

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

32 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

Volume 32

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—Petition & Poll Show Resistance to Frac Sand Mining—

—Funding for Forever Green—

— An Anti-Democratic Free Trade Deal—

—Hatching Farmers 1 Acre at a Time —

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—The Big Meat Robbery, Urban Farm, Pocket Prairie—



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LSP's Long Range Plan: 2014-2019

How & Why this Key Document was Developed

By George Boody & Juliet Tomkins

This spring the Land Stewardship Project released its latest *Long Range Plan*. This plan, which will guide our work for the next five years, is the result of asking a simple, straightforward question: "How can LSP be most effective, powerful and resilient as an organization?" Asking that question on a regular basis is important to LSP, a grassroots, mission- and member-driven nonprofit organization founded in 1982. For over 30 years we have functioned as a powerful base for positive change. With LSP's current membership of more than 3,400 farm, rural and urban households, our work has a broad and deep impact, from new farmer training and local organizing, to federal policy and community-based food systems development.

We are proud of the many accomplishments we have made over the years. However, there are still major challenges that LSP must continue to address as we work toward our mission of land stewardship, a sustainable agriculture and healthy communities. This will require reforming the dysfunctional corporate-controlled food system that focuses on maximizing profits for shareholders and wealthy individuals with little regard for the impacts on our environmental or human community. Make no mistake: powerful forces profit greatly from the current food and farming system, and they will not give up their power without a fight.

But our past successes give us confidence that we and our allies can bring about transformative changes to the food and farm system. The other thing that gives us the courage to take on these major challenges is

our members. Over the years, LSP member-leaders have helped us set goals while joining in the work needed to attain them.

That's why when we began the process of developing this work plan for the next five years, we turned to that membership. First, LSP's board of directors appointed a



LSP members and staff gathered last fall at one of two Leadership Assembly meetings to discuss what should be part of the organization's Long Range Plan. One question helped guide the discussions: "How can LSP be most effective, powerful and resilient as an organization?" (LSP Photo)

10-person *Long Range Plan* committee of member-leaders. This committee, in turn, set up a process which invited input from all of LSP's membership to help create the final draft of the *Long Range Plan*.

The committee launched the process by asking all of our members, via a survey, the following questions:

- 1) What should we be doing to best advance the changes towards stewardship and justice on the land and in our food and farming system that we seek?
- 2) What should our goals be for membership development and growth?

- 3) Five years from now, what will we want to have accomplished?

These same questions were discussed at two Leadership Assembly meetings—gatherings of member-leaders serving on program steering committees or the board—held in the fall of 2013. In addition, staff in our three offices grappled with these questions during special meetings.

Throughout this process, our members made it clear they were overwhelmingly positive about the work LSP has already done. They also provided a number of good ideas and suggestions for improvement or change as we move forward.

The result of all this is the *Land Stewardship Project Long Range Plan 2014-2019*. We are very excited to present this plan, and even more importantly, to begin executing it. True to LSP's reputation for combining forward thinking with practical, nuts-and-bolts problem solving, we have laid out in this plan our long range goals, the resources we have for reaching them and how we will go about utilizing these resources to do the work that is so important to developing a more sustainable and just food and farming system.

We hope this *Long Range Plan* will make clear that of all the resources at LSP's disposal, none are more critical than a committed membership base that is willing to ask, and answer, the hard questions. □

George Boody is the Executive Director of the Land Stewardship Project. Juliet Tomkins is the Chair of LSP's board of directors. They were both members of the Long Range Plan committee, which also included Abby Liesch, Dennis Johnson, Mark Schultz, Alan Hoffman, Heidi Morlock, Chad Kingstrom, Rebecca White and Karen Stettler.

More on the Long Range Plan

See pages 4-5 for more on the Land Stewardship Project's new *Long Range Plan*. Information on obtaining a copy is on page 5.

The LSP Way: A Creative Tension

By Mark Schultz

As the Land Stewardship Project's *Long Range Plan* committee moved forward with our work this past fall and winter (see page 3)—reading our members' responses to the long-range plan survey, digging into discussions with LSP member-leaders in two half-day meetings, and working together to put our plan into words—an observation that surfaced time and again was that LSP has a way of working that people find effective, rewarding, balanced and unique. A few members called it “the LSP way.”

At the core of it, of course, are people and the land. “Keeping the land and people together” is one of LSP's oldest and most accurate descriptions. And in order to achieve stewardship, justice and prosper-

ity in our communities, LSP understands that we must both educate and build power to make change, so that the land is well-cared for, that wealth generated is retained by those who create it by their labor and management, and that we build a food and agriculture system that is just.

In recent years, I've begun to understand

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our work as a handful of paired strategies, or approaches. The “tandem pairs” I describe in the box below have become clear as key elements in LSP's approach to societal change.

As you look through them, understand that few organizations actually approach their work this way, and instead often choose one of the approaches over the other. It is also true that there is a tension between each tandem pair—they are not the same thing. So the skills of listening, clarification, accountability and strategic sense need to be strong for the work to be effective over the long-term.

For these pairs, the hard part is doing both well, in relationship with the other. To some degree, we as an organization—all of us—have figured that out. That's “the LSP way.” □

Mark Schultz is LSP's Associate Director, Director of Programs and Policy Program Director.

→ Mission Driven & Member-Driven

The Land Stewardship Project is both **mission-driven and member-driven**. Our mission gives us guidance every day—so does the lived experience, needs and aspirations of LSP's members.

