

The Land Stewardship

Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Volume 29

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Number 2, 2011



In search of new opportunities for the next generation of farmers. (see pages 10, 16, 18, 20, 22)



- Making Soil Conservation History*—
- Take the CSA Member Survey*—
- Local Control Remains Strong*—
- Prairie Strips & Biodiversity*—
- 2011-2012 Farm Beginnings Class*—
- Extending the Local Foods Season*—
- Urban Ag & Urban Edge Ag*—
- Crow Planet, Hopeful Earth, Watershed Year*—



Vol. 29—Number 2, 2011

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Learning from history

Our nation's soil must not fall victim to shortsighted cost-cutting

EDITOR'S NOTE: This spring and summer, as Congress and the Obama Administration debated government budgets for the next two years, farm conservation programs were on the chopping block. The fiscal year 2011 budget cuts USDA conservation by more than \$500 million; the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) alone faces a \$39 million cut under the plan. For fiscal year 2012, President Obama's proposed budget slashes ag conservation by \$1 billion, and CSP is one of the programs set to take a severe hit. The Land Stewardship Project, working with allies such as the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, has been pressing decision makers in Washington to consider the long-term damage such cuts would impose on the landscape. Below is a letter written this spring by LSP's Mark Schultz to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

By Mark Schultz

As our nation slowly recovers from one of the worst economic crises in decades, policymakers are challenged to achieve spending reductions while not undermining American jobs and our economy, nor the natural resources on which the current and future health and well-being of our nation rests. It is clear that agriculture will be deeply affected by cuts, as will many other areas of the federal budget.

The Land Stewardship Project has serious concerns about the approach to budgeting outside of the federal Farm Bill. Agricultural funding and policy is best achieved in the reauthorization framework of the Farm Bill, which provides appropriate consideration as well as public input during deliberations.

In the interim, if agriculture is required to make additional cuts, then all agriculture spending must be on the table. This has not been the case as of late, with conservation and innovative family farm programs bearing the biggest burden, while other more costly and less productive farm program entitlements remain largely untouched.

Leadership during another turbulent time, the Great Depression, provides insight on how our nation can overcome hardships and

emerge stronger and more resilient.

In the depths of the Great Depression, when soil erosion was declared a national menace and skies blackened with the Dust Bowl, the president and agriculture secretary did not say to the nation, "Things are really bad. We've got to cut back. I know soil erosion is bad, but we can't do anything about it. We need to do less."

No. They said that we are a great nation,



Clearly agriculture has evolved and changed since the 1930s, but even relatively flat fields are vulnerable to erosion these days. Two photographs taken this spring show how water-caused rill erosion in southeast Minnesota (left) and wind erosion in western Minnesota are doing major damage to farmland. (LSP photos)

and that our health and our strength depend on the soil, on our productive land, on our farmers and our conservationists. In order to safeguard and enhance our soil in times of such great stress and troubles, that administration worked closely with Congress to establish the Soil Conservation Service.

Together, our political leadership did not permit the politics and financial troubles of the day to destroy the basis of our nation and our nation's security. They said that our nation would invest in conservation, because it is the right thing to do, the smart thing to do, and the wise thing to do.

And history has proven them right. Since that time farmers, ranchers and conservationists, working with the Soil Conservation

Service, helped make American agriculture the most productive in the world.

Clearly agriculture has evolved and changed since the 1930s, yet the strain on our landscape and natural resources continues and may be greater than ever. Strong commodity prices, competing land uses and increased acres in production, as well as more intense use of existing acres, have all put greater stress on our farmland.

In response, investments in working lands conservation — methods that allow farmers and ranchers to not only produce agricultural products but also to enrich the health of our natural resources and long-term productivity of farmland through effective conservation farming systems and practices — have become a conservation priority.

Budgetary efforts to undermine effective programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, as well as the Conservation Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program, are shortsighted and misguided. While these programs can be enhanced to become more efficient and effective, that debate should be conducted in the context of the 2012 Farm Bill.

The cost of further cuts to these programs will have long-term impacts. It will seriously undercut farmers' and ranchers' ability to achieve conservation while also producing food and fiber. The loss will not

be temporary or merely political, but will damage our land, our vision as a nation, our security, and our long-term well-being.

The Land Stewardship Project is urging our leaders in Washington to make conservation a priority

at this moment in our history. Any pulling away from the long-term stewardship of our farmlands must be considered not in the inaccessible reaches of budget deals, but in the context of public policy debate. And any cuts that must be made in the short-term must not disproportionately fall on conservation, but must be borne fairly across agricultural programs. □

Mark Schultz is LSP's Associate Director and Director of Policy and Organizing. He also is the Director of LSP Programs. Schultz can be reached at 612-722-6377 or marks@landstewardshipproject.org.

Commentary !?!?!?

'The most abused chemical we've ever had in ag.' *A plant pathologist sounds the alarm about Roundup herbicide*

During the past several years, Monsanto's Roundup herbicide has become one of the most popular weed killers in the world. Most of that success is due to the fact that Monsanto has genetically engineered crops such as corn and soybeans that resist being killed by Roundup. That means when "Roundup Ready" crop fields are sprayed with the herbicide, the crops survive, but weeds die.

One argument in favor of Roundup is that it's safer for the environment than many other types of herbicides. That's because Roundup's main component is glyphosate, a broad-spectrum herbicide that supposedly dissipates relatively quickly in the environment, reducing its ability to cause long-term problems.

But Don Huber has thrown a monkey wrench into this mindset. Huber, a Purdue University emeritus professor of plant pathology, has recently been highlighting glyphosate's ability to make the growing environment for crops an unhealthy one. In a summary paper of the latest research in this area, Huber documents how glyphosate has significantly changed nutrient availability and plant efficiency. Huber and other researchers are concerned that the soil's very ability to produce healthy crops in the long term is being compromised by years of glyphosate use. Increasing the use of glyphosate via the approval of more "Roundup Ready" crops like alfalfa should be treated with great caution, say the scientists.

On March 24, 2011, Huber spoke before a group of farmers and scientists at a forum in Creighton, Neb. Land Stewardship Project staff members Richard Ness and Julia Ahlers Ness recorded the professor's presentation.

Here are some excerpts from Huber's talk:

Creating superweeds

"What we're doing with resistance is we are creating superweeds that are resistant to these soil-borne pathogens. Then as we increase our rate of glyphosate four times or 10 times as some of those [farmers] are using in order to kill those [weeds], what we're doing is increasing the virulence of the pathogens.... What we've been seeing the last 15 or 18 years is a lot of pathogens we thought we had very effectively controlled through our management practices all

Listen to & view Huber's presentation

- To listen to LSP's podcast featuring Huber's presentation, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=3. It's episodes 98-102.

- The plant pathologist's PowerPoint presentation is available as a pdf document on LSP's website: www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/UnderstandGlyphosate.pdf.

- LSP has available DVD copies of Huber's presentation for \$15, plus \$3 for shipping and handling. To order a copy, contact LSP's offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377).

of a sudden are out of control.

"So we're changing the environment, we're increasing the virulence of the pathogen and we're reducing the resistance of the plant when we hammer with one compound, one chemistry."

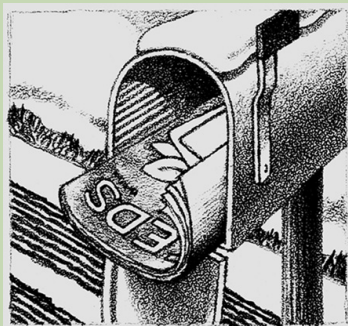
Wasting a tool

"[Glyphosate] has been a very powerful tool for us. But it's the most abused chemical we've ever had in agriculture. We're losing a tool, because we've abused it."

Approving more Roundup Ready crops for planting?

"All I'm saying is we need to have research done before we jump off the cliff, because some of these things are irreversible, or hard to reverse."

What's on your mind?



The danger of worshipping technology

"Agriculture is the most critical infrastructure for a productive society.... Quite often we can get enamored with the bells and whistles and the technology and we forget our real purpose." □

Letters

Play strikes a chord

I listened to the *Ear to the Ground* podcast featuring the performance of the play *Look Who's Knockin'* (No. 1, 2011, *Land Stewardship Letter*, pages 8-9).

It really struck a cord with me, listening to Gerald talk down the idea of renting out to a young couple and nay-saying Nettie's ideas. I live in Japan now, with my family, but before we came here I was scrambling to put together a farm business. I got the ag degree, plenty of farm jobs, and endorsements from the farmers I worked for, even a business plan — but I couldn't find a farmer who wanted to rent me out their old falling down barn.

Even when I could locate a place, old farmers would rather keep old junk in the barn and let it fall down than rent it out. Having worked for a bunch of 'em, I wasn't totally blind-sided. But still, it's surprising how psychology plays such a role in decision-making — even for "common sense" folk like farmers.

Anyway, I'm biding my time and making connections here with farmers as much as possible, but I wanted to let you know a play is a great way to get a message across.

— Matt Verson
Japan

To listen to the play, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html. It's episodes 94 and 95.

Got an opinion? Comments? Criticisms?

We like to print letters, commentaries, essays, poems, photos and illustrations related to issues we cover.

We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Commentaries and letters published in the *Land Stewardship Letter* do not necessarily represent the views of the Land Stewardship Project.

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Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

→ Myth: Soil erosion is at sustainable levels.

→ Fact:

There is no doubt soil erosion rates have dropped dramatically since the “Dirty Thirties,” when soil from the nation’s midsection

literally reached the nation’s capitol during unprecedented windstorms. Conservation tillage, land retirement programs like the Conservation Reserve Program and a greater awareness of the vulnerability of our soil resources have helped cut erosion in the Midwest and elsewhere. Day-to-day erosion on the typical crop farm is nowhere near what it was during the days of the moldboard plow, and farmers deserve a huge pat on the back for that.

The most recent National Resources Inventory (NRI) has found that between 1982 and 2007, erosion dropped 43 percent nationally. According to the NRI, which is the federal government’s assessment of how much soil is being washed and blown off our farmland, between 1982 and 2007, average water-caused erosion on cropland dropped from 4 tons per acre per year to 2.7 tons; annual wind erosion rates fell from 3.3 tons per acre to 2.1 tons.

The USDA says we are losing on average only 3.9 tons per acre annually across the Corn Belt. While any soil loss is troubling, when you can get it down to around the 5 tons per acre range, many scientists are confident that’s a rate we can tolerate agronomically and environmentally since it can be replaced over time through the build-up of new material.

But this spring a significant study was released showing Iowa farms are losing soil up to 12 times faster than previously thought. Such a loss is well beyond the rate that we can replace through the development of new soil over time. In other words, it’s not sustainable.

“In a variety of locations, we’re losing topsoil considerably faster—10 to as much as 50 times faster—than it’s forming,” Iowa State University agronomy professor Richard Cruse told the *New York Times* after the report was released.

Although this particular study focuses

on Iowa, soil experts suspect similar research in other parts of the Midwest would turn up equally extreme erosion levels.

Cruse directs the Iowa Daily Erosion Project, which is studying soil loss with an unprecedented degree of precision. It’s the Project’s research that forms the basis for the report, which was put together by the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

Why do the Erosion Project and NRI es-



timates diverge so much? The USDA’s NRI data is based on sample sites from around the country and takes into account such factors as long-term climate data, inherent soil and site characteristics, and cropping and management practices. Computer models are used to develop broad-brush estimates.

That’s a good start. But the Iowa Daily Erosion Project research provides a truer picture because it uses detailed information on rainfall and field conditions to estimate soil loss after each storm event in nearly all of Iowa’s

townships. In addition, EWG used information gathered from aerial photographs and interviews with experts to document the formation of post-storm field gullies.

Paying close attention to the erosion caused by storm events is key. While conservation measures like minimum tillage, terraces and contour farming do a good job of controlling the run-of-the-mill erosion that is caused by raising row crops in the Midwest, such techniques can’t handle major storm events that scour tons of soil in a matter of minutes (see page 14).

A 1997 paper published in the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* pointed out that in fact such storm bursts are the major cause of soil erosion. The authors of that paper went on to argue that land management systems must be adjusted to deal with such erosion events. That doesn’t mean that a significant amount of soil isn’t lost on a routine basis. But big storm events can accelerate things considerably, particularly if they come at just the wrong time—when corn and soybean plants are just starting the growing season, for example.

Our climate is changing and intense storms are more the norm, which means investing in farm conservation should be a bigger priority than ever.

But while the government paid Corn Belt farmers \$51.2 billion in subsidies to push production of row crops like corn between 1997 and 2009, only \$7 billion went for implementing conservation practices during that period. Ironically, as the commentary on page 3 points out, government spending on soil conservation is more threatened than ever.

→ More information:

- To view the EWG’s *Losing Ground* report on soil loss in Iowa, including video footage showing extreme erosion, see www.ewg.org/losingground.

- The latest National Resources Inventory report is at www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI.



LAND
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LSP News

LSP cookout-celebration features prairies, worker rights & ethnic food

Prairie restoration, the newest Roundup herbicide research, prairie restoration on a conservation farm and a Mexican cooking demonstration were some of this year's highlights at the Land Stewardship Project's 2011 summer gathering on the Dahl family farm July 10 near the southeast Minnesota community of St. Charles. Over 100 LSP members and friends participated in the event, which included a hog roast and an "All American-All Ethnic" potluck meal. Pages 6-7 feature a few photos from the event. □

RIGHT: The cookout featured an ethnic-themed potluck, a roasted hog from LSP members Eric and Lisa Klein, refreshments from Organic Valley Co-op and ice cream from Castle Rock Creamery. Linda Dahl's family hosted the event in front of their farm's barn. (*LSP photo*)



BELOW: (*l to r*) Blanca Rojas, Carolina Gasca and Carmen Hernandez put on a demonstration on how to prepare chicken mole and tacos de rey ("King's Tacos"). The chicken and beef came from the farm of LSP members Mike and Jennifer Rupprecht. (*LSP photo*)



RIGHT: Mark Delehanty, an attorney who specializes in worker rights for new immigrants and migrant workers, talked about some of the abuses agricultural workers are exposed to in southern Minnesota. (*LSP photo*)



Ever been a CSA member? Take LSP's survey

Are you a current or former member of a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm? The Land Stewardship Project wants to hear from you.

LSP is exploring what can be done to strengthen the role of CSA farms as viable businesses and as a transformative model for changing our food and farming system.

To complete a short online survey on your CSA membership experience, see www.landstewardshipproject.org.

