Contact: Robin Moore, LSP, 320-269-2105, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **JULY—LSP Twin Cities Summer Potluck Cookout**, LSP Minneapolis office (details to be announced), 5:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. Contact: Mike McMahon, LSP, 612-722-6377, mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **JULY 31—LSP Farm Dreams Class**, LSP Minneapolis office, 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Contact: Dori Eder, dori@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-578-4497 (page 13)

→ **AUG. 1—Early Bird Application Deadline for 2016-2017 LSP Farm Beginnings Course** (page 13)

→ **SEPT. 1—Final Application Deadline for 2016-2017 LSP Farm Beginnings Course** (page 13)

→ **OCT. 1—LSP Journey person Course deadline** (page 13)

LSP's Farm Beginnings Accepting Applications for 2016-2017

The Land Stewardship Project is now accepting applications for its 2016-2017 Farm Beginnings course. The early bird discount deadline is Aug. 1; Sept. 1 is the final deadline. Separate classes will convene in Northfield, which is near Minnesota's Twin Cities, and Glenwood in west-central Minnesota. See page 13 for details.

Earth Day Benefit Breakfast April 22 at Red Stag in NE Minneapolis

Red Stag Supperclub in Northeast Minneapolis (509 1st Ave. NE) will be hosting an Earth Day Benefit Breakfast for the Land Stewardship Project on Friday, April 22, from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m.

The event will feature sustainably-produced foods and short presentations on the Land Stewardship Project's work. Proceeds from the meals will be donated to LSP.

For details, contact LSP's Dylan Bradford Kesti at 612-722-6377 or dylank@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Volunteer for LSP

A big thanks goes out to the volunteers that help the Land Stewardship Project out in all aspects of our work. LSP 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. If you'd like to volunteer in one of our offices, contact:

• **Montevideo, Minn.**—Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105, tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org.

• **Lewiston, Minn.**—Karen Benson, 507-523-3366, karenb@landstewardshipproject.org.

• **Minneapolis, Minn.**—Megan Smith, 612-722-6377, megans@landstewardshipproject.org. □

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LIVE  WIRE

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* e-letter to get monthly updates from the Land Stewardship Project sent straight to your inbox. See www.landstewardshipproject.org/ sign up for details. □

Check Upcoming Events at www.landstewardshipproject.org for the latest workshops, classes, field days and deadlines.