→ Local or Personal & Structural or Systemic

We work hard in the sphere of local, specific and even personal action. Examples include helping a beginning farmer figure out a farm plan, organizing with local residents to stop a factory farm or frac sand mine, and talking through a conservation practice with a farmer. But equally important is our work to win systemic or structural change by, among other things, passing public policy that rewards conservation on working farmland, creating multi-state collaboratives to expand beginning farmer training and addressing structural racism in the food and agriculture system. For LSP, investing in both of these two “ends” of the work—the **local or personal, and the structural or systemic**—makes us practical, effective, cutting-edge and powerful.

Working in Tandem

→ Fighting the Worst & Promoting the Best

LSP fights some of the worst ideas and developments that would damage the land, our communities and our democracy—like corporate-backed factory farms, strip-mining of sand for hydraulic fracturing, and an excessive and unjust set of crop subsidies that consolidate land ownership while expanding industrial agriculture. At the same time, we know that we must work to create and build what we want and need—new family farms, new ways of farming, new local and regional food systems and new public policies. By **fighting the worst and promoting the best**, we are stronger, and accomplish more towards our mission and long-term goals.

→ Taking Action & Telling the Story

Through reflection, evaluation and writing, LSP strives to improve our work and to share what we learn with others. It is a constant and highly valued part of LSP's work, whether it is through the highly-regarded *Land Stewardship Letter*, commentaries and articles, social media or the evaluation at the end of a meeting. And we also know that we must act, do, create and build. **We take action, and we tell the story.**

→ A Rural & Urban Membership Base

LSP unites a **strong rural/small town base with urban and suburban members**. We emphasize the need for farmers and other rural people to be a central element of LSP's power base, and a source of knowledge and solutions. We know that urban and suburban communities bring important ideas and solutions as well. United by values and vision, LSP members are able to influence decision makers, steward the land and create the communities we want and need, together.

Executive Summary

In 2014, the Land Stewardship Project formulated a *Long Range Plan* to guide our work for the next five years (see pages 3-4). It was developed after consulting with members, staff and our board of directors. All had a common message: the health of the land and water is a gift we should give to generations to come. All are aware that the corporate-controlled food and farming system violates their right to healthy food and values of democracy and justice, and want to change it. The *Long Range Plan* describes how LSP will educate and organize for positive, transformational change.

LSP's Values Underlie the Plan

Values are: Stewardship of farmland; justice for people working in and affected by the food system; democracy (meaning that people hold and exercise the power to govern); and health for people, the land, air and water, which are all interdependent.

Long Range Goals Guide the Plan

1. Prosperous, Diversified & Resilient Family Farms Managing for High Levels of Stewardship

→ We will have inspired a broad public discussion about restoring the health of soil ecosystems and significantly increased the amount of farmland protected by crop and livestock systems that maintain perennial plants and continuous living cover.

2. Land Reform in the Upper Midwest

→ We will have more people farming on diverse, small- and mid-sized farms with affordable and secure access to farmland through the development of a long-term vision, collective grassroots action and decision-making.

3. Healthy Communities

→ We will have more reliance on community-based economies where people are able to put their values into play and are able to make a good living from their work.

4. An Alternative Narrative About Food & Farming

→ We will have exposed the adverse impact of the dominant corporate-controlled narrative and elevated a narrative based on people's values of stewardship, justice, democracy and health—enabling the redirection of resources to sustainable food and agriculture systems.

Organized to Achieve Change via Program Areas

LSP's program areas are a major tool for putting our values into action:

- **The Policy and Organizing Program** organizes growing numbers of people to build the power to change public and corporate policies and practices in order to help family farms and rural communities to thrive, support stewardship of the land, and move us all towards a sustainable food and agriculture system.
- **The Farm Beginnings Program** works to put more farmers on the land through training and by organizing community members and beginning farmers.
- **The Community Based Food Systems Program** advances local and regional food systems in accordance with our values and addresses inequities in the food system.
- **The Membership and Individual Giving Program** communicates regularly with LSP's growing number of members and constituents through updates, surveys, letters, personal

visits, social media, telephone banks and more.

- **Operational Areas** support the programs through financial management, administration and communications.

LSP's Strategic Initiatives

Strategic Initiatives define major changes in a five- to 10-year period that position us for even larger transformation of our food and agriculture system towards stewardship and justice on the land:

- **Landscape Stewardship in the Chippewa River and Root River watersheds**
 - LSP and partners are tying stewardship in farm fields to the health of a larger landscape, the food produced and opportunities for beginning farmers.
- **Food and Ag Justice Campaign**
 - LSP is building a close collaboration with rural membership organizations in 10 states across the Midwest and West to build a larger power base for significant change in the U.S. food and farming system.
- **Long-Term, Secure, Affordable Access to Land for Farming**
 - LSP is organizing beginning and experienced family farmers to address concentration of land ownership driven, in-part, by public and corporate policies. We are working to achieve secure and affordable land ownership.
- **Growing LSP's Power to Make Change**
 - LSP's power to advance positive change comes from our members. As we grow our membership and continue education and organizing, our work will be further advanced.
- **Farmers Growing Farmers**
 - It is clear that we are going to need more successful, beginning farmers who want to grow food using high levels of stewardship. We will assist more people to be actively engaged in farming and develop farmer-leaders with partners here and in other states.
- **Healthcare for All**
 - To address the serious obstacles family farmers, beginning farmers and others in rural and urban communities face when it comes to obtaining good, affordable healthcare, LSP supports a publicly run health insurance system in Minnesota.
- **Protecting Southeastern Minnesota from Frac Sand Mining**
 - LSP is leading organizing to stop harmful frac sand mining developments and advance sensible policies on the local and state level.
- **Advance a Statewide Soil Health Initiative**
 - LSP will engage more mid-sized farmers to advance farming systems that build soil health and lead to increased resilience and profitability.
- **Capacity Building**
 - To achieve these changes will require enhanced capacity to do the work, including an active membership base, staff and board, as well as improved administration and information technology and growth of communications. □

Read the *Long Range Plan*

A full copy of the *Land Stewardship Project Long Range Plan: 2014-2019* is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org or by contacting our offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377).