RIGHT: Linda Dahl explained how her family's farm is raising hay and oats for her neighbors, Arlene and LaVerne Nelson, who produce certified organic milk. The Dahls have also established native prairie and are maintaining a stand of self-propagating white pines. Dahl said that having the Nelsons raise small grains, hay and cover crops on her hilly acres is important to her family's goals of protecting the land. "After the snow melts, everything's green," she said.

BELOW: The program was presented in three languages. LSP board member and dairy farmer Bonnie Haugen (right) spoke English, Ernesto Bustos spoke Spanish and Cheng Xiong spoke Hmong. (LSP photo)



ABOVE: Northeast Iowa farmer Dan Specht gave a presentation on the problems associated with the long-term use of the Monsanto herbicide Roundup. Specht is an LSP board member and former member of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee. See page 4 for more on the Roundup controversy. (LSP photo)

A look at the big picture

The Land Stewardship Project sponsored three Holistic Management classes this summer in the western Minnesota community of Sunburg.

During the classes, which were led by certified Holistic Management instructors Roland Kroos and Joshua Dukart, topics such as grazing, biological monitoring and land planning were covered.

For more information on Holistic Management classes LSP may be offering in the future, contact Richard Ness at 320-269-2105 or rness@landstewardshipproject.org. More information on Holistic Management is at www.holisticmanagement.org. (photo by Richard Ness)





LAND
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LSP News

Hutchins, Cook, Pierce Colombo & Rupprecht serve LSP internships

Hannah Hutchins, Grant Cook, Peter Pierce, Barrett Colombo and Johanna Rupprecht are serving internships with the Land Stewardship Project this summer.

Hutchins, who is from Mankato, Minn., will soon begin her senior year at Bemidji State University, where she is majoring in environmental studies, with an emphasis in policy and planning. Her minor is in wetlands ecology and applied public policy. Hutchins has worked as a farm hand, on a seed corn summer crew and in the Sustainability Office of Bemidji State.



Hannah Hutchins

She has also volunteered for LSP and Habitat for Humanity, among other organizations.

While at LSP, Hutchins organized the Twin Cities summer potluck/celebration on July 28. She is also writing a Conservation Stewardship Program (see page 12) profile for LSP's Policy and Organizing program.

A native of Duluth, Minn., **Cook** is majoring in economics and environmental studies, with a minor in Hispanic studies, at Saint John's University. He has worked at the Outdoor Leadership Center and at Common Ground Community Supported Agriculture Garden. Cook also worked in Guatemala on a reforestation project.

While interning at LSP, he is researching matched savings approaches for beginning farmers (see page 18) and building national organizational support for federal beginning farmer initiatives that LSP is developing. Cook is also helping organize a farm tour that focuses on beginning farmer policy needs.

Pierce is serving a geographic information system (GIS) internship with LSP this summer. Pierce, a native of Edina, Minn.,

is a student at Colgate University, where he is studying geography and economics, with an additional focus in geology. He has worked at Habitat for Humanity and in the AmeriCorps Service Program, and served as a camp counselor and youth minister.



Peter Pierce

During his LSP internship, Pierce is helping the Chippewa 10% Project (see page 15) map and analyze regions in western Minnesota suitable for reintroducing perennial farming systems.

Colombo has a bachelor's degree in global studies from the University of Minnesota. He is currently pursuing a master's of public policy degree at the U of M's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, where he is focusing on sustainable development. Colombo and his wife, Aimee Witteman, are graduates of LSP's Farm Beginnings program, and he has worked as a research fellow for the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest. Colombo has also worked as a conservation planning intern for Defenders of Wildlife and a high school teacher.



Barrett Colombo

While at LSP, Colombo is organizing meetings for stakeholders that are helping farmers add diversity to their operations in agricultural watersheds.

This spring, **Rupprecht** received a master's degree in library and information science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She also holds a bachelor's degree in English from Saint Olaf College, where she was a National Merit Scholar.

Rupprecht, a native of Lewiston, Minn., has worked on Earth-Be-Glad Farm, her family's crop and livestock operation, as well as at numerous libraries. In 2008, she coordinated a water quality testing initiative while serving as an LSP intern in southeast Minnesota.



Johanna Rupprecht

While at LSP this summer, Rupprecht is working with the organization's Community Based Food Systems Program in western Minnesota's Big Stone County (see page 24). □

Claassen leaves LSP

Sarah Claassen has left the Land Stewardship Project to return to her native Kansas.



Sarah Claassen

Since 2009, Claassen has worked as an organizer with LSP's Community Based Food Systems program. Before that, she was a Policy and Organizing intern.

Claassen focused on developing LSP's urban agriculture initiatives, and was instrumental in helping organize the Southside Star Community Garden. She also built key relationships with other Twin Cities organizations working on urban food security issues, particularly in communities of color.

Most recently, Claassen had helped organize citizens who pushed for key initiatives in the recently passed Minneapolis Urban Agriculture Policy Plan (see No. 1, 2011 LSL, page 23). □

Cioffi begins urban ag organizing work

Anna Cioffi began work this summer as an organizer in LSP's Community Based Food Systems program.

Previously, Cioffi had been an LSP Policy program organizer. In that position, she worked on state and federal policy issues, including beginning farmer support, fair access to livestock markets and local democracy. In her new position, Cioffi will be working on urban food issues in the Twin Cities (see page 22). □



Anna Cioffi

Opportunities

Resources

LSP fact sheets

Land Stewardship Project's updated fact sheets are available at www.landstewardship-project.org/resources-factsheets.html. For paper copies, call Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377. □



LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Land Stewardship Project 2009-2010 Financial Update

Operating Revenue & Temporarily Restricted Net Assets Raised for Future Fiscal Years

Religious Grants	5%	\$82,500
Foundations & Corporations	51%	\$797,699
Government Grants	17%	\$271,670
Membership & Contributions	21%	\$325,021
Fees & Sales	5%	\$83,098
Other	1%	\$18,341
Total	100%	\$1,578,329

Statement of Financial Position

As of June 30, 2010

Assets

Cash & Investments.....	\$1,108,166
Board Restricted Long Term Reserve.....	\$151,446
Property & Equipment.....	\$90,541
Grants Receivable.....	\$433,809
Other.....	\$34,616
Total Assets.....	\$1,818,578

Liabilities & Net Assets

Liabilities.....	\$123,394
Net Assets:	
Board-Controlled Long Term & Short Term Reserves.....	\$763,617
Unrestricted.....	\$151,446
Temporarily Restricted Grants.....	\$780,121

Total Liabilities & Net Assets.....\$1,818,578

Expenses by Operational Area

Fiscal Year 2009-2010

Organizing/Policy	20%	\$307,340
Food Systems	23%	\$347,194
Farm Beginnings	20%	\$305,744
Communications	5%	\$78,617
Membership/Outreach	11%	\$169,334
Fundraising	6%	\$87,425
General Administration	12%	\$182,261
Other	3%	\$49,924
Total	100%	\$1,527,839

- From audited statements based on generally accepted accounting principles for nonprofits, which book temporarily restricted net assets raised for future use in the year granted.

- Programs include payments for joint project-based work to other collaborating nonprofit, university or government partners.

- Additional program expenses of \$21,954, including events, scholarships and livestock loans, are no longer included in the above expenses because they are now netted against revenue or assets, per audit rules.

- Liabilities & Net Assets includes a previous gift of real estate sold to family farmers in a way that protects the land for farming and open space.

- Mahoney Ulbrich Christiansen and Russ, P.A. expressed an unqualified opinion on the financial statements of the Land Stewardship Project.

A nationwide call for new farmers

LSP takes a national lead on BFRDP

By Adam Warthesen

In mid-June, Nolan Lenzen traveled from his central Minnesota dairy farm to Washington, D.C., with an important message: federal support of beginning farmer initiatives can help create jobs and

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition from 12 states, was the culmination of a busy spring in which LSP took a national lead in advancing public policy that supports the next generation of farmers. The timing for such activity is critical, as policymakers in Washington, D.C. start discussions about what the next

Farm Bill will look like. Tentatively scheduled for passage in 2012, the new Farm Bill has the potential to continue and strengthen the precedent-setting beginning farmer initiatives that were created in the 2008 Farm Bill.

In particular, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) was launched in that Farm Bill. This is a competitive grants initiative that assists community-based organizations working with beginning farmers to address local approaches to starting and succeeding in agriculture. Since it was launched in 2009, demand for BFRDP has far outstripped the resources available, with over 100 groups applying for grants annually.

As a recent report (*see sidebar on page 11*) developed by LSP shows, BFRDP still has some kinks to work out, but in general is headed in the right direction of providing that critical community foundation needed to launch the next generation of family farmers.

BFRDP across the country

In May, I traveled to Texas to see firsthand how one community-based organization, the Texas-Mexico Border Coalition, is assisting beginning farmers. The coalition is working in the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas, where it is partnered with the University of Texas-Pan American, a college in Edinburg that is a BFRDP grantee. The Texas-Mexico Border Coalition is conducting 15 to 20

meetings with predominantly Latino beginning farmers to recruit them for a training program focused on building their ability to supply local farmers' markets. The Coalition and the University are also providing some technical assistance to new producers as part of the BFRDP work.

Later that month, I traveled to Maine with Amy Bacigalupo, who directs LSP's Farm Beginnings program. While there, we met with the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), an impressive sustainable agricultural organiza-

On the Web

- *Sound Investments to Ensure the Next Generation of Beginning Farmers* is background material used during the beginning farmer fly-in to Washington, D.C., on June 14-16, 2011. It can be found at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/BFRDPJune2011.pdf

- To read and listen to media coverage of the fly-in, see the **LSP in the News** section at www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-itn.html.

- To read a Farm Beginnings profile of Nolan and Vanessa Lenzen, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/profiles/lenzen.html. An LSP podcast featuring the Lenzens is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?s=burn-out.



During a June fly-in to Washington, D.C., beginning farmers from 12 states conducted over 50 meetings with agriculture policymakers and USDA officials. (photo by Adam Warthesen)

vibrant rural economies. Lenzen, who is a Land Stewardship Project member, was one of a dozen beginning farmers from across the country who met with members of Congress and USDA officials to discuss how the upcoming 2012 Farm Bill must continue sound investments to ensure the next generation of beginning farmers.

This fly-in, which was coordinated by LSP's Policy and Organizing program and involved member-groups of the National

tion with a major presence in the Northeast.

MOFGA was formed in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. MOFGA applied for a BFRDP grant this past year and is in a position to be a likely grant awardee. It wants to use BFRDP resources to maintain and enhance its Journeyperson Farm Training Program, which provides targeted assistance to 50 beginning farmers over a period of two years. New farmers are paired with mentors, learn business planning, and get technical assistance provided not only by MOFGA but partners such as the Maine Farmland Trust and Land for Good, which have expertise in land access issues.

Each fall, MOFGA puts on the Common Ground Country Fair in the town of Unity, which attracts as many as 60,000 people who are interested in local foods, family farming and ways of creating a sustainable and just food and farming system. While in Maine, Bacigalupo and I got to see three different farm operations as well as one of the oldest farmers' markets in the country. The Portland Farmers' Market traces its roots back over 240 years, and the fact that it is thriving today is a testament to the work groups like MOFGA are doing to promote and support new farmers.

Beginning Farmers, see page 11...

Taking the message to D.C.

These and other interactions during the spring laid the groundwork for the mid-June fly-in to Washington called “Sound Investments to Ensure the Next Generation of Beginning Farmers.” During the fly-in, Lenzen and other beginning farmers conducted nearly 50 meetings with agriculture policymakers and USDA officials. Among others, they met with Minnesota Congressman Collin Peterson, who is the ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee, and Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan. They also met with the staff of agriculture committee members Minnesota Representative Tim Walz and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar.

During the meetings, the farmers discussed how the next Farm Bill could build on current federal initiatives that help new farmers and ranchers who are seeking affordable credit and savings options as well as viable ways to adopt conservation measures. New farmers discussed the importance of community support offered through BFRDP as well as how beginning farmer measures create jobs and provide opportunities for economic revitalization.

“There are opportunities in agriculture and people want to farm, but it’s tough to get started and sometimes it feels like the deck is stacked against you,” says Lenzen, 29, who has used Farm Service Agency ownership and operating loans, as well as the USDA’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program, to launch a grass-based organic dairy. He is also a graduate of LSP’s Farm Beginnings program (see page 16). “Personally, I would be nowhere near as far along on my farming career if I didn’t have access to programs like these, as well as community support.”

A new beginning farmer bill

While in D.C., beginning farmers were making the case for an upcoming bill called the “Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act of 2011,” which is expected to be introduced by the end of the summer. Such a proposal is a collection of smart, cost-effective initiatives that can help new producers. This legislation is a momentum builder for the upcoming Farm Bill and could not come at a better time. As we’ve seen with current programs like BFRDP, the demand is strong and the need is there; if you prime the pump you can achieve results like a new generation of creative, hard-working farmers that will be key in developing a better food and farming system.

Lenzen said the policymakers and USDA

Making BFRDP more community oriented

When the first Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) grants were handed out in the fall of 2009, they represented a significant step toward helping communities support the next generation of farmers.

But according to an analysis conducted by the Land Stewardship Project during the first year of the program’s operation, fewer than a dozen of the 29 grants awarded that year went to projects led by community-based organizations. The big recipients of BFRDP grants were large universities, with a smattering of other institutional players also receiving grants. All told, projects led by community-based groups like LSP received just 30 percent of BFRDP dollars awarded in 2009.

It became clear: winning passage of policy is one thing, but making sure program resources are used most effectively and as Congress intended, is another.

When it created BFRDP, Congress wrote into the law that the priority should be given to community-based programs—a proven and effective avenue to supporting new farmers. There has been a great deal of concern from LSP and other leaders in the beginning farmer education and training movement that, unfortunately, in its inaugural year BFRDP failed to deliver on its promise to be community-based.

During the past two years, LSP has been implementing a game plan to improve the implementation and results of this new farmer training initiative. As an instrumental player in creating and attaining passage of BFRDP, LSP was well equipped and obligated to wage a campaign to rectify inconsistencies and shortcomings in USDA’s delivery of the program.

By organizing with allies across the country, hosting high-level meetings with USDA policymakers and members of Congress, as well as engaging in the bureaucratic process, LSP sought to ensure that BFRDP would fund solid community-based approaches to helping new farmers.

BFRDP offers new grants each year, and as part of our work to monitor its imple-

mentation, in early 2011 LSP conducted a follow-up review of BFRDP grants that were issued in 2010. We studied program data, reviewed grant abstracts and conducted telephone interviews with grantees.

What LSP found was that great strides have been made since 2009 in making sure BFRDP fulfills its role as an initiative that helps beginning farmers right in their communities. In 2010, roughly 63 percent of the grants went to community-based organizations or nongovernmental organizations. Such groups got around half of the funding provided through BFRDP that year.

The other good news is that BFRDP benefited more groups in general. In 2009, \$17 million went to the 29 grantees; in 2010 40 projects got a total of \$18 million (demand far outstrips supply when it comes to BFRDP grants—117 applications were submitted in 2010, with a total funding request of around \$65 million).

These improvements in the second round didn’t happen by accident. They took a concerted and focused approach, led in large part by LSP and its allies. There is still work to be done to make sure BFRDP lives up to its potential, such as increasing even further the number of grants (and the amount of grant money) that goes to community-based organizations and nongovernmental organizations. As the article on these two pages points out, such community approaches have already proven quite effective at making good use of BFRDP money.

While results for year three haven’t been announced, they are expected soon. LSP remains vigilant and ready to evaluate future program results.

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To download *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: 2010 Progress Report and Recommendations*, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/BFRDP-2010Analysis.pdf. For more information on LSP’s work to improve implementation of BFRDP, contact LSP’s Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.

officials he and other beginning farmers met with in D.C. seemed to recognize the opportunities available in new, viable farming enterprises ranging from livestock production to produce and crops.

“I’ve never been to Washington, D.C., before and being able to make the case for new farmer support with policymakers was better than a vacation—it was talking about

what I know and believe in,” says Lenzen. □

Adam Warthesen is an LSP organizer working on federal agriculture policy. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.

Farmers urge Obama Administration to finalize GIPSA livestock reforms

By Adam Warthesen

June marked the one-year anniversary of the release of the proposed Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) rule, and three years after passage of the Farm Bill directing the USDA to develop the rule. It has also been over eight months since USDA closed the comment period for the proposed rule, which is aimed at bringing greater fairness to livestock and poultry markets. The rule-making was a result of Congress and family farm groups such as the Land Stewardship Project advancing a directive in the 2008 Farm Bill to clarify and strengthen the Packers and Stockyards Act, a law that's been on the books for decades but has never been enforced adequately.

To make the point that the time was long overdue for acting on GIPSA, on June 22 we joined other family farm groups in hosting a tele-press conference for the media on the issue.

The press conference resulted in dozens of news stories printed and broadcast across the country. It came during a week when LSP and other groups helped generate over 5,000 calls nationwide from farmers and ranchers to the White House urging action to enable livestock producers the opportunity to compete in open and fair livestock and poultry markets.

Producers have been reminding policy-makers in Washington that when Barack Obama was campaigning for president in 2008, he promised to reform livestock and poultry markets. LSP and other groups are calling on now President Obama to follow up on this promise and do what Congress intended in the 2008 Farm Bill by complet-

ing a timely review of a proposed rule to end unfair and deceptive practices by meatpackers, hog processors and poultry integrators.

There is no doubt that the current livestock market is far from "free" in any sense of the word. Four firms now control at least 83 percent, 66 percent and 55 percent, respectively, of the nation's beef, pork and turkey processing markets, according to University of Missouri researchers. Based on conventional economic wisdom, when four firms control more than 40 percent of a market, it's no longer a competitive one, and farmers selling into such a market have little control over their financial destiny.

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"If I'm going to remain in the business, I need to be confident that I have market access for my hogs and I'm competing on a level playing field with other producers."

— hog farmer Darwyn Bach

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This unfair system has been devastating for family farm-based livestock agriculture. Thirty years ago there were 1.3 million beef cattle operations; today there are only 740,000. In 1980, there were 660,000 hog farms; today there are only 67,000. Last year alone, 2,300 hog producers went out of business.

While this is obviously a huge economic blow to our rural communities, it is also bad news for conservation and long-term stewardship of the land. As an increasing number of diversified farmers drop livestock, their operations become dominated by monocultures of row crops. This disrupts the healthy nutrient cycle that can exist on a diversified crop-livestock farm and eliminates the need for perennial plant systems such as hay and pasture.

Reforms to livestock marketing have met with fierce opposition from meatpackers and their close allies, the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). To top it off, this summer opponents of the GIPSA rule are working with some members of the House to try and eliminate funding in the House Agriculture Appropriation Bill for USDA to continue work on the rule.

By any means necessary, corporate livestock interests are looking to kill outright or at least delay to death livestock market reforms.

One of the participants in the June 22 press conference was Darwyn Bach, a Boyd, Minn., farmer who raises corn and soybeans on 400 acres and has a 150-sow farrowing operation. Bach is also a member of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee.

"I'm trying to decide if I'm going to remain in hog farming," he told the media. "If I'm going to remain in the business, I need to be confident that I have market access for my hogs and I'm competing on a level playing field with other producers."

Joining Bach on the call were representatives of the National Farmers Union, Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias, the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), Food and Water Watch, Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF USA), and the National Family Farm Coalition.

Bach said the proposed GIPSA rule is a step in the right direction and, if given the chance, could address many of the concerns he and other independent hog producers have. The rule could provide for greater price transparency and price discovery, and prohibit packers from giving preferential treatment to certain producers.

"It's now time to enact the rule," Bach told the reporters participating in the press conference. "President Obama and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack need to make a decision: are they on the side of Smithfield, JBS and NPPC, or are they on the side of the majority of livestock producers who live and work in rural America?" □

Adam Warthesen is an LSP federal policy organizer. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardship-project.org.

On the Web

- An audio recording of the tele-press conference is available at www.worc.org/rc/Rules-Audio-6-2011.html.
- To read LSP's full comments on the GIPSA rule, see www.landstewardship-project.org/pdf/GIPSAComments.pdf.
- To view media coverage of LSP's work on the GIPSA issue, see the **LSP in the News** page at www.landstewardship-project.org/news-itn.html.

Opportunities

Resources

CSP sign-up information

Sign-up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is now continuous. Check out the Land Stewardship Project's updated CSP fact sheet at www.landstewardship-project.org/pdf/CSPFactSheet1.pdf.

For a paper copy or more information on CSP, contact LSP's Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardship-project.org. □

People power keeps local control strong

Corporate special interests fail again in attempt to weaken local democracy & township rights

By Bobby King

The official 2011 Minnesota legislative session ended at midnight on May 23 with township rights and local control strong in Minnesota—a testament to how seriously we in Minnesota value our right to determine the future of the communities we live in.

As we reported in the last issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, House File 389 (Michael Beard, R-Shakopee) and Senate File 270 (Warren Limmer, R-Maple Grove) were introduced early in the legislative session. The bills proposed to give corporate interests the upper hand by weakening the right of townships, counties and cities to stop unexpected and harmful developments such as factory farms, big box stores and garbage burning facilities.

As we have in past legislative sessions, the Land Stewardship Project made protection of local control a priority. We engaged our members and township officers across the state in standing up for local democracy. In January, LSP laid the groundwork for preserving local democracy by contacting our members and 5,000 township officers from around the state, warning them that it was likely that corporate interests would attempt to weaken township rights this legislative session. This prediction proved accurate.

Once the bills were introduced in early February, LSP members and staff called, wrote and e-mailed rural citizens alerting them to the fact that local control was under attack by corporate interests. We held two grassroots organizing meetings in Minnesota—one in Little Falls and one in New Ulm—where we engaged members directly on the issue. LSP also launched a radio campaign that ran around the state over the Easter legislative recess. And as always, this issue was a focus at our annual Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol in February.

As a result, hundreds of farmers, rural residents, township officers and others contacted legislators with the message that Minnesotans value strong local control and township rights. The citizens' message to legislators was that weakening local control should be off the table and that the lawmakers' focus must be on addressing our \$5 billion deficit.

This grassroots opposition had a measurable impact. Three co-authors removed their name from the bills, and a Senate committee hearing on the bill was postponed after a flood of calls. Late in the session, a House hearing was canceled and never rescheduled. When the Senate version of the bill finally did pass the Senate Local Government Committee on April 27, we alerted the state's township officers and our members and prevented it from getting to the Senate floor.

The strategy that worked was one of directly engaging a broad range of grassroots people from around the state: farmers, rural residents, township officers and urban people. Minnesotans believe that local folks should be able to have a strong say in what their communities look like by working through their local government, be it city, county or township. Corporate interests have long tried to weaken these rights and centralize control outside local communities at the state or federal level where they have more access and clout.

We know it is better when the proposers of factory farms and other controversial developments must contend with local governments—the government that's

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Local government in the hands of local residents is exactly what corporate interests absolutely do not want.
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closest to the people. This is what happened a few years ago in Dodge County when a New Jersey investor wanted to build a 5,000 cow mega-dairy. When local residents there had concerns, they were able to work through their township to get them addressed. It's no accident that corporate ag representatives from as far away as St. Louis attended a township meeting in an attempt to undermine the process.

Local government in the hands of local residents is exactly what corporate interests absolutely do not want. Corporate interests want a relatively weak set of uniform standards for the entire state. The problem is this vision doesn't square with one of strong local democracy where

local communities chart their own path to prosperity—a path that includes respect for the land as well as the people.

Local control & other states

In Pennsylvania, mining interests have met resistance at the township level and are currently pushing a state law seeking to undermine township rights by imposing a weak set of uniform state laws for mining. Pennsylvania has already seen some local control of factory farms weakened, as has Iowa and Wisconsin.

The Missouri Rural Crisis Center, an LSP ally and fellow member of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, recently beat back an attempt to weaken local control of factory farms in that state. The Crisis Center engaged hundreds of farmers and rural residents in opposing big ag-backed legislation that would put local limits on factory farms.

In Minnesota, we have repeatedly beat back attempts to weaken local democracy by engaging township officials, farmers and concerned citizens to make it clear that the interests of the community must come before corporate special interests. This struggle will continue, but organizing on this work has always invigorated our membership—preparing us to succeed in the future. ☐

Bobby King is an LSP state policy organizer. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

Opportunities



Resources

Local democracy tool

The Land Stewardship Project's *When a Factory Farm Comes to Town: Protecting Your Township from Unwanted Development* provides guidance on using the Minnesota Interim Ordinance and other tools in the state's Municipal Planning law.

Paper copies of the 52-page guide are available from LSP's Policy program by calling 612-722-6377, or e-mailing bking@landstewardshipproject.org. The cost is \$8 if shipped. It can be downloaded for free off of LSP's website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/township_manual06.pdf. ☐

Stripping it down to nature

Research shows that planting just a small percentage of a row-cropped field to prairie produces dramatic results, but will farmers buy into it?

By Brian DeVore

On an overcast afternoon in June, Iowa State University researchers Matt Helmers and Matt Liebman walk up to a device that has a story to tell about land use, conservation farming and how a little nature can go a long ways toward making a row-cropped field more sustainable.

The device is a flume which funnels field runoff through a narrow gate, where Helmers, Liebman and other researchers can snatch key data on how much water, soil and nutrients are being washed off this central Iowa field after each rainfall. On this day, no scientific tests are needed to figure out what's being lost off this field. A significant pile of topsoil is piled next to the flume, a shovel poking out of the top as an indicator of how it got there. It turns out researchers periodically have to clean out the device just to keep it from being clogged by eroding soil. Liebman and Helmers walk a few hundred feet away to an identical flume. No soil is piled next to it, and the metal bottom of the clean raceway almost gleams.

"Sediment has never been cleared from this flume," says Liebman.

The difference? Above the clean flume, planted on the contour of this 8 percent slope, are 30- to 50-foot wide strips of native prairie. The strips, although they make up only 10 percent of the test area, have cut soil erosion by as much as 95 percent.

This is a prime example of a conservation tool having, as Helmers puts it, "a disproportionate effect." In other words, strategic placements of these small strips of prairie are allowing them to punch above their weight when it comes to protecting the land. It's this kind of targeted conservation that may allow perennial plant systems to be integrated into rowcrop farming in the

Midwest. This ongoing research is a partial answer to concerns that adding diversity to the landscape will rob farming areas of their ability to produce significant quantities of commodity crops, and it has farmers, environmentalists and natural resource professionals from across the region excited about how to keep working lands productive while

Wildly Successful Farming



An occasional series on farms & their role in the natural environment

protecting soil and water quality.

A little goes a long way

The research project is called STRIPs, which stands for Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairies (www.nrem.iastate.edu/research/STRIPs). Coordinated by Iowa State University's Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, this research project has been taking place since 2007 at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge in central Iowa, which is undergoing a long-term transition from crop fields to native prairie. The topography provides a challenge to keeping soil in place—slopes of 6 percent to 8 percent are not uncommon.

When the research started out, the assumption was that planting native prairie

in crop fields would provide some environmental benefits such as increased habitat for wildlife and pollinators. It was also assumed the strips would slow overland water flow, allowing it to better soak in and reducing the amount of soil that would make its way to the bottom of these hills, and eventually into the wider watershed.

Indeed, there has been an increase in the number of birds and beneficial insects utilizing the prairie areas. Wildlife experts working on the project have documented that such grassland species as dickcissels, song sparrows, vesper sparrows and common yellowthroats are using the strips for nesting.

But researchers weren't quite prepared for just how successful the strips would be at slowing down water and cutting erosion.

"I was and am surprised that it's that dramatic," says Helmers of the 95 percent reduction with just 10 percent of the field in strips.

What's interesting is when researchers planted 20 percent of a field to prairie, they didn't gain much in soil erosion control—10 percent seems to be enough in this case. They've located the strips on parts of the slope where erosion was particularly bad—at least 150 feet separates them to accommodate two passes of a field sprayer. The researchers are also utilizing small, triangle-shaped patches of prairie at the bottom of the hillsides, where racing water can often do the most damage.

Helmers, an ISU agricultural engineer, says farmers are familiar with utilizing grass buffers to reduce erosion. But usually these are planted to monocultures of cool season grasses like brome. Brome creates a nice, soil-friendly sod, but in heavy rains tends to lay down, allowing water to race over it. Na-

Strips, see page 15...



Strips of prairie placed in strategic locations on a sloping crop field not only add diversity to the landscape, but can cut soil erosion dramatically. (LSP photo)

Give it a listen

To listen to a recent Land Stewardship Project podcast featuring researchers talking about the prairie strips study, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?s=Using+native+prairie.

tive prairie plants, on the other hand, have erect, stiff stems that are better at impeding the movement of water, and anything along for the ride.

A close look at the strips bears this out. On a recent summer day a walk through the knee high prairie after an intense overnight rain (less than half an inch fell, but it all came in a short time) shows an impressive amount of rich, black glacial soil—the kind that produces record crop yields—trapped amongst the plants. Just a few feet away is the source of that soil: a soybean field.