Myth Buster Box

An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

→ Myth: Corn Residue is a Waste Product

→ Fact:

This could be the year of crop residue biofuels. Up until now, the biofuels industry has focused on using the kernel of the corn to distill ethanol. But one alternative biofuel source that has captured attention recently is stover—the stalks, shucks, etc., left in the field after corn is harvested. At first blush it appears to be the ultimate in recycling and making sustainable use of every last resource. After all, crop residue is unapologetically called “trash” by tillage experts and is considered a nuisance when putting in the following year’s crop.

Using such material to produce fuel is feasible because of advances in cellulosic energy production. This relies on lignocellulose, a structural material that comprises much of the mass of plants. Popular sources of cellulosic feedstock are switchgrass, woodchips and the byproducts of lawn and tree maintenance. Residue left over after the harvest of wheat, rice and even sugar cane can also be used to produce energy. But in the Midwest, the number one potential source of cellulosic fuel production is corn stover.

For the most part, cellulosic fuel production is not being done on a large-scale commercial basis. However, several major firms are investing heavily in the technology and are saying 2014 could be a breakthrough year for producing energy from crop residues. For example, DuPont and POET-DSM are both launching major corn stover ethanol plants in Iowa, and some firms have already contracted with farmers to deliver baled stover. The firms invested in crop residue energy production are promising their ethanol process will result in 80 percent to 90 percent fewer greenhouse gas emissions when compared to conventional gasoline derived from fossil fuels.

One study by the U.S. Department of Energy and the USDA estimates that crop

residues could provide one-third of ethanol’s needs by the middle of this century. Fulfilling such a role would require 60 percent to 75 percent of crop residue to be recovered, says the USDA study. That will require a major tooling up of the process, and it’s one reason there have been serious proposals, including in Minnesota, to provide government subsidies for harvesting crop residue for biofuels.

But crop residue such as corn stover is far from being a waste product, as far as the soil is concerned. It turns out it plays a major role in cutting erosion, building soil organic matter and helping fields store carbon.



Photo by Mark Hirsch, www.markhirschphoto.com

The importance of that latter service was highlighted in a paper published this spring in the journal *Nature Climate Change*. The University of Nebraska study found that removing corn residue could result in such a carbon deficit in fields that it would produce a net increase in greenhouse gas emissions over five years when

compared to conventionally-produced gasoline. Crop residue stores carbon dioxide, and it also creates a better environment for the soil itself to sequester greenhouse gases by building organic matter and protecting the surface.

Some scientists and biofuel industry experts fault the Nebraska study for the amount of residue removal its authors assumed would take place in a typical cornfield—they looked at removal rates as high as 75 percent or 100 percent. Companies like POET-DSM are asking farmers to harvest no more than 25 percent of what’s available. But it’s unclear what if any enforcement of residue removal rates or conservation tillage practices biofuel firms will impose. Anecdotal reports out of Iowa indicate well more than half of the residue in some fields is being removed.

What is clear is that removing more than 25 percent of a field’s corn stover can cause significant harm to soil biology. A 2009 paper published in the *Soil Science Society of America Journal* found that removing more

than a quarter of a field’s stover had negative impacts on structural stability and soil fertility.

And replacing that fertility with petroleum-based nutrients like nitrogen fertilizer may help produce a bumper crop in the short term, but it won’t build the kind of soil health needed to sequester carbon in the long term. Research out of the Morrow Plots in Illinois shows that nitrogen fertilizer speeds up the decomposition process in soil, resulting in a net decrease of soil organic carbon.

This sets up a vicious cycle: more nitrogen means less carbon in the soil, which reduces biological activity, requiring more nitrogen to maintain yields. And all that fertilizer requires energy to produce. So when one considers that removing residue produces more greenhouse gases directly by impoverishing our soil on the spot as well as indirectly (requiring more production of synthetic fertilizer), it’s clear that stover is not something to be taken lightly. But then, many farmers already know that: a 2011 survey of Iowa producers showed only 17 percent were interested in selling stover. Environmental concerns topped the list of why they were hesitant to put “field trash” on the market.

→ More Information

- The “Biofuels from crop residue can reduce soil carbon and increase CO₂ emissions” study is on the *Nature Climate Change* website: www.nature.com/nclimate/index.html.

- A summary of the “Corn Stover Removal for Expanded Uses Reduces Fertility and Structural Stability” study is on the *Soil Science Society of America Journal* website: www.soils.org/publications/ssaj.

- The Morrow Plot “Myth of Nitrogen Fertilization for Soil Carbon Sequestration” study is on the *Journal of Environmental Quality* website: www.agronomy.org/publications/jeq.