What's striking is that the part of the field that lacked strips is losing soil by the ton despite being farmed in a way considered highly sustainable. The narrow bean rows are growing amongst last year's corn stalks and dead plant residue covers much of the soil, an indicator that a good no-till system is in place.

"Even though we are five years into no-till, we are not getting an elimination of soil loss just with no-till," says Liebman.

In 2008, heavy rains resulted in the part of the study field that's not planted to prairie strips (but is in a no-till system) to lose on average 11 tons of soil per acre. The amount of soil lost in the stripped part of the field was measured in the hundreds of pounds that year. Researchers also found nitrogen and phosphorus losses from the stripped fields were a fraction of what they were in their non-stripped counterparts.

Why isn't no-till working better to cut erosion? One reason is that in recent years an unprecedented spate of torrential rainfalls and floods have hit the region.

"We have so much water coming down here that the residue just floats off, and at that point the soil is completely vulnerable," says Liebman, an agronomist who occupies the Henry A. Wallace Chair for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State. "These kinds of high intensity events are occurring with a greater frequency. And in the world of farmers, they're looking at large amounts of nutrient loss, large amounts of sediment loss, increased threats to crop production. These kinds of things are catching people's attention."

Getting it onto working farms

In fact, the four years of results produced by the STRIPs research is catching the attention of not only environmental groups and natural resource professionals. At a recent field day, farmers and representatives of commodity groups were on hand at the refuge to learn more about prairie strips.

The crop farmers were intrigued by the

research results thus far, but expressed concerns about utilizing strips that are of varying widths (a problem for large field equipment), whether the prairies would provide a home for weeds and whether they could afford to give up even 10 percent of a crop field to nature. Of particular concern is the growing trend of Midwestern farmland being cash-rented, with the landowners often living out of state. These landowners don't see the day-to-day erosion that intensive row-

cropping can produce, and their renters find themselves focusing on producing enough crops to make payments that have followed commodity prices through the stratosphere.

"He's worried about making the payment and not what the farm looks like when he's done," said one large crop farmer who owns as well as rents land in the neighborhood where the STRIPs study is being conducted.

But farmers and natural resource professionals also talked about how producers would be willing to adopt such systems, especially if they can see themselves how they benefit not only their own farms, but the community at large. After all, many in central Iowa took a risk a couple decades ago and adopted conservation tillage systems. Farmers also talked about the importance of having personal contact with other farmers and agricultural experts who may live in their same watershed and who are willing to try something new.

The Chippewa 10% Project (*see sidebar*



Flumes like this are designed to measure how much soil is eroding from fields being studied. This one, which lies at the bottom of a slope planted to no-till soybeans but no prairie strips, is full of silt. (LSP photo)

below), which is being coordinated by the Land Stewardship Project and the Chippewa River Watershed Project, is trying to utilize the latest science to integrate more perennials into one western Minnesota watershed. But it's also relying on that most critical of resources: farmer-to-farmer knowledge transmission.

"One of the most powerful tools is the relationships people build with each other," says Chippewa 10% coordinator and LSP staffer Julia Ahlers Ness.

And as Liebman points out, those relationships go beyond the farm gate. Making something like prairie stripping viable for farmers means bringing together market forces, community needs and innovative policy.

Says the agronomist, "We have to come to some broader agreements that protecting the productivity of our farmland is really important to all us, not just those who are farming it directly." □

'Profits from perennials' events in Aug. & Sept.

The Chippewa 10% Project (www.profitsfromperennials.org) recently sponsored a trip to the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge to see the prairie strips research firsthand. Chippewa 10%, which is a joint initiative of the Land Stewardship Project and the Chippewa River Watershed Project, is seeking ways of helping farmers make production of perennial plant systems such as grass economically sustainable.

For more information, contact LSP's Julia Ahlers Ness at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org. Chippewa 10% is helping put on three more events in coming weeks:

- AUG. 15—Profits from Perennials EcoSun Prairie Farm Bus Tour, Brookings, S. Dak. (bus leaves from Montevideo, Minn.); Contact: Julia Ahlers Ness, 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

- AUG. 18—"Utilizing Sustainable Crop Production Principles to Establish Perennial Grasses for Bio-energy Production," Prairie Horizon Farm, Starbuck, Minn.; Contact: Sharon Weyers, 320-589-3411; Sharon.Weyers@ars.usda.gov

- SEPT. 9-10—"Opportunities for Profits from Livestock & Grazing" with grazing expert Greg Judy, Alexandria, Minn.; contact: Julia Ahlers Ness, 320-269-2105, janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

Farm Beginnings

Spots remain in Farm Beginnings course

Classes to be held in Minnesota communities of Hutchinson & Rochester

There are still a few class spots remaining in the 2011-2012 edition of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course. Classes will begin this fall in the Minnesota communities of Rochester and Hutchinson, providing participants two options for getting involved in one of the most successful beginning farmer training initiatives in the country.

In 2011, LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its 14th year of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is tailor-made 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.

Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the area. The classes, which meet approximately twice a month, run until March 2012, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

The fee is \$1,500 per farming partnership (flexible payment plan and partial scholar-

ships available).

Over the years, more than 500 people have graduated from the Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings program. Farm Beginnings 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 over the years in Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota and the Duluth-Superior area. New Farm Beginnings courses have recently been launched in South Dakota and the Hudson Valley of New York.

More information on LSP's Farm Beginnings course is available at www.farmbeginnings.org, or by contacting LSP's Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or lpse@landstewardshipproject.org. The web page also has details on Farm Beginnings courses in other states. □

Is farming in your future?

Find out Aug. 28 at LSP's Farm Dreams workshop

Are you trying to figure out if a farming career is right for you? The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Dreams initiative is an entry level, exploratory workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether sustainable farming is the next step for them.

In this workshop, participants:

- Assess their resources, skills and motivations for farming.
- Develop an educational plan toward farming.

- Learn about regional training opportunities and support networks.
- Prioritize their next action steps in moving closer toward their goals in farming.

Farm Dreams is recommended as a precursor workshop for those who are considering taking the 10-month Farm Beginnings course (see article above). To view a list of frequently asked questions about Farm Beginnings, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/whatisfb.html#faq.

Farm Dreams is offered four times each year, with the next one scheduled for Aug. 28, from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., somewhere in the Twin Cities.

Check www.landstewardshipproject.org or watch future issues of the *LIVE-WIRE*, LSP's monthly e-newsletter, for details about the workshop.

More information is also available by contacting LSP's Nick Olson at nicko@landstewardshipproject.org or 320-269-2105.

The Farm Dreams initiative is supported by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA.

Farm Beginnings Farm Planning Track & Skills Assessments

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program is based upon the idea that beginning farmers can greatly increase their chances of success by continually investing in their education over time. Such an investment can be made by seeking out experts, attending field days and other educational events, and making skills assessments and annual learning plans part of their overall farming plan. Here are resources that can help beginning farmers begin that lifelong learning process:

• **Farm Planning Track.** This document is a tool to help prospective farmers map three years of learning through

educational skills sessions, one-on-one consultation, skills assessments, learning plans, field day workshops, Farm Dreams workshops and the Farm Beginnings course (see articles above).

• **Vegetable Farming Skills Evaluation.** This document can be used by farmers and prospective farmers to assess competence areas in vegetable farming.

• **Livestock Farming Skills Evaluation.** This document can be used by farmers and prospective farmers to assess competence areas in livestock farming.

• **Growing Season Learning Plan for**

Livestock. After completing the Livestock Farming Skills Evaluation, this document can be used to identify a number of livestock production skill areas you want to develop competency in.

• **Growing Season Learning Plan for Vegetables.** After completing the Vegetable Farming Skills Evaluation, this document can be used to identify a number of vegetable production skill areas you want to develop competency in.

To download any of these documents, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/tracks.html. □

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland? Or are you an established farmer/landowner who is seeking a beginning farmer to purchase or rent your land, or to work with in a partnership/employee situation? The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program has simple application forms available for people seeking farmland or farmers. Once the form is filled out, the information can be circulated by LSP via the *Land Stewardship Letter*, the *LIVE-WIRE* and online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/land_clearinghouse.html. This service is free of charge for LSP members. To obtain a form and for more information, e-mail LSP's Parker Forsell at parker@landstewardshipproject.org or call 507-523-3366. You can also download the forms from our *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse* section on the LSP website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/resources.html#land. Here are the latest *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse* listings:

Seeking Farmland: Western MN

Amery Longman is seeking to rent or buy 50 to 500 acres of tillable farmland in western Minnesota's Lac qui Parle or Swift counties. Longman does not require a house. Contact: Amery Longman, 320-979-9700; amerylongman@gmail.com.

Urban Homestead Available: Twin Cities

Alisha and Jared Likness have for sale in total or as a parcel a quarter-acre of land in the Twin Cities, Minn., community of Richfield. The property consists of a 3 bedroom, 1¼ bath home and a ¼ acre corner lot that has been transformed into an "urban homestead." They have transformed areas of lawn into large gardens, planted fruit trees and vines, established a large perennial herb garden, and have practiced sustainable gardening methods while doing so. They are relocating and would like to see someone purchase the house who is interested in keeping the gardens. The price is \$199,900. Contact: Alisha or Jared Likness, alishalikness@yahoo.com, jaredlikness@yahoo.com; 612-866-8653.

Seeking Internship/ Employment: Minnesota

Christina Bellert is seeking an internship or employment in some aspect of sustainable farming in Minnesota. She has several years of gardening experience and worked in the greenhouse at the University of Minnesota-Duluth (where she received a bachelor's of science degree in biology), as well as at a nursery in Oregon. She is interested in learning about all aspects of vegetable production and marketing, as well as business planning and on-farm milk/cheese processing. Contact: Christina Bellert, 503-508-9930; bell0300@d.umn.edu.

Seeking Farmland: Twin Cities Area

Di Wu is seeking to rent or buy 5-10 acres of tillable and forested land in Hennepin County, Minn., near the Twin Cities. Wu prefers that the land has not been sprayed for at least five years, and has water and electricity. Wu is prepared to take control of the land in December 2011. Contact: Di Wu, wuxxx419@umn.edu.

Seeking Farmland: Western WI

Kelly Jacobs is seeking to rent or buy 5-30 acres of farmland in western Wisconsin's Eau Claire County, near the communities of Eau Claire or Altoona. Jacobs is looking for pastured land; a house is preferred, but not required, and a site with outbuildings would be considered. Contact: Kelly Jacobs, 715-590-2241; kellyraejacobs@gmail.com.

Land Available: Twin Cities Area

Wally Anderson has 120 acres of farmland for sale or rent in Minnesota's Sherburne County, northwest of the Twin Cities. Thirty acres is tillable and 70 is forested, and it has not been sprayed in 35 years. There is no house or outbuildings. There is a blacktop road on two sides of the property, which is about 35 miles from Maple Grove, Minn. The price is negotiable. Contact: Wally Anderson, 651-248-9512; wally@prshealth.com.

• Farm for Rent: NW WI

Lori Swift has 120 acres of pasture and woods (with lots of maple trees) available for rent near the northwest Wisconsin community of Rice Lake, Wis. The land is hayed each year, tilled every other year, and no chemicals have been used on it for over 30 years. Sheep/goats/llamas/emus/horses okay; not set up for dairy cattle. The property includes ½ acre organic garden already producing, a newer 45x52 pole

building and a nice house. Contact: Lori Swift, 715-403-3622.

• Seeking Farmer: Western WI

Mark Eslinger is a certified organic dairy farmer near the western Wisconsin town of Stanley who is seeking a family to transition to farm ownership. He has a seasonal, 100 percent grass-based operation with 50 to 70 cows and a parlor. The operation consists of 158 acres owned and 180 acres rented. Other enterprise ideas welcomed. Contact: Mark Eslinger, 715-644-5368; loramarfarm@gmail.com.

• Organic land for sale: SC WI

Jacquelyn Mitchard has 30 acres of organic land for sale in south central Wisconsin, near Madison. The asking price is \$120,000 to \$130,000. Contact: Jacquelyn Mitchard, mitch@mailbag.com.

• Pasture Farm/Cheesemaking Business for Sale: NE MN

Will Hedquist has for sale a farm and cheesemaking business in northeast Minnesota's Carlton County. Available are 40+ acres of managed grazing land that has not been sprayed in over 30 years and an established 11-year-old cheese business. The 800 square-foot cheesemaking facility and retail space have an inspected kitchen/café area, and are handicap accessible. There is also a 40x70 pole barn and a dairy barn with 18 stalls. There is a productive apple orchard and a five-bedroom, two-bath house with recent updates. The property is close to I-35, and adjoins the Munger Trail. More land is available. The asking price is \$349,000. Contact: Will Hedquist, 218-384-4513; wehedquist@gmail.com.

Beginning organic farmers wanted

New Spirit Farmland Partnerships is accepting applications for its newly launched Organic Farm Succession Program. This program helps young farmers by allowing them to take over a mature certified organic operation (with a long-term lease with an option to buy) from a retiring farmer who wants to keep his or her land in organic production.

For details, see http://newsspiritfp.com/?q=Organic_Farm_Succession_Program, or call Jim Holub at 319-310-7263. □

Farm Beginnings

Priming the pump

Savings program helps one farm weather expansion

By Grant Cook

On a cold morning in May, I sit down to talk with Cree Bradley in her greenhouse near the northeast Minnesota community of Two Harbors. We are surrounded by hundreds of tomato, pepper, eggplant and brassica transplants. Farming on Lake Superior's North Shore is often synonymous with a short growing season, but this year spring has hesitated longer than usual. Still, Cree doesn't seem terribly worried, and says that dealing with the cold weather is simply part of farming here. And with the several new investments that she and her husband, Jason, are purchasing thanks to Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM), Cree has reason to be optimistic.

Both Cree and Jason were individual participants in the FAIM program, which offers a three-to-one match of each participant's savings of up to \$40 per month for two years. The program is designed to help low-income Minnesotans grow their assets in order to purchase a home, start or expand a business, or pursue higher education. Not only is this program useful for beginning farmers, but it expands economic opportunities for a cross-section of small, local business development, and has been identified as an important link to racial justice in the state. Several individuals from communities of color have used FAIM's matched savings to start new businesses across Minnesota and build equity and independence. FAIM was named as one of 14 solutions that expand job growth and economic opportunity and reduce Minnesota's disparities in the Organizing Apprenticeship Project's recently released Racial Equity Policy Brief (see No. 1, 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter*, page 13).

FAIM participants are required to attend financial literacy training as well as asset-specific training related to the use of their money, and those saving for a business must

submit an approved business plan by the program's end. Since Cree and her husband each had an account, the money they have saved through the program totals \$7,680, which is helping purchase capital investments to improve their farm's production.

The Bradleys have owned and operated Chelsea Morning Farm for five years. They bought the land in partnership with Cree's father, who lives and works with them on the farm. The Bradleys run a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) vegetable-



Cree and Jason Bradley with their recently purchased vegetable cultivating tractor. "If young farmers could have some of these key infrastructure investments when they begin, they might have an easier time building to an economy of scale in a more reasonable time frame," Cree says. (photo courtesy of the Bradleys)

growing operation, and over the past five years have expanded their business from 10 shares to 80. The farm is situated on a 25-acre plot with three acres currently dedicated to vegetable production. Maintaining a farm and homestead while operating a successful and growing business may seem like a full plate of work — and it is. But Cree and Jason wear many hats, of which the wide-brimmed farmer's hat is only one. Both work as seasonal agronomists for the

Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Jason is a commercial fisherman on Lake Superior, and Cree directs the Lake Superior Farm Beginnings program. They also tap 2,500 maple trees each spring.

The Bradleys' successful, diverse and growing CSA may imply a background in farming or business management. They had none. Cree grew up in North Dakota and came to Duluth for college after spending several years backpacking and working ranch jobs in the western U.S., while Jason spent time working with canoe outfitters in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Cree worked for a nonprofit during college that connected regional farmers with local markets, exposing her to sustainable agriculture. Both she and Jason worked on farms in the Duluth area and found farming to be a lifestyle they enjoyed.

"Farming is a beautiful way to work," Cree says.

In purchasing their farm, Cree acknowledges that she and Jason were lucky to have her father involved, but says that acquiring land isn't the only obstacle facing young farmers — building their farms up to a financially-viable scale in a reasonable time frame is an equally significant problem. Often, developing a farm business is a slow-growing process. Building soil fertility for better production and yields takes time. And because beginning farmers often can't initially purchase all necessary capital investments, they produce on a scale too small to be financially viable, making it difficult to save money for investments that would increase production to the scale needed.

The need to start slow

Many experienced farmers will advise beginners to start small, on a scale at which they can easily recover from mistakes. The Bradleys followed this advice and are glad they did, but Cree says a balance is necessary to prevent beginning farmers from burning out while in the process of scaling up. Working too many hours on and off the farm with limited mechanical help can turn farmers away from the lifestyle.

"If young farmers could have some of these key infrastructure investments when they begin, they might have an easier time building to an economy of scale in a more reasonable time frame," Cree says.

However, many beginning farmers find it difficult to obtain loans from mainstream

FAIM, see page 19...

financial institutions. "When you're a beginning farmer and say, 'We want to start small and grow as we gain experience and comfort,' there's likely not a bank in the world that's going to support that business model and give you a loan," she adds.

This is where asset-building programs like FAIM help. Cree and Jason felt unable to expand their operation because of production issues. They needed to improve their soil quality, which would improve plant health and yields, while also expanding the amount of land they could manage. To do this they needed more time and better time management. Due to the time spent manually watering, planting and weeding their vegetables, however, Cree and Jason

couldn't keep up with tasks or put as much time as desired into improving their soil. They have remained at 80 CSA members so as not to over-tax their soil or themselves labor-wise, although they would like to continue expanding.

The Bradleys' FAIM savings will help them overcome these obstacles. The list of investments they plan to make with the money includes a vegetable cultivating tractor, a bed preparer, irrigation supplies, floating row cover and a push-seeder. They've already bought the tractor, an Allis Chalmers Model G, which Cree hopes will allow them to spend less time manually weeding.

Money isn't the only benefit of FAIM. Cree says the financial literacy and business training is crucial to starting and operating a farm. "A business plan lets you see where you are at, where you're going, and most

rewardingly, how far you've come," she says, "It gets farmers thinking like business people."

Programs like FAIM and Lake Superior Farm Beginnings, which was approved as their asset-specific training requirement, give beginning farmers the resources to run their farms in the most economically, socially and environmentally sustainable ways. The continuation of current programs like FAIM and the institution of new ones is one way to support the wave of new farmers who want to produce food in a sustainable and healthy way.

Because farming is a beautiful way to work. □

Grant Cook is a Land Stewardship Project intern working on beginning farmer issues.

More on FAIM

How it's used & its status

- Individual development accounts (IDA) matched 3-1 by the program.
- Matches participants' savings of \$40 a month 3 to 1 for two years, resulting in a possible maximum of \$3,840 available to participants at the end of the program.
- Funds can be used to start or expand a business, buy a home or pursue a higher education.
- Must have a combined family income of no more than 200 percent the poverty level to participate.
- Helped 2,435 individuals obtain a higher education, start a business or purchase a home between October 2003 and March 2010.
- 12 hours of financial literacy and 10 hours of asset specific training required.
- FAIM was not funded during the regular session of the 2011 Minnesota

Legislature. As of this writing, the future of FAIM and many other programs under the Health and Human Services budget were unclear.

Participant demographics

- 77 percent female, 23 percent male.
- 42 percent used the money to buy a new home, 33 percent to pursue higher education and 25 percent to start a business.
- 59 percent Caucasian, 21 percent African American, 5 percent Latino, 4 percent Asian, 4 percent Native American and 7 percent other.
- 47 percent are employed full time and 40 percent are employed part time.
- 35 percent live between 100 percent and 150 percent of the federal poverty level; 34 percent live below the federal poverty level and 31 percent between 150 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- 57 percent live in a minor urban area

(under 1 million people), 18 percent live in a rural area, 12 percent live in a major urban area (over 1 million people) and 13 percent live in unknown locations.

Contact information

Website: www.minnesotafaim.org

Coordinators:

- Kate Ouverson
West Central Minnesota
Communities Action, Inc.
411 Industrial Park Blvd.
Elbow Lake, MN 56531
218-685-4486 ext. 133
- Pam Johnson
Minnesota Community Action
Partnership
100 Empire Drive, Suite 202
St. Paul, MN 55103
651-645-7425 ext. 2
pamjohnson@minncap.org

Farm Beginnings field days in September

Part of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course consists of on-farm educational events such as field days. These are targeted at Farm Beginnings participants, but for a \$35 fee are open to members of the public. There are two remaining Farm Beginnings field days this season:

→ **September 17:** Fall grazing field day focusing on winter preparation, University of Minnesota-Morris, (1 p.m.-4 p.m.); contact: Richard Ness, 320-269-2105, rness@landstewardshipproject.org.

→ **September 25:** Fall grazing field day focusing on winter preparation, Wolf Hill Farm, La Crescent, Minn. (1 p.m.-4 p.m.); contact Aimee Finley, 507-523-3366, aimee@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Gardens of Eagan recently hosted a Farm Beginnings field day on organic vegetable production. (photo by Parker Forsell)

Farm Beginnings

Brad & Shelley Schrandt

Riding the storm out

A few years ago, Brad and Shelley Schrandt faced a dilemma: should they keep their dairy herd at around 20 cows for a few more years while working off the farm, or should they expand enough to justify quitting those town jobs? They went for the expansion in an attempt to simplify their life. Shelley, who was pregnant at the time, was helping milk cows on a neighboring farm while working at a bank, and Brad was a night mechanic for a waste management firm.

"Those were some long days," Shelley says, rolling her eyes. "Yeah, those were the days," Brad quips.

While saying this, the young couple (he's 34, she's 30) is sitting in the kitchen of their farm near the southeast Minnesota community of St. Charles. They explain that while expanding met taking on a heavier debt load, working off the farm was hurting them as well as their operation.

"We knew there were things on this farm that just weren't getting done," says Shelley.

So in 2007 they added 15 cows to their herd, providing enough milk income to quit their jobs. In 2008, they added another 25. It turns out their gamble may have been ill-timed.

"We went for broke, and almost went broke," says Brad, only half joking.

Yes, it's been a rocky couple of years for the Schrandts financially. In fact, when reflecting on those tough times, the farm



Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

couple sounds a little relieved they are still in business. They say what made it easier to ride the rough waves without going under was the business planning background and farmer networking they gained when they

took the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course in 2005-2006.

That fall and winter the couple drove twice a month to the Minnesota community of New Prague for sessions taught by established farmers and other agricultural professionals from the community. For 14 years, Farm Beginnings has been training beginning farmers who are interested in innovative management systems (*see page 16*).

The course emphasizes goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and innovative production techniques. Farm Beginnings participants also have the opportunity to attend on-farm events where they see firsthand the use of innovative management techniques.

"We felt like Farm Beginnings was a good training course for anyone who's trying to start a business of any kind, not just farming, because of the emphasis on business plans and whole farm planning," says Brad. "A lot of it is trying to lay out where your goals are and how you are going to get there. The risks in agriculture are so much higher now."

Economic turndown

They know from first-person experience about those risks. While 2008 turned out to be a good year for milk prices, 2009 was not. Add on top of that in 2007 they began the three-year process of transitioning the herd to organic. Once a herd is officially

organic, it can qualify for significant price premiums. But before that day comes, there can be financial risk involved. For one thing, the Schrandts were converting row crop acres to rotationally grazed pastures. This met foregoing the subsidy payments commodity crops like corn and soybeans qualify for.

"While converting this high value land to grazing you don't have that income from the crops and the debt accrues," says Brad.

Things got bad enough that they seriously began reconsidering farming as a career. "We talked about, 'Do we just quit?'" Shelley recalls. "I remember we had a lot of discussions about whether we were even going to survive."

And finally becoming certified organic in August 2010 didn't solve their problems. It turns out the down economy



Shelley and Brad Schrandt, shown with their daughters Grace and Callie. "I remember we had a lot of discussions about whether we were even going to survive," says Shelley. (LSP photo)

Fresh Faces, see page 21...

was scaring organic dairy processors from taking on new contracts. That meant selling organic milk into the depressed conventional market.

But their tenacity paid off. In October of that year, the Schrandts got an organic contract with Westby Creamery in Wisconsin.

"Maybe we should have grown more slowly," says Shelley as she heads to the barn to help an artificial insemination technician. "But it all worked out."

Support network

The other invaluable resource LSP and Farm Beginnings provided was a connection to established farmers in the area. Carmene and Dale Pangrac, long-time organic dairy

They regularly visit the farms of other beginning farmers in the area who are trying out different production and management methods. Their original loan came from a local banker who has other graziers as clients.

No farming neophytes

That the Schrandts would need mentoring, or that they would take a beginning farmer training course in the first place, may seem somewhat surprising, given their backgrounds. Shelley grew up milking cows in the same barn they milk in now, and Brad grew up on a dairy farm in northeast Iowa. In fact, they met while Brad was working on a large dairy near St. Charles.

But when the couple got married in 2003 and began looking into taking on farming as a career, they soon figured out they didn't want to farm conventionally. Both their fam-

Give it a listen

To listen to an LSP podcast featuring Brad and Shelley Schrandt, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html. It's episode 104.

farm around 230 tillable acres. The couple owns approximately 100 acres and rents the rest from Shelley's parents across the road, where the cows are milked in a tie-stall barn. Since the barn had not been milked in for five years before 2006, it needed some work, including a new plumbing system. Plans call for building a low-cost parlor that gets the cows through more efficiently with less labor. The Schrandts are hoping that spending less time milking will mean more quality time spent with their two chatty daughters, Grace, 4, and Callie, 2.

Reducing risk

The Schrandts raise most of their own feed, including 80 to 90 acres of rotationally grazed pasture. Brad and Shelley feel they are making progress in working down their debt load, thanks to the premium their organic milk receives and low cost production methods such as managed grazing.

They've supplemented their Farm Beginnings training by enrolling in the Minnesota Farm Business Management Program, which is helping them monitor and manage their cash flow, among other things.

"Even if milk prices dropped some, I think we're still headed in the right direction for paying down debt," says Brad. Despite the early bumps, he has no regrets about converting the operation, and the land, to organics. For one thing, his experience working on large-scale confinement dairies was not a pleasant one—the cows were pushed hard to produce high volumes and it affected the animals as well as the farmers.

The young farmer also feels a grass-based organic system will prove to be more financially viable long-term, especially in a world where volatile commodity prices are making agriculture increasingly risky.

While he, Shelley, Grace and Callie check on cows grazing in a pasture that was converted from corn a few years ago, Brad points to cropland across the road that's renting for \$400 an acre.

"I don't know how you make it on that," he says, shaking his head in wonder. □

More FB profiles

To read more Farm Beginnings profiles, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html.



The Schrandts hosted a Farm Beginnings field day in June for other beginning farmers interested in grazing. Networking with other farmers in the area "has been huge for us," says Brad. (photo by Aimee Finley)

farmers from the area with years of experience in managed rotational grazing, have traded labor, equipment, and, most importantly, knowledge, with the Schrandts.

"That's been huge for us," Brad says. "They've been a big help in figuring out animal treatments and crop production, even just what you do when money's tight. What are your highest priorities? What do you buy? What do you not buy? What can you do without?"

In fact, the Schrandts are in a bit of a hotspot for innovative farming in general.

ilies got out of dairying partly because of the difficulty of making it with a moderate-sized herd utilizing conventional methods.

So the Schrandts began investigating producing milk using managed rotational grazing and eventually going organic. The Farm Beginnings classes, as well as the on-farm workshops the program offered, helped them learn the basics of grazing.

As of this summer, the milk from the Schrandts' 70-cow herd has been on the organic truck for over nine months. They

A report from the urban ag front

The challenges posed by wandering kids & hungry pests are nothing compared to bureaucratic red tape & unenlightened policy

By Anna Cioffi

I stand on the border of my tiny “farm” and survey the seedlings and transplants of spring. Before long I curl my lips in a frown — the pests have been back. On the corner of Chicago Avenue and 35th Street, in the Powderhorn Park neighborhood of South Minneapolis, I’m living the age-old struggle of the vegetable farmer. Careful meditative planting of 70-square feet has been ruined in one fell swoop by an invisible pest that can destroy an entire season’s worth of crops, leaving the farmers in its wake to assess the damage and salvage what they can.

My pests are different, though. My pests wear size five children’s tennis shoes that make deep craters through my carrot patch as they run to fetch a stray tennis ball. They’re the kind of pests that leave behind candy bar wrappers and banana peels. Once when I left my tools outside, my pests used them to dig through my compost pile, spreading the fresh fertility into a flat, amorphous blob that I carefully shoveled back into a mound again, before making it a habit to lock my tools away. My pests will find any way possible to tinker with my garden while I’m not there, including re-directing the sprinkler path to play on a sunny day.

For most urban farmers, neighborhood kids are the least of their worries. The problems they face aren’t very different from a rural farmer: access to land, prohibitive start-up costs, and lack of a comprehensive support network make starting and running an urban farm operation pretty daunting.