→ More Myth Busters

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



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LSP News

LSP Staff, Board Changes

Nuessmeier Joins Board; Kesti, O'Connor, Rusch on Staff

Tom Nuessmeier is the newest member of the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors. He operates an organic crop and livestock farm near Saint Peter, Minn., and has served on LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee since 2009. In that capacity he has participated in the development and advancement of organizational priorities on federal policy. His contributions have included meetings and discussions with Congressional leaders both in Minnesota and in Washington, D.C., as well as collaborative work with allied groups. Nuessmeier has also served as a media contact and expert on conservation policy and numerous other issues.



Tom Nuessmeier

Dylan Bradford Kesti is now working as an urban agriculture organizer for LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program. Kesti has a bachelor's degree in global politics from the College of Saint Scholastica and a master's degree from American University in environmental policy with a focus on food justice. He has worked as a campaign coordinator for Minneapolis Energy Options and an instructor for the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs. In 2012 Kesti worked with LSP to research and develop a white paper on increasing access to land for beginning farmers through tax credits. In his new position, he is focusing on LSP's work to develop equity in the food system and in particular is doing organizing work focused on developing sustainable food systems at Hope Community in Minneapolis.



Dylan Bradford Kesti

Kaitlyn O'Connor has joined the Land

Stewardship Project's Policy and Organizing Program. She recently served an internship with LSP, during which she coordinated the Citizens' Frac Sand Summit and frac sand petition drive (see page 10). She also coordinated LSP's 2014 Family Farm Breakfast and Lobby Day at the Capitol on April 8 (see page 8). O'Connor has a bachelor's degree in biology/environmental science from Winona State University and has worked as an integrated pest management specialist at an orchard, a teaching assistant and a Naturalist Corps intern.



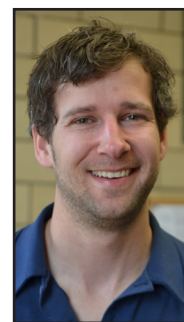
Kaitlyn O'Connor

In her new position, O'Connor will be an organizer focusing on federal policy issues. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or koconnor@landstewardshipproject.org.

Mark Rusch is working with LSP's Membership Program. Rusch has a bachelor's degree in English from Creighton University. He has worked as a manager on

duty for Seward Community Co-op and as a farm volunteer at White Violet Center for Eco-Justice in Indiana. Rusch has also volunteered for LSP.

In his new position, he is helping update the organization's database and assisting with new member recruitment and membership renewals.



Mark Rusch

Matt Grimley is serving a Farm Beginnings journalism internship with LSP this summer.

Grimley has a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in biology from the University of Minnesota, where he wrote a column for the *Minnesota Daily* newspaper. He has also worked as an associate editor for the *Appalachian Voice*, a sustainability educator in Vancouver, Wash., and a researcher and writer for the U of M Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program.

During his LSP internship, Grimley is writing profiles of farm families in various stages of transitioning their operations and land onto the next generation. For more information on LSP's work in this area, see the *Farm Transitions Toolkit* at www.landstewardshipproject.org, or contact LSP's Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366, stettler@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Matt Grimley

Earth Day Breakfast at the Red Stag

The Red Stag Supperclub in Northeast Minneapolis hosted a special Earth Day Breakfast for the Land Stewardship Project on April 22. The event featured local, sustainably-produced food and numerous presentations, including Rebecca White describing the Women Caring for the Land Program (see page 22), farmer Koby Jeschkeit-Hagen speaking about stewardship of soil health on urban and rural farms in relation to sustainable food and Minneapolis city council member Alondra Cano addressing food and environmental justice in our communities.

In celebration of Earth Day, the restaurant donated proceeds from the breakfast to support LSP's work. Thanks to the Red Stag for generously hosting this event. (LSP Photo)





LAND
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LSP News

LSP Members Share Food, Ideas with Lawmakers at Family Farm Breakfast

By Kaitlyn O'Connor

The Land Stewardship Project's 9th Annual Family Farm Breakfast and Lobby Day at the Capitol provided a prime opportunity for citizens from across the state to discuss environmental and family farm issues with their Minnesota legislators while enjoying a meal of locally raised food. Over 225 citizens and lawmakers turned out for the event on April 8 at Christ Lutheran Church on Capitol Hill.

As a first time breakfast attendee, it was great to see folks from around the state chatting with their Senators, Representatives and various government officials as they enjoyed scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, oatmeal and an assortment of pastries and beverages. The breakfast was delicious, thanks to the members—farmers and business owners—who provided the food for the event. Perhaps my favorite moments of the morning were witnessing our members discussing those issues they feel passionate about, not only with the legislators

representing them in state government, but also with the heads of the agencies given the charge of preserving and protecting Minnesota's resources and communities.

To start the breakfast program, David Rosmann, LSP Lands Solutions Outreach Specialist in southeastern Minnesota's Root River watershed, explained the ecological importance of cover crops and perennial

vegetation, and the role farmers can play in improving water quality, reducing soil erosion and providing wildlife habitat. LSP farmer-member Carmen Fernholz spoke about one of LSP's top priorities for the 2014 legislative session, the need for public investment in the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative. This program is developing cover crops and perennial forages that help farmers protect the soil's surface 12 months out of the year (*see page 12*).

Later on during the breakfast, Marilyn Frauenkron Bayer, a lifelong resident of southeastern Minnesota's Houston County, gave a captivating speech on the threat the frac sand industry poses to the idyllic countryside of the Driftless Region, and the petition drive calling on Governor Mark Dayton to enact a two-year moratorium in southeast-

Breakfast, see page 9...