The term “urban farmer” is becoming common lingo these days, but what does it mean exactly? The image it usually invokes of an overall clad farmer bent over a hoe in a plot surrounded by skyscrapers isn’t that far off. The urban farmers I’ve met look like a typical agrarian: sun burnt forearms,

Carhartts, dirt under their fingernails. Living in the city allows them to connect more intimately to their markets and stay in tune with their customers’ wants and needs.

Parking lot production

On a hot day in June, I visited Growing Lots, a pioneering urban farm in the Seward neighborhood of Minneapolis. Co-owners Stefan Meyer and Jake Schultz lounged on

Getting the farm approved by the city in 2010 was like pulling teeth — there had apparently never been another vegetable farm on Minneapolis city land that operated directly on top of a parking lot. There were concerns that the soil in the raised mounds would erode heavily, or that there would be massive runoff, but so far that hasn’t been the case. Meyer has taken steps to keep the soil in place, including laying a thick layer



Urban farmers Stefan Meyer (left) and Jake Schultz work their CSA operation on a South Minneapolis parking lot as trains pass by on the Hiawatha light rail line in the background. The farmers have enjoyed support from local residents, but the reception from city officials has been mixed. (LSP photo)

hay bales during a break from washing and packing lettuce for Growing Lots’ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) members. The Hiawatha light rail train rushed by just beyond the parking lot fence. In fact, their whole farm used to be a parking lot until Seward Redesign, a neighborhood revitalization organization, contacted Meyer and asked him to help convert the vacant lot into an urban farm.

of hay across the parking lot.

Meyer is no stranger to innovation in farming. He’s a fourth generation farmer, and while his father farmed conventional corn, soybeans and turkeys, he was much more interested in ecological agriculture, biodiversity and permaculture practices.

Schultz, by contrast, became interested in

Urban Ag, see page 23...

farming and urban agriculture through health and nutrition research, and reading Michael Pollan in college. In addition to co-owning Growing Lots, Schultz runs a bakery CSA, yogurt CSA, and raises 47 chickens, though their eggs are illegal to sell. Because of stringent city regulations, many urban farmers have to market and sell their products under the radar. The new Minneapolis Urban Agriculture Policy Plan (see *LSL* No. 1, 2011, page 23) finally allows for vegetables grown in home gardens to be sold to market, but there are many types of farmers and producers in the city who, like Schultz, grow more than just vegetables.

Although the co-owners at Growing Lots still cringe when they talk about the bureaucratic processes of working with city officials, operating a farm in the city does have its benefits. They're much closer to their customers, who can stop by to show their friends where their produce comes from.

Another challenge urban farmers face is limited growing space, and Concrete Beet Farmers are doing a lot on this front. Concrete Beet is a CSA comprised of four Macalester College students, two of them recent graduates, who started their urban farm this season in South Minneapolis. They've interplanted shade tolerant lettuce with many of their crops, and are using a rope trellising system with their tomatoes and pole beans to cut down on costs and save room.

The Concrete Beet Farmers were instrumental in convening an ad-hoc group of urban farmers that meet regularly to discuss problems, plan events to promote their farms, help each other with work days and share knowledge. As a result of this partnership, Concrete Beet Farmers and Uptown Farmers began renting and sharing new plots of land to expand production for both their enterprises.

Eric Larsen of Concrete Beet Farmers echoed a sentiment shared by Meyer and Schultz — city regulations currently prohibit structures such as high tunnels (see page 24) for season extension, which would make their vegetable operations more commercially viable. Hooved animals are also prohibited, even though Growing Lots is in an industrial area out of the sight (and sound) of any residential areas. Both businesses have expressed interest in hooved animals to close the ecological loop, and to cut down the amount of fertilizer they need to outsource. Current city regulations also prohibit large-scale compost production, which limits efforts to be more self-sufficient.

There is, however, a growing movement to make urban farms more mainstream, and to bring zoning ordinances up to snuff with

the real needs of growers. John Brosnan of the nonprofit Gardening Matters is working with sustainable agriculture and urban farming groups across the Twin Cities to create an urban land trust that could help to alleviate the problem of access to land. The proposed urban land trust could purchase and secure empty lots that are viable growing places, and sell or rent the space to urban farmers. This year, Meyer and Schultz had to move a huge portion of their farm to a different site because the parking lot they were operating on was under development. They've secured one plot under a three-year lease, but the security of their second plot is still under question. In order to make urban farming a viable livelihood, farmers need to have long-term access to land.

Brosnan is also interested in the idea of creating a centralized food distribution hub that would cut out much of the work urban and regional farmers do to find customers for their products.

A few steps forward...

The Permaculture Research Institute (PRI) Cold Climate began offering a certification course this year for urban farmers. This new program aims to shift the urban focus from community gardening to high yielding urban food production that supports green jobs in urban communities.

PRI feels that this work will not only help shape the future of emerging local food systems, but will help spawn public policy that's friendly toward urban farming. The Minneapolis Urban Agriculture Policy Plan recommends that abandoned city lots be prioritized as sites for local food production.

The plan also creates new zoning standards that will enable small-scale market growing to become a viable opportunity for urban farmers of all types.

PRI is capitalizing on the interest in urban food production by offering the city's first Urban Farmer Certification Course, which I'm enrolled in. The produce I raise goes to the Aliveness Project, an organization for people living with HIV/AIDS in the Twin Cities area.

Work on the part of city officials, individuals and nonprofit groups shows promise of refreshing our cities and communities through our foundational and vital connection to food. Although there is much movement in the direction of making urban farming a viable occupation in the Twin Cities, there are still many Twin Cities urban farmers who are operating on the fringes of the system.

We do still need people to be operating on the fringes, to continue pushing innovative policy forward and stretching the perception of what can and can't be done in an urban setting. □

Anna Cioffi began work this summer as a Land Stewardship Project Community Based Food Systems organizer. She is focusing on, among things, ways of making Twin Cities communities more accommodating to urban agriculture models of all types. Cioffi can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or annac@landstewardshipproject.org. The Minneapolis Urban Agriculture Policy Plan is available at www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/urban_ag_plan.asp.

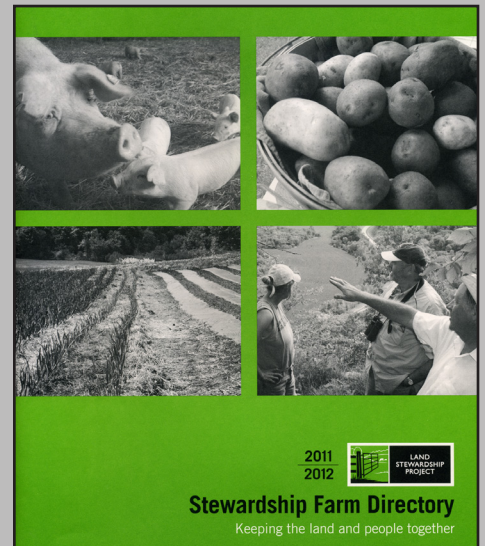
Get access to the freshest food around

LSP's 2011-2012 *Stewardship Farm Directory* is now available.

Use the *Directory* to source sustainably raised food and farm products from over 230 Land Stewardship Project farmer-members who believe in and practice stewardship of the land.

LSP member businesses such as food co-ops, restaurants, farmers' markets and more are also included.

The *Directory* will help you find locally grown vegetables, fruits, meats, dairy products, wool, flowers, Christmas trees and much more. It is available online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/cbfed/buy_food.html. Hard copies are available by contacting our offices in Minneapolis (612-722-6377), Lewiston (507-523-3366) or Montevideo (320-269-2105).



The season extender

High tunnels can make local food a bigger part of the community

By Rebecca Terk

West of U.S. Highway 75 in western Minnesota's Big Stone County, the growing season started early this year.

"My first planting was on March 19. It was 37 degrees outside," says vegetable grower Jan Eifealdt of Sunrise View Farms. It may have been 37 outside, but inside the producer's season-extending high tunnel, it was perfect growing weather for cool season crops.

According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a high tunnel is "a polyethylene covered structure, at least six feet in height, which modifies the climate to create more favorable growing conditions for vegetables and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil within the covered space."

In cold climates like what's found in the Upper Midwest, high tunnels are an increasingly popular way for growers to extend the season and to protect tender crops from the ravages of weather extremes. The tunnels can also offer a way for row crop or livestock farmers to diversify their income stream by growing high value crops in smaller spaces.

Eifealdt erected her 96x24 high tunnel last fall with help from family members and a cost-share program through NRCS that will pay a sizable portion of the tunnel's \$7,000 price tag. The program requires that tunnels be situated on cropland and that crops grown within the tunnel are planted directly into the natural soil—no tables, benches or hydroponic systems are allowed. Windbreaks are also needed to ensure the tunnel's survival in windy and stormy conditions. If conditions are met, the program can cover more than half of the cost of the tunnel—up to \$4,923 per agricultural operation. In exchange, the grower agrees to maintain the structure for four years. Tunnels can be used to grow annual vegetable crops and perennials like asparagus, strawberries and

bramble fruits.

There are cost-share programs both for conventional producers and for growers certified or transitioning to organic production. Krecia Leddy, NRCS District Conservationist for Big Stone County, urges growers interested in the high tunnel program to start thinking about the 2012 season now. "Con-



Jan Eifealdt worked in her high tunnel this spring. By early April, Eifealdt's tunnel was already growing crops of sugar snap peas, two kinds of lettuce, spinach, radishes and onions with a succession of crops planned throughout the season. (photo by Rebecca Terk)

tacting us early can help farmers get through the process and be set up in plenty of time for the next season," she says.

By early April, Eifealdt's tunnel was already growing crops of sugar snap peas, two kinds of lettuce, spinach, radishes and onions with a succession of crops planned throughout the season. "Early tomatoes are the big thing—wouldn't it be nice to have tomatoes by the 4th of July?" Eifealdt asks. "And what about getting peppers to actually ripen in our short season?"

It doesn't seem like an impossible feat inside the tunnel, where on an early spring day it's 80 degrees and the soil temperature is 65. Outside, it's in the 50s with a bone-chilling wind and drizzle.

High tunnel erection and production is not without difficulties—it's a lengthy process to get the tunnel sited and put up, and

"you don't want to try attaching the plastic on a windy day," says Eifealdt.

Snow load can be an issue with the tunnels—producers can remove the cover during the winter months to protect against collapse, but for late fall and early spring season extension, monitoring and removal of snow makes more sense for most growers. Heat build-up is also a factor—tunnels have roll-up sides to allow for heat escape, but keeping a close watch or utilizing electronic monitoring equipment are required to avoid "cooking" the crop in the ground on bright warm days.

Still, the income potential for a producer with the first greens in spring or the first ripe tomatoes at the market during the summer can be significant. The benefits to consumers

are plentiful too, with healthy local foods available for an extended season. Farmers' markets, grocery stores, restaurants and institutions that carry or serve local produce can offer a higher-quality farm-fresh product for much of the year when high tunnel production is an option.

Producers interested in the NRCS high tunnel cost share program can get information on contacting their NRCS District Conservationist in their county by visiting <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>, or calling 202-720-2791. □

Rebecca Terk is Land Stewardship Project's Community Based Food Systems organizer for Big Stone County. She can be contacted at 320-305-9685 or rebeccat@landstewardshipproject.org.

Opportunities

Resources

High tunnel manual

The popular *Minnesota High Tunnel Production Manual for Commercial Growers* has been updated. The University of Minnesota publication includes sections on risk management, structures, the high tunnel environment, cultural practices and crop production, as well as specific information on tomatoes, garlic, crop mixtures and bramble fruits.

A web version is at <http://hightunnels.cfans.umn.edu/2010Manual/2010manual.htm>. A print version of the updated manual is not available, but copies of the 2004 edition are available from the Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association at 763-434-0400. □

Fresh green in the food bank

This spring an innovative program called Fresh Green Buck\$ helped make sure healthy food was not a luxury item

For Hugo, Minn., Community Food Shelf Director Mary Schaefer, eating healthy is an option that should be available to everyone, no matter what their income level. That's why she's excited about Fresh Green Buck\$, an initiative that this spring gave grocery shoppers a chance to put fresh fruits and vegetables straight into the hands of food shelf clients in Minnesota's Washington County year-round. From mid-April to the beginning of June, the test program generated over \$3,000 for the Hugo food shelf alone.

"Three thousand dollars buys a lot of produce. The impact on these people is immediate," says Schaefer. "One hundred percent of the money buys fresh produce."

The Fresh Green Buck\$ money was generated when shoppers tore off a coupon attached to a display posted in the produce section of participating stores. There were three coupon amounts available: \$5, \$10 and \$20. When the shopper checked out, the cashier scanned the coupon and the money was deposited into an account for the partnering food shelf. The food shelf then used the money to buy fresh produce from the store.

"It's pretty simple to use since we already have scanners set up," says Mark Hartmann, manager of the Festival Foods store

in Hugo, which is a Fresh Green Buck\$ partner with Schaefer's food shelf. "And our customers understand this concept of getting fresh produce into the hands of food shelf clients."

Besides Hugo, the program was piloted this spring in three other Washington County communities. The Mahtomedi Area Food Shelf partnered with Festival Foods in White Bear Lake, Valley Outreach in Stillwater partnered with River Market Co-op in Stillwater, and in Forest Lake, Community Helping Hands and Bruce's IGA worked together.

The idea for Fresh Green Buck\$ came out of grassroots discussions Land Stew-

ardship Project members and staff began having in the area last fall. At issue was how to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables in Washington County enough to have a positive impact on residents' health. It was learned that while produce is available to food shelves in the summer, very little is available the rest of the year. Fresh Green Buck\$ was developed as a way for food shelves to provide their clients fresh produce during the non-

• • •
"The impact on these people is immediate."
• • •



Mark Hartmann, manager of the Festival Foods store in Hugo, Minn., says that his shoppers have been very open to the Fresh Green Buck\$ program: "Our customers understand this concept of getting fresh produce into the hands of food shelf clients." Pictured with Hartmann are: (l to r) Mary Schaefer, director of the Hugo Community Food Shelf; Marguerite Rheinberger, host of a local cable TV program; and Ann DeLa Vergne, an LSP organizer. (LSP photo)

growing season.

It is one of three nutrition projects in Washington County funded through a Minnesota Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) grant. The county was interested in funding Fresh Green Buck\$ because it provided an opportunity to improve the nutrition of economically disadvantaged people, says Jean Streeter, Washington County's Public Health Program Director and SHIP coordinator.

"I think this really helps draw attention to the fact that no matter who you are and where you get your food, you deserve to have access to fresh produce," she says.