Over 225 citizens and lawmakers turned out for the 9th Annual Family Farm Breakfast at Christ Lutheran Church on Capitol Hill. (LSP Photo)

Thanks!

The Land Stewardship Project would like to thank all the volunteers who helped made the 9th Annual Family Farm Breakfast and Lobby Day at the Capitol a success, as well as the businesses and organizations who chose to support our work by placing an advertisement in the event program:

A Couple of Gurus ♦ Albert Lea Seed House ♦ Atlantic Press ♦ Bennett Office Technologies ♦ Birchwood Café ♦ Blue Heron Coffee House ♦ Bryant Lake Bowl/Red Stag/Barbettes ♦ Burt's Meats ♦ Cedar Summit Farm ♦ Chow Girls ♦ Clancey's Meats & Fish ♦ Clean Up the River Environment ♦ Common Good Books ♦ Common Roots Café ♦ CSP & Associates ♦ Eastside Food Co-op ♦ Equal Exchange ♦ Eureka Recycling ♦ Falk's Seed Farm ♦ Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. ♦ Foresight Bank ♦ French Meadow Bakery ♦ Hampden Park Co-op ♦ Kinstone Academy of Applied Permaculture ♦ Lakewinds Natural Foods ♦ Ledebuhr Meat Processing, Inc. ♦ Linden Hills Co-op ♦ Lorentz Meats and Deli ♦ May Day Café ♦ Midwest Bio-Ag ♦ Minnesota Community Solar ♦ Minnesota Farmers Union ♦ Mississippi Market Natural Foods Co-op ♦ National Farmers Organization ♦ Niman Ranch ♦ Organic Valley ♦ Organizing Apprenticeship Project ♦ Peace Coffee ♦ People's Food Co-op ♦ Prairie Moon Nursery ♦ Room 34 ♦ Roscoe Printers ♦ Seven Corners Printing ♦ Seward Co-op Grocery and Deli ♦ Spoonriver ♦ TakeAction Minnesota ♦ The Book House in Dinky Town ♦ The Databank ♦ The Matchbox Coffee Shop ♦ The Wedge Co-op ♦ Thousand Hills Cattle Company ♦ Triangle Park Creative ♦ Trotter's Café and Bakery ♦ Valley Natural Foods ♦ Velasquez Family Coffee

ern Minnesota, enforce strong air and water quality regulations statewide, and promote community based renewable energy systems (see pages 10-11). After the breakfast, close to 30 LSP members crossed the street (see photo on page 12) to the state capitol to lobby for the Forever Green Initiative and inform their legislators about the frac sand petition drive. □

LSP organizer Kaitlyn O'Connor coordinated the Family Farm Breakfast and Lobby Day at the Capitol. She is at 612-722-6377 or koconnor@landstewardshipproject.org.

Get Current With LSP's

LIVE WIRE

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

LSP Cookout Aug. 1 in Mpls.

The Land Stewardship Project's Twin Cities office will be holding its 13th Annual Cookout and Silent Auction Friday, Aug. 1, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. The event will be held in the yard at LSP's office in the Powderhorn Park Neighborhood of South Minneapolis (821 E. 35th Street).

During a short program, Minnesota U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison will speak about fast track trade authority and the Trans-Pacific

Partnership (see page 15). Featured musical guests will be the Brass Messengers. In addition, LSP is seeking approximately a dozen bakers to commit to making a pie for a new event—a pie raffle.

For details on the event, see www.landstewardshipproject.org or contact LSP's Carolyn Bussey at carolyn@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-722-6377.

Give a Gift Membership in LSP

Know someone who would enjoy becoming a member of the Land Stewardship Project? Contact us today and we will send a special card describing the gift, along with a “new member” packet of materials. For more information, call Mike McMahon, Abby Liesch or Megan Smith at 612-722-6377, or see www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate. □

Listen in on the Voices of the Land

The Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast showcases the voices of farmers, eaters, scientists and activists who are working to create a more sustainable food and farming system.

We now have over 150 episodes online and are adding more. To listen in, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast. □

A Look at the Farm from the Ground Up

“Nature functions in whole,” answered a participant at a Holistic Management Biological Monitoring workshop held May 31 on the farm of Land Stewardship Project member Michael Natvig near Decorah, in northeast Iowa. It was the only correct response educator Ralph Tate wanted to hear as he pressed home the integration of below- and above-ground activity that builds soil and resilience into a healthy farm.

Twenty-two people at all stages of farming spent the day examining field litter, plant species, signs of insects and soil tilth, as well as discussing how these things interact with farming decisions, goals, weather, grazing plans and time.

The biological monitoring course took a “look-see” approach by monitoring two

distinct sites on Natvig's farm and on the adjoining farm—the birthplace of the late Nobel Peace Prize-winning plant breeder Norman Borlaug—which he manages. Monitoring sites included a wet and rocky field Natvig transitioned to grazing in 1991 and a restored oak savannah. Natvig took his first Holistic Management course in 1996 when LSP brought it to Minnesota. He has been grazing his cattle since 1988 after concluding that soil erosion, personal health and the financial demands of chemicals could not justify any other form of land management.

This workshop was part of a series of Holistic Management sessions LSP and Practical Farmers of Iowa co-organized in the region this past winter and spring with support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the McKnight Foundation. See the Stewardship Calendar on page 32 for details on a Holistic Management workshop being held Sept. 26 in northwestern Iowa.