Schaefer said without Fresh Green

Buck\$, her food shelf could not afford to offer produce to its clients year-round, which is unfortunate, given the importance of having fruits and vegetables as a regular part of one's diet.

"We need to get fresh nutrition into people's diets," she says. "Our fresh fruits and vegetables go out as soon as they come in. People love it."

Being able to provide healthy, fresh produce through food shelves may become even more critical to the overall

health of Washington County residents as more of them turn to food shelves in a down economy. Some area food

shelves are reporting that demand is up as much as 20 percent from a year ago.

Schaefer would like to see an expanded Fresh Green Buck\$ program that, among other things, makes it possible for food shelves to give classes on cooking fresh produce. Fresh Green Buck\$ has the potential to expand to other counties or even the entire state. A natural next step would be a program that buys produce from local farmers during the growing season with money donated through businesses or organizations, she says.

Washington County's Streeter agreed that there is great potential for such a program to expand in terms of where produce is procured from as well as how it's distributed.

"We're interested in continuing it," says Streeter.

Unfortunately, the future of Fresh Green Buck\$ is up in the air. The 2011 Legislature failed to fund SHIP before convening on May 23. Unless it receives funding through a special session, SHIP will be unable to support programs like Fresh Green Buck\$.

"It would be a shame to undercut this program just as it's getting off the ground," says Ann DeLa Vergne, an organizer with LSP's Community Based Food Systems program. It could not only benefit local health but also the local economy." □

For more information on Fresh Green Buck\$ and LSP's other work on community based food systems in Washington County, contact LSP's Dana Jackson at 612-722-6377 or dana@landstewardshipproject.org. Details on Washington County's Living Healthy initiative are at www.livinghealthywc.org.

Community Based Food Systems

Farming on the edge

One community begins a discussion on how food can be produced in the midst of rapid development

On a recent summer night in the upstairs of a library in Washington County, Minn., Dana Jackson launched a meeting by introducing half-a-dozen farmers to the 50 or so people gathered in the room. These farmers, she explained, produce everything from vegetables and berries to honey.

"I'm introducing these farmers to you to show you that food is produced in the area and the point of this meeting is to figure out how we can produce more food in this area," said Jackson, an organizer with the Land Stewardship Project's Community Based Food Systems program.

And during the next two hours it became clear that although Washington County lies on the northeast edge of the Twin Cities and is one of the fastest growing exurbia areas in the country, plenty of food is grown here. As Jackson pointed out, the focus of the meeting, which was co-sponsored by LSP and the Minnesota Food Association (MFA), was to begin the process of figuring out how to bridge the gap between farmers, landowners and communities, in the process helping this area along the St. Croix River live up to its food producing potential in a way that protects the soil, the water and wildlife habitat in the region. If Washington County could take effective steps to make land more

accessible to working farmers, it could serve as a model for other "urban edge" communities in the region, said Glen Hill, Executive Director of MFA.

Hill said that urban edge areas like Washington County are attractive to farmers raising such products as produce because they are so close to major markets. Hill's group has a training program for new immigrant farmers, and he said that many Hmong farmers, for example, like raising food in the area because it allows them to commute from their permanent homes in the Twin Cities.

Great potential

Bud Markhart, a University of Minnesota horticulture professor, said history shows a lot of food can be produced in the Upper Midwest on small parcels of land within metro areas. During World War II, over 40 percent of the country's fresh produce was raised in Victory Gardens.

"History tells us we have that capacity to produce a lot more than we do now," said Markhart, adding that as energy prices climb higher, it may be an advantage economically to produce more food closer to home.

To do that, two basic things are needed: farmers and land. Markhart said there is no shortage of people interested in filling that first requirement. In his 30 years at the U

of M, he's seeing more interest than ever on the part of students who want to farm or be involved with the sustainable, local food movement in some way.

In terms of quantity, on the face of it, having access to farmland in the area should not be a problem either, according to Ann Punk Terwedo, a senior planner for the county, who said about 91,000 acres of deeded farmland is in the county.

However, much of that farmland is considered "wasteland" by developers and local government officials—land that is not worth much unless it's sprouting homes, parking lots or other types of development. This has resulted in inflated land values that are beyond the reach of a typical farmer's pocketbook.

Hill said farmers don't necessarily need to own the land, and there are various lease arrangements available for gaining access to it. But development pressures have made it difficult for farmers to get leases for even small parcels of land that extend much beyond a year.

Joci Tilsen, Assistant Director of MFA, explained that produce farmers often sign up to supply a farmers' market before they get access to land for the upcoming growing season. This can create problems in an area where demand for development acres can ebb and flow. Tilsen told the story of a farm family that had planted a garden on leased land, only to have it destroyed when developers came in.

"They didn't know this was the year that development was going to come in," she said.

Hli Xyooj, an attorney with Farmers' Legal Action Group, said Hmong farmers face the additional barrier of "not looking like local people."

"It can cause tension," she added. "Hmong farmers don't get long term leases."

Farm neighbors

Two people farming in Washington County are Paula Foreman and May Lee. They both rent garden space from David Washburn, who has certified organic land in the area. Foreman is a graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings Program, and Lee has been through MFA's New Immigrant Agriculture training program. Both are commuting to Washburn's land during the growing season.

Foreman, who raises dry edible beans for restaurants and other customers, said she feels fortunate to have a long-term lease and to also have another farmer next to her. She originally considered farming in southeast Minnesota, but that was far from her markets.



Produce farmer May Lee rents her plots from Washington County landowner David Washburn, who is sitting behind her. (LSP photo)

Urban Edge Ag, see page 27...

Building community

Residents of the Washington County, Minn., community of Landfall this spring built garden planter boxes during a workshop to help them launch a community garden.

More than 20 families in the small mobile home park received soil, seeds and plants to get their raised beds started. This is part of the Living Healthy in Washington County initiative the Land Stewardship Project is helping implement. More than half of the Landfall community is Latino, and the community garden has been a great community-building exercise, with participants eating better and learning life skills, says LSP organizer Ann DeLa Vergne.

For more information on LSP's community based food systems work in Washington County, see the article in the No. 1 2011 *Land Stewardship Letter* (page 24), or contact Dana Jackson at 612-722-6377, danaj@landstewardship-project.org.



‘Our Community Kitchen’

Another project resulting from LSP's work with the Living Healthy in Washington County initiative is the “Our Community Kitchen” breakfasts in Stillwater, Minn., this summer. The breakfasts are being offered each Tuesday and Thursday morning (7 a.m. to 10 a.m.) through the month of August at Ascension Episcopal Church. As part of an initiative to increase local residents' access to fresh fruits and vegetables, Our Community Kitchen is seeking to source as much of its food as possible from area farmers. (photos by Ann DeLa Vergne)

...Urban Edge Ag, from page 26

“One of my goals is to farm with a minimal footprint,” said Foreman, adding that farming near other producers is also key. Farming neighbors can share work and equipment, as well as moral support in an area otherwise dominated by non-farming residents who may not understand things like composting and tractor noise.

“It’s hard to do it alone,” said Foreman. “It’s great to have a farming neighbor and it would be great to have leases that encourage that.”

Besides Lee and Foreman, Washburn rents land to 10-15 families involved in a community garden. One idea Washburn has entertained is to have landowners like himself own hoopouses and other infrastructure and renting those facilities to the farmers along with the land.

Jackson said it’s important that expanding agriculture in the county does not come at the price of stewardship.

“It would be a shame if we accomplished our goal of many more farmers, and in the

process hurt our soil,” said Jackson. Both LSP’s Farm Beginnings and MFA’s New Immigrant Agriculture Program emphasize stewardship farming methods.

Township officials talked at the meeting about how they are trying to put in place planning and zoning that protects farmland from development. One way to gain support for these types of pro-farming policies is to show how key local farmers are to the local food economy. For example, one township launched a farmers’ market last year. Other ways to support local farmers is to reduce fees for selling food directly off farms and reducing spraying of weeds in roadsides to help the pollinators so critical to many types of fruit and vegetable production.

“We plan for parks, we plan for roads, why not plan for another important part of our culture, which is agriculture?” Markhart asked.

Numerous ideas were thrown around, including holding workshops that bring together landowners and potential farmer-renters, where, among other things, different leasing arrangements could be discussed. LSP and MFA are currently applying for a

USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant that would research models for setting innovative leasing arrangements.

Terry VanDerPol, Director of LSP’s Community Based Food Systems program, says where she farms in western Minnesota’s corn-soybean-sugar beet region, the crops and scale may be different, but getting beginning farmers and landowners/established farmers together is still a major challenge. And overcoming that challenge requires the same one-on-one interaction, whether it be in Washington County or Chippewa County.

“It’s one deal at a time,” VanDerPol said. “It’s about creating relationships between the right landowner and the right beginning farmer. It takes time.” □

For more information on LSP’s work on community based food systems in the St. Croix River Valley, contact Dana Jackson at 612-722-6377 or danaj@landstewardshipproject.org. Details are also available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/bfbl/index.html.



A Watershed Year Anatomy of the Iowa Floods of 2008

Edited by Cornelia F. Mutel
2010; 250 pages
University of Iowa Press
www.uiowapress.org

Reviewed by Brian DeVore

In June 2008 massive storms hit parts of southern Minnesota and eastern Iowa, sending the Cedar into a destructive frenzy of historical proportions. As it happens, while taking a break from reading *A Watershed Year: Anatomy of the Iowa Floods of 2008* the other day, I ran across the announcement that the main “character” in the book, the Cedar, has just been named one of the nation’s most endangered waterways by the group American Rivers. “Outdated flood management and poor watershed planning” were cited as the reasons for the ranking.

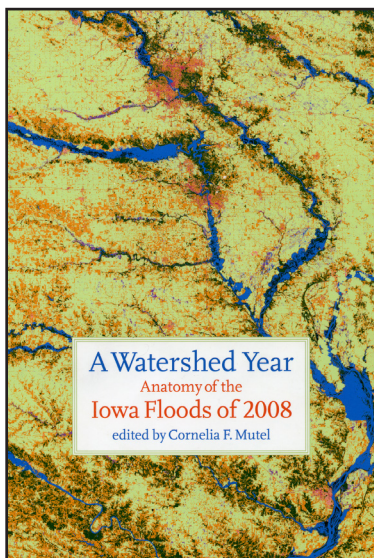
The Cedar has its headwaters in southeast Minnesota’s Dodge County, and it flows through some of the region’s richest farmland before cutting a wide, crescent-shaped swath through a major part of eastern Iowa.

The Cedar has experienced a “500 year flood” twice during the past 15 years—giving that part of Iowa two of its worst river-related catastrophes. When the river went out of its banks in 1993, people thought they’d never see anything like it again in their lifetimes. But in 2008, it did happen again. Virtually all of eastern Iowa was affected, but the area around Iowa City and Cedar Rapids was perhaps the worst. At one point the water flow through the latter city reached 140,000 cubic feet per second, nearly double the earlier record flood flow in 1961.

Homes, businesses and institutions were wrecked and lives ruined. The floods also did a major number on farmland. In fact, part of the damage caused by that flooding can be traced back to farmland, or, more accurately, how it is managed. As Laura Jackson and Dennis Kenney write in *A Watershed Year*: “A drop of rain that falls in Iowa has a 63 percent chance of falling on a corn or soybean field. If we look just at northern Iowa, where farming is most intensive, that probability rises to 88 percent.”

In July, August and September, all those corn and soybean fields provide plenty of ground cover. But the flood occurred in mid-June, when row-cropped fields have yet to develop a good canopy that can protect the land’s surface from torrential rains. Water dropping from the sky can be like a hydraulic hammer on bare ground: the power of raindrops on one acre of land in the Midwest is equal to the energy found in 20 tons of TNT. The root systems of row crops are also not well established in mid-June, leaving fields vulnerable to the scouring effect of flood waters.

Some soil scientists estimate that an erosion rate of around five tons per acre annually is “tolerable,” meaning a farmer can maintain crop productivity as long as the rate doesn’t rise higher. Five tons roughly translates to the thickness of a dime uniformly covering an acre of land. According to *A Watershed Year*, the 2008 floods loosened as much as 50 tons per acre in some



Iowa townships. That’s not chump change.

Let’s face it: when a storm event of that magnitude hits an area, even the best ag conservation practices aren’t going to be enough to prevent some above-normal erosion, as the Iowa Daily Erosion Project research cited in the *Myth Buster* on page 5 shows. We certainly saw that in southeast Minnesota and southwest Wisconsin during the flooding that took place in August 2007. And as I write this, southwest Iowa and northwest Missouri farmland is being ravaged by a Missouri River swollen to proportions no one can remember seeing.

But the theme that emerges from the various essays in *A Watershed Year* is that there are steps we can take to mitigate such damage. Much of Iowa, like southern Minnesota, has had its wetlands, deep-rooted prairies and other natural areas replaced by intense

plantings of row crops that only cover the soil a few months out of the year. That makes the land much less hydrologically resilient, write Jackson and Keeney. They, as well as other contributors to *A Watershed Year*, recommend bringing perennial plant systems back to key parts of the landscape to help slow down and soak up water.

This doesn’t mean establishing a blanket of bluestem from Austin to Iowa City and banning farming in the Cedar River watershed. Great strides have been made in recent years to utilize managed rotational grazing, diverse crop rotations and other sustainable systems to balance agricultural production with environmental protection on working lands.

Returning perennials to key, particularly sensitive portions of agricultural watersheds can produce impressive results. For example, Jackson and Keeney cite an Iowa study (see page 14) where prairie strips covering just 10 percent of a field were able to reduce sediment loss by 95 percent. Modeling research in Minnesota has shown that diversifying portions of intensely row-cropped watersheds in the western and southeastern part of the state can vastly improve water quality, while returning some balance to the hydrological cycle.

It’s also time to examine whether a major land use like agriculture is prepared to meet the challenges of a changing climate. As *A Watershed Year* points out, one new climate wrinkle is that we’re getting our precipitation in a different manner. Nice steady showers that have a chance to soak in without creating damaging runoff are increasingly rare. That means conservation methods and structures such as conservation tillage and terracing may not be able to handle these intense, infrequent storm events. As soil scientist Jerry Hatfield once told me: “We have conservation measures that were built for a climate scenario we no longer have.”

There’s no doubt changes in land use can help make rivers like the Cedar less dangerous. But *A Watershed Year* also points out the limits to what humans can do. In fact, I found the book’s argument that we should stop treating floods as “abnormal events” its most intriguing proposal—and perhaps its toughest to accept.