For more information, contact LSP's Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. (Text & Photo by Caroline van Schaik)



Policy & Organizing

Citizens Deliver 6,000 Petition Signatures to Gov. Dayton Calling for 2-Year Moratorium on Frac Sand Mining

Poll Shows Majority of Minnesotans Oppose Expansion of Industry

By Bobby King

Governor Mark Dayton received resounding proof on Earth Day that Minnesotans want the state to take a hard look at the controversial frac sand mining industry. Over 6,000 petition signatures and the results of a new statewide poll were delivered to the Governor's office April 22 by a group of citizens from southeastern Minnesota. Companies are targeting that part of the state for frac sand strip-mining operations, despite the fact that it is dominated by environmentally sensitive karst geology and home to family farms, small businesses and blue ribbon trout streams.

Marilyn Frauenkron Bayer of Houston County was among those who travelled by bus to the capitol to deliver the petitions and poll results.

"Many, many of my neighbors signed this petition," says Bayer. "They realize the harm frac sand mining causes to the environment, farmland and our local economy far outweigh any so-called benefits. A moratorium in southeastern Minnesota makes sense to them."

The petition, which had been circulated by the Land Stewardship Project beginning in mid-January, calls for a two-year moratorium on frac sand mining in southeastern Minnesota, as well as tougher statewide standards for the industry.

Gov. Dayton has the authority to enact a regional moratorium on frac sand mining through the use of the Critical Areas Act. According to statute, the intent of the Critical Areas Act is to identify and protect "areas of the state that have cultural, or aesthetic values or natural systems which perform functions of greater than local significance," and are endangered by development which "could result in irreversible damage to these resources, decrease their value and utility for public purposes, or unreasonably endanger life and property." The law specifically lists "suspension of development" as part of its scope.

The southeastern Minnesota Driftless Region clearly fits the description of the



Lynn Schoen, a member of the Wabasha, Minn., city council, spoke at the Minnesota capitol press conference before the petitions were delivered to Governor Dayton's office: The Governor "has said he favors keeping frac sand mining out of the fragile karst area of southeastern Minnesota and tough state-level regulations to protect air and water quality," Schoen said. "This petition supports that policy and urges the Governor to take action to get us there." (LSP Photo)

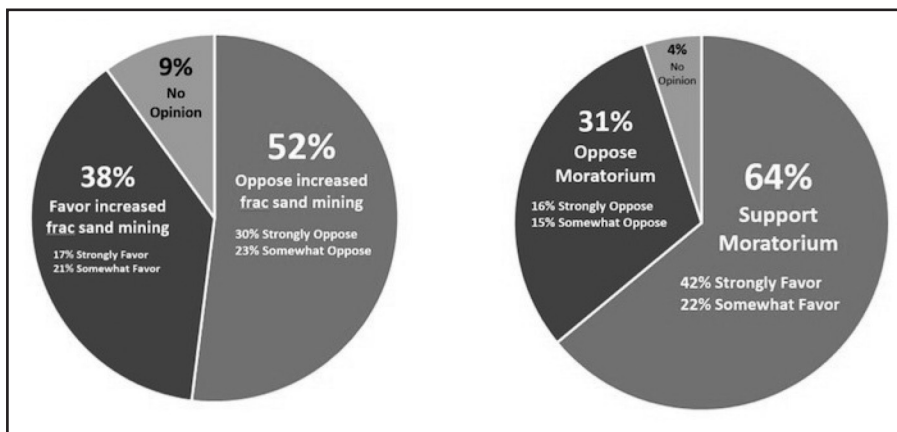
type of area that the Critical Areas Act was designed to protect. It is threatened by frac sand mining, a relatively new and especially destructive type of development. The law allows for suspension of development or moratoriums in that case, and LSP is calling on the Governor to use that authority.

John Wells, who served as strategic planning director for the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board for 25 years, has described in a two-page memo how this

Poll: Restrict the Industry

The petition signers' sentiments reflect the results of a statewide poll (*see pie graphs below*) released in April that shows a majority of Minnesota voters oppose increased frac sand mining in the state, and 64 percent support a two-year moratorium in southeastern Minnesota while potential en-

Frac Sand, see page 11...



Source: "Public Support for Frac Sand Mining in Minnesota" poll (telephone interviews with 667 voters in Minnesota, Feb. 4-6, 2014).

environmental impacts are more fully assessed and state regulations are developed.

Lynn Schoen, a member of the Wabasha, Minn., city council, also travelled by bus to the capitol on Earth Day.

"Governor Dayton has laid out a policy which makes a lot of sense. He has said he favors keeping frac sand mining out of the

fragile karst area of southeastern Minnesota and tough state-level regulations to protect air and water quality," Schoen said during a capitol press conference. "This petition supports that policy and urges the Governor to take action to get us there." □

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



Robert Rivers of Winona, Minn., carries the box of petitions with over 6,000 signatures up the steps to the state capitol, followed by dozens of southeastern Minnesota residents, including (left to right) Bev and Vern Crowson of Fillmore County and Jim Rahm of Lake City. (LSP Photo)

The Frac Sand Poll

The "Public Support for Frac Sand Mining in Minnesota" poll was conducted Feb. 4-6 by the bipartisan public opinion team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies. It included telephone interviews with 667 voters in Minnesota. The sample included 600 voters statewide and an oversample of 167 voters in six southeastern counties: Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Olmsted, Wabasha and Winona. All data was weighted to reflect the true geographic distribution of voters across the state. The margin of sampling error is + or - 4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level for the statewide sample, and + or - 6.9 percent for the southeastern Minnesota counties.