“Floods are what rivers do,” writes Cornelia Mutel in the book’s introduction. “Floods are one component of the water cycle, a process as ancient and necessary as any of nature’s cycles...Floods become a problem only because we choose to live and place objects of value in a river’s extended channel—that is, in its floodplain.” □

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.

A Hopeful Earth

Faith, Science, & the Message of Jesus

By Sally Dyck & Sarah Ehrman

2010; 141 pages

Abingdon Press

www.abingdonpress.com

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

A *Hopeful Earth: Faith, Science, and the Message of Jesus* is the product of an interesting writing team: the Reverend Sally Dyck, Bishop of the Minnesota Conference of the United Methodist Church, and her niece Sarah Ehrman, who teaches environmental science to high school students.

This book addresses a number of environmental issues from a religious and scientific perspective, including global climate change, rampant consumerism and the importance of local food. Dyck and Ehrman draw on the ideas of a number of noted scholars and activists in the fields

of environment and religion, including Wendell Berry, Ellen Davis and Bill McKibben. Along with its companion teacher's guide, it provides an excellent adult education resource in the area of religion and the environment.

The fifth and sixth

chapters will be of special interest to most Land Stewardship Project members. Chapter five, "Take it to the Water," addresses the increasing scarcity of water, especially in developing areas of the world, and how this scarcity contributes to conflicts in places like Somalia. According to a 2005 United Nations/ World Health Organization study, one in six people in the world lack access to enough clean water to drink, wash, cook or provide sanitary needs. This lack of clean water is the source of many of the world's fatal illnesses and is a leading cause of children's deaths. Dyck and Ehrman challenge us to think not just about our use of this precious resource and how it affects others, but how much we take this resource for granted while others suffer and die due to a lack of it.

Chapter six, "Bless This Food!", explores eating from a number of perspectives—as a social and community experience, an

environmental experience and an ethical experience—challenging us to consider the cost of our fast-eating, cheap food society.

Dyck and Ehrman take a very critical look at the effects of "factory farming" and how the animals we eat, especially poultry, are treated. In describing how North Americans and Europeans do not appreciate the role and impact of agriculture in our lives and eating habits, they quote Aldo Leopold:

"There are two dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace."

The authors also discuss the value of locally owned and locally supplied restaurants, such as Philadelphia's White Dog Café, which is an example of how a well-planned, well-marketed locally owned restaurant can serve the community in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner.

A Hopeful Earth is an excellent book for anyone interested in the role that religion can play in advocating for a more socially and environmentally just world that is sustainable for future generations. It's geared to religious communities, but could be useful for any group interested in addressing environmental issues from a theological/ethical and scientific perspective. □

Land Stewardship Project member and frequent volunteer Dale Hadler has a master's degree in religion and theology from the United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities.

Crow Planet

Essential Wisdom from the Urban Wilderness

By Lyanda Lynn Haupt

2011 (paperback release)

229 pages

Little, Brown & Company

<http://crowplanet.com>

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

The primary purpose of Lyanda Lynn Haupt's new book, *Crow Planet*, is to describe the author's encounter with the "urban wilderness" through her observations of the common

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We are challenged to consider the cost of our fast-eating, cheap-food society.
• • •

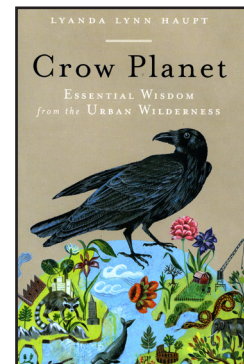
crow, a bird that is very adaptable to life in the big city. But this book's secondary theme is to show the value of open landscape for people and animals living in an urban environment.

Haupt's fascination with birds is no surprise, given that she is a former educator for Seattle Audubon as well as a former raptor rehabilitation worker and sea bird researcher for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Perhaps what's more surprising is her focus on the "urban crow"—a lively black bird that generates a wide range of human emotions from fascination to disgust. She describes the various locations where she observes the crow in her home city of Seattle. These locations include parks, nature reserves and community gardens, as well as her own backyard garden. Haupt describes how the urban crow has been able to survive in an environment that on the surface appears to be hostile to most forms of wildlife.

The crow has been able to survive because it has adapted to this environment not just by learning to scrounge in human garbage dumps, but by making use of limited open space—whether it be a small, secluded space in a backyard or the trees of an urban forest preserve. In fact, the crow has used these resources so well that its numbers are increasing, while urban development threatens other forms of wildlife.

Haupt's description of the crow's ability to thrive in the urban environment relays an important message about how our cities can provide some surprising resources long thought exclusive to rural or "wild areas." These resources include gardens big enough to make a serious dent in the demand for local food.

Although this book may not be of much interest to rural Land Stewardship Project members, it will certainly open the eyes of our urban members to the value open space such as gardens afford to the city. This is an especially important message for those who value nature and appreciate its positive impact on the emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of all people. *Crow Planet* is a worthwhile short read for anyone interested in finding the natural world in the city environment. □





LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Membership Update

Joining or renewing?

Consider becoming a sustaining Land Stewardship Project member. As a monthly pledger, you are helping build a food and farming system that cares for people and the land, and your LSP membership is current as long as your pledge is active (no more renewal reminders).

If you have questions about the status of your membership or would like to set up a monthly or quarterly pledge, contact Abby Liesch at 612-722-6377 or aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Volunteer for LSP

Donating your time to LSP is a very valuable gift. There is a lot going on in the coming months and we could use your help. Volunteering is a great way to stay connected to the work LSP is doing to build community based food systems, help new farmers get started and shape policies that support family farms and a healthy environment.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact:

→ **Lewiston, Minn.**— Karen Benson, 507-523-3366, lpse@landstewardshipproject.org.

→ **Montevideo, Minn.**— Tom Taylor, 320-269-2105, ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org.

→ **Twin Cities**— Abby Liesch, 612-722-6377, aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Employer matching grants: Ask today

Many employers offer matching donations programs to their employees. These programs will often match donations made by employees to nonprofit organizations like the Land Stewardship Project. Ask your employer if they have such a program and if your LSP donation could be matched.



Without volunteers like Kaye Huelskamp, shown here helping out at the southeast Minnesota cookout-celebration July 10 (see pages 6-7), it wouldn't be possible for LSP to put on such successful community events. (LSP photo)

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 work-place 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.



MINNESOTA Environmental Fund

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 more information, contact LSP's Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377, or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

Continue your land's legacy by donating it to LSP

The Land Stewardship Project has launched an initiative that allows property owners to continue their family's legacy on the land while supporting the work of the organization as well as beginning farmers. This is a gifting opportunity for people who have a vital connection to a piece of land and want to maintain that legacy while supporting the work of LSP.

"When people have dedicated themselves to a given piece of land, their investment of stewardship transcends any given value," says Dan Guenther, an Osceola, Wis., farmer and former LSP board member.

Through *Land & Stewardship Legacies*, LSP can accept gifts of farmland and other real estate. The *Stewardship Legacy* secures financial resources to support the work of LSP now and into the future. The *Land Legacy* is distinguished by accepting gifts of suitable parcels of farmland to serve as incubators for beginning farmers, or

sold outright to promising graduates of LSP's Farm Beginnings program. For details, check the *Land & Stewardship Legacies* web page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-join-us-land-legacies.html, or call LSP Executive Director George Boody at 612-722-6377.

LSP is partnering with the Minnesota Real Estate Foundation, which has excellent resources and guidelines for people who are interested in exploring various avenues for

donating real estate to charities. The *Land Stewardship Letter* is featuring an ongoing "Did you know..." series from the Real Estate Foundation that highlights ways of making charitable real estate gifting a satisfying, sustainable experience. Below is the latest installment in this series:

Did you know...

Donors can contribute real estate to a charitable remainder trust and take back a stream of income for life. Donors receive an immediate tax deduction for a portion of the fair market value of the property and are not taxed on the gain when the property is sold. This can be an ideal solution for a donor wanting to benefit a charity but needing a retirement income from the value of the property. Real estate is an under-utilized charitable gifting vehicle which offers significant tax benefits.



LSP blog

The Land Stewardship Project writes weekly on food and sustainable agriculture issues for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership's *Looncommons* blog.

To view the blog, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org and click on the **Blog** link under the **LSP on the Web** heading. You can sign up for an RSS feed at <http://looncommons.org/category/food-and-sustainable-agriculture/feed>. □

Listen in on the voices of the land

For the past few years, the Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast has been showcasing the voices of the farmers, consumers, scientists and activists who are working to create a more sustainable food and farming system. We now have over 100 episodes online and have organized our podcasts by category.

The categories are: Ag and Food Policy
◆ Beginning Farmers/Farm Beginnings

◆ Culture and Agriculture ◆ Global Ag
◆ Grassroots People Power ◆ Innovative Farming and Farmers ◆ Innovative Marketing ◆ Local Food Systems ◆ Multifunctional Farming ◆ Stewardship Farming/Farming with the Wild.

To listen in, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org, and click on the **Podcast** link under the **LSP on the Web** heading. □

Get current with

LIVE  WIRE

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* to get monthly e-mail updates from the Land Stewardship Project. To subscribe, call 612-722-6377 or e-mail aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org and put in the subject line, "Subscribe LIVE-WIRE." You can also sign up at www.landstewardshipproject.org. □

LSP on the social media circuit

LSP is now in more places online. Connect with LSP through *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter*.

Direct any questions about



LSP's social media initiatives to Abby Liesch at 612-722-6377 or aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org. □



In memory...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received gifts made in the name of loved ones over the past few months.

In memory of Edward F. Bouska, "who was a steward of the land, a farmer and a peacemaker."

◆ Carol Bouska

In memory of Wilfred "Fritz" Kraft, a beloved grandfather and farmer.

◆ Tara Kraft

In memory of the premature birth of triplet grandsons: Edward Johnson Bertrand, Peter Johnson Bertrand and Harry Johnson Bertrand.

◆ Judith Bertrand

In memory of Terry Gompert


◆ Connie Gompert



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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **AUG. 13—6th Annual Minn. Garlic Festival**, Hutchinson, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org; 320-543-3394
→ **AUG. 14—Urban Chicken workshop**, Minnehaha Park, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: <http://slowfoodmn.org/events.html>
→ **AUG. 15—Profits from Perennials Eco-Sun Prairie Farm Bus Tour**, Brookings, S. Dak. (see page 15)
→ **AUG. 17—“In Her Boots: Sustainable Farming for Women, By Women,”** Moonstone Farm, Montevideo, Minn.; www.mosesorganic.org/events.html; 715-778-5775
→ **AUG. 18—USDA North Central Soil Conservation Research Lab Swan Lake Field Day**, featuring LSP's George Boody, Morris, Minn.; Contact: 320-589-3411; Beth.Burmeister@ars.usda.com
→ **AUG. 18—Field day on Utilizing Sustainable Crop Production Principles to Establish Perennial Grasses for Bio-energy Production**, Prairie Horizon Farm, Starbuck, Minn. (see page 15)
→ **AUG. 18—“Local Foods Night” at Hallie Q. Brown Food Shelf**, St. Paul, Minn.; Contact: www.hallieqbrown.org; 651-224-4601
→ **AUG. 23—South Dakota State University SE Research Station Organic Plot Tours**, Beresford, S. Dak.; Contact: www.npsas.org/events.html; 701-883-4304
→ **AUG. 28—LSP Farm Dreams course**, Twin Cities (see page 16)
→ **AUG. 28—Minnesota Cooks Event at Minnesota State Fair**, St. Paul, Minn.; Contact: www.minnesotacooks.net; 651-639-1223
→ **SEPT. 6—Great River Graziers Pasture Walk & Facilitated Discussion Group on Gearing up for Fall Grazing**, Canton, Minn.;

Contact: Vance & Bonnie Haugen, 507-743-8326; www.mosesorganic.org/attachments/events/10.18PastureWalkSchedule.pdf
→ **SEPT. 9-10—Chippewa 10% Project “Opportunities for Profits from Livestock & Grazing”** with grazing expert Greg Judy, Alexandria, Minn. (see page 15)
→ **SEPT. 10—Harvest Festival & Energy Fair**, Bayfront Park, Duluth, Minn.; Contact: www.lssfa.org; 715-209-0370
→ **SEPT. 10—Farm Succession, Niche Pork & Energy**, Frantzen Farm, Elma, Iowa; Contact: 515-232-5661; <http://practicalfarmers.org/events/field-days.html>
→ **SEPT. 11—Dinner in the Garden at**

Farm Beginnings spots still available

There are still a few spots available in the 2011-2012 session of LSP's Farm Beginnings course. See page 16 for details.

Whitewater Gardens, Altura, Minn.; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, 507-523-3366; caroline@landstewardshipproject.org
→ **SEPT. 10-12—Growing Power's National-International Urban & Small Farm Conference**, Milwaukee, Wis.; Contact: www.growingpowerfarmconference.org; 414-527-1546
→ **SEPT. 17—Fall Grazing-Winter Preparation Farm Beginnings Field Day**, Morris, Minn. (see page 19)
→ **SEPT. 25—Fall Grazing-Winter Preparation Farm Beginnings Field Day**, La Crescent, Minn. (see page 19)
→ **SEPT. 25—Big River-Slow Food** (a benefit for immigrant farmers & Minnesota Food Assoc. & Slow Food Minn.), Big River Farms, Marine on St. Croix, Minn.; Contact: <http://slowfoodmn.org/events.html>
→ **OCT. 29—LSP Farm Beginnings**

course in Hutchinson, Minn., begins (see page 16)

→ **NOV. 3-5—National Small Farm Trade Show & Conference**, Columbia, Mo.; Contact: 800-633-2535; www.smallfarmtoday.com/tradeshow/
→ **NOV. 5—LSP Farm Beginnings course in Rochester, Minn., begins** (see page 16)
→ **DEC. 9-10—“Fearless Farm Finances Workshop,”** La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org/farmfinances.html; 715-778-5775
→ **JAN. 13-14—Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference** (details to be announced); <http://practicalfarmers.org>; 515-232-5661
→ **JAN. 24—2012 session of Minnesota Legislature convenes**; Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 612-722-6377; bking@landstewardshipproject.org
→ **JAN. 27-28—Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society Winter Conference**, Aberdeen, S. Dak.; Contact: www.npsas.org; 701-883-4304
→ **FEB. 17-18—Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota 21st Annual Conference**, College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org/conference; 763-260-0209
→ **FEB. 23-25—23rd Annual MOSES Organic Farming Conference**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org; 715-778-5775
→ **MARCH 3—Last session of Hutchinson, Minn., Farm Beginnings class** (see page 16)
→ **MARCH 10—Last session of Rochester, Minn., Farm Beginnings class** (see page 16)

Check www.landstewardshipproject.org for the latest on upcoming events.