For full poll results, see www.landstewardshipproject.org or contact Bobby King at 612-722-6377, bking@landstewardshipproject.org

Critical Areas Act Memo

Read the Critical Areas Act memo about frac sand mining in southeastern Minnesota at LSP's **Frac Sand Organizing** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

Frac Sand Fact Sheet

Check out LSP's new fact sheet, "Frac Sand Mining: A Threat to the Land, People & Communities" at www.landstewardshipproject.org. Copies are also available by calling LSP's offices in southeastern Minnesota (507-523-3366) or the Twin Cities (612-722-6377).

As Summer Arrives in SE MN, Frac Sand Fight Heats Up

By Johanna Rupprecht

After delivering over 6,000 petition signatures to Governor Mark Dayton on Earth Day (see story above), southeastern Minnesota Land Stewardship Project members got right back on the bus and headed home to continue the fight against the frac sand industry in their counties, townships and cities.

The corporate interests behind the push to strip-mine the region's hills and bluffs for frac sand are not letting up. In fact, the *Wall Street Journal's* Alison Sider reported in an April 30 blog post entitled "Fracking Sends Sand Sales Soaring," that "the industry want[s] exponentially more of it, with a growing number of drillers telling investors that fracking with more sand is the quickest, cheapest way to increase oil

and gas output."

Locally, LSP members continue to stand strong for family farms, the rural environment and the health of our communities, fighting back against this arm of the extreme energy extraction industry. They are organizing in a complex, often shifting atmosphere, as the pattern of behavior displayed by frac sand corporations and their allies includes covering up and frequently changing both their identities and their proposals.

This month, for instance, residents of Houston County have been organizing to prevent the Erickson mine near Rushford from avoiding doing the Environmental Impact Statement ordered on the Minnesota Sands, LLC, multi-site mining proposal, and to stop the county from approving the mine's permit in spite of state law. This spring, the owner of Minnesota Sands announced his intention to mine in Fillmore and Winona counties at three

or four more sites than were previously identified. And in central Winona County, a new frac sand mine may soon be proposed just up the hill from the popular Farmers' Park and Garvin Brook, a pristine trout stream. A company known as Cascade Drilling spent four weeks drilling to test the sand beneath farmland there, and the permit application process will begin if results show it is of the desired quality for frac sand.

Watch your mailbox, e-mail, and LSP's website for updates on these quickly-developing situations, and for action alerts about opportunities for you to help in this fight to protect the health of the land and people from being exploited for corporate profit.

LSP organizer Johanna Rupprecht can be contacted at 507-523-3366 or jrupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org.

MN Legislative Update

Forever Green Gets Funded

Initiative Researching Cover Crops, Perennial Systems in Minn.

By Bobby King

During the waning days of its 2014 session in May, the Minnesota Legislature took a major step toward supporting the kind of agriculture that can green up our landscape in a way that's economically viable for farmers. Conference committee negotiations produced \$1 million for Forever Green, an innovative University of Minnesota research initiative involving cover crops and perennial plant systems (see story below).

The Land Stewardship Project's state legislative priority this year was securing greater public investment in research and outreach at the University of Minnesota for sustainable agriculture. Funding of Forever Green is a move in this direction. The Minnesota Environment Partnership (MEP) also made this issue one of its legislative priorities, helping to increase the voices of those advocating for the importance of the program. MEP is a coalition of more than 70 environmental, civic and conservation organizations of which LSP is an active member.

An Urgent Issue

Representative David Bly and Senator Kevin Dahle, both of Northfield, introduced bills to provide ongoing funding of Forever Green at \$1.395 million a year and worked them through House and Senate committees. At hearings, LSP farmer-members, Forever Green scientist Don Wyse and MEP made the case for the importance of this work and

making a public investment in developing the crops needed to improve stewardship of the land while protecting water quality.

The urgency of the case was bolstered by a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency



After the Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol on April 8, Land Stewardship Project members went to the Minnesota capitol to talk to lawmakers about legislative priorities like funding for Forever Green. (LSP Photo)

report released in 2013 that described the extent of nitrogen pollution present in the state's waters. The report found that cropland produces 73 percent of the nitrates entering surface waters. "Cover crops and strategic establishment of perennial energy crops can greatly reduce N losses to waters, but need further development in Minnesota to make these practices more successful

and adopted on more lands," concludes the report.

LSP members were a presence throughout the 2014 legislative session, making the case directly with legislators on the importance of the issue. The highlight of these lobbying efforts was the Family Farm Breakfast on April 8 (see page 8).

A critical juncture in the effort came about when MEP and LSP met with Senator Richard Cohen, who chairs the Senate Finance Committee. Sen. Cohen agreed to include funding for Forever Green in the Omnibus Supplemental Finance Bill and he was instrumental in the final bill including a total of \$1 million for Forever Green. It

should be kept in mind this is not recurring funding—the goal in future legislative sessions will be to secure solid, ongoing money for Forever Green so that this research has the long-term stability it deserves. □

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

Greening Up Farming's Brown Season

By Brian DeVore

To understand why the Forever Green Initiative (see story above) is so important, consider this: the current corn-soybean system that dominates a state like Minnesota relies on a few annual summer crops, which cover the land only a few months out of the year.

That means for eight months or more,

around half of Minnesota lacks any living roots or green ground cover—creating a long bare season. During this brown period, the land is particularly vulnerable to erosion and precipitation runs off the land, carrying with it fertilizers and other chemicals that were not used during the growing season. That's one reason nitrogen pollution of Minnesota's water is at such extremely high levels, according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. In fact, the problem of

fertilizer runoff is becoming worse throughout the Mississippi River basin, according to testimony U.S. Geological Survey scientists gave in a Congressional hearing earlier this year.

Such a system is not only wasteful but doesn't utilize agriculture's ability to provide key ecosystem services such as keeping pollutants out of water, building soil health, sequestering greenhouse gases and provid-

Forever Green, see page 13...

ing wildlife habitat. It also limits economic options for farmers.

"If you stick with the crops that we have now, which are all summer annuals, you won't be able to produce those ecosystem services," says Don Wyse, a professor in the University of Minnesota's Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics and the co-director of the Center for Integrated Natural Resources and Agricultural Management. "But if you want a more efficient system, one that produces these ecosystem services, we have to fund the development of a different type of plant system."

Such a system would cover the land 12 months out of the year. We had this year-round armor back in the day—it was called the tallgrass prairie. We will probably never see the return of such a diverse, sustainable ecosystem on a widespread basis. But Wyse and the other researchers working on the Forever Green Initiative believe they can bring some "functional diversity" back into the landscape by integrating soil-friendly annuals and perennials into the traditional corn-soybean rotation.

"No, these are not native plants, but they are certainly a step forward in providing these ecosystem services," says Wyse. "Agriculture, I don't care what it is, it's a huge human footprint. But we might be able to modify that footprint in a way that makes the system more efficient and more environmentally sound."

The idea of protecting the land during the corn and soybean "off season" is nothing new to anyone who is familiar with cover crops. In fact, recent attention to rebuilding farmland's soil health has generated some excitement over the role small grains, brassicas and other "low value" plant systems can play in bringing resiliency back to our fields. But as a recent Forever Green report illustrates (www.cinram.umn.edu/forevergreen), this initiative is trying to take cover cropping several steps ahead agro-economically and economically.

And we're not exactly talking about plant systems that are household names in the Upper Midwest. For example, field pennycress, an annual crop that overwinters, can be seeded after corn or soybeans are harvested in the fall. It provides protection for soil during the fall, winter and spring and produces

high-value oil and protein meal from unused fertilizer and water that would otherwise be wasted. It also naturally suppresses weeds and supports honeybees and other pollinators. The U of M has already mapped the genome of pennycress and is using that information to try and create lines that can produce consistent yields of oil and feed in our climate.

Intermediate wheatgrass is another work in progress that holds much poten-



Farmer Carmen Fernholz talked to legislators and their constituents about the importance of research initiatives like Forever Green during this year's LSP Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol. (LSP Photo)

holz, who does whatever he can to build soil health on his 400-acre organic crop farm.

"We're going to have to do something to improve soil properties because we are in fact losing that diversity of soil microbes a healthy system needs," says Fernholz, who regularly uses rye and other traditional cover crops as part of his rotation. "We do have to accept the fact that agriculture is a soil disturbance process. My goal on my own farm is to minimize that disturbance while staying economically viable."

The farmer says intermediate wheatgrass has that potential to balance environmental health with economic viability—it could be a source of livestock forage, biomass feedstock, even grain.

On the other hand, he's noticed how the seed head falls off and shatters before maturing. He's excited to see how Forever Green research could solve this problem, as well as help develop shade- and drought-tolerant cover crop varieties that would do well when planted right in the rows of a growing corn or soybean field. Innovations in seed varieties as well as field equipment are needed if cover cropping is to work in Minnesota's short growing season, says Fernholz.

"This isn't just about one crop—this is about getting more cover on the land and feeding the livestock in our soil," he says.

Pennycress and wheatgrass are examples of innovations that have come a long way as a result of research resources Wyse and his

Give it a Listen

Don Wyse talks about the Forever Green Initiative on LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast at www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/592.

associates have been able to patch together in recent years. But now it's time to take the next steps.

"We've brought things like this far enough along that I can look anyone in the eye and say, 'These projects are worth the investment,'" says Wyse. "I can't tell you which ones are going to fail and which are going to be successful, but here's a core of six or seven projects that are worthy of additional investment for the next five years."

The Cart & the Horse

Part of the reason Forever Green requires long-term investment is because it's not just a typical research project that takes a narrow, agronomic view of how to improve cover cropping. There's no doubting the ability of pennycress and wheatgrass to protect the land during the brown season is a plus, but, as Fernholz implies, such alternatives will not catch on unless farmers find them profitable to raise. How can the market value match the environmental value of these crops?

Forever Green proposes doing this by developing incubators across the state that would coordinate the technological, economic and even policy innovations needed to make alternative crops a consistent part of the farming picture. These incubators, which are being called "Landlabs," would help overcome the "chicken or the egg" barriers that often plague innovations in agriculture. What incentive do farmers have to plant a new crop if there is no market for it? And even if there is a market, what if there are no processing and transportation systems available to get the product from the field to the end user?

Landlabs are an attempt to coordinate all of these steps in a way that farmers and other links in the chain aren't taking on all the initial risk of trying something innovative. The Landlab concept is what sets Forever Green apart from other research initiatives that simply look at how to produce a higher yielding crop—this is a big picture, integrated approach to dealing with the issue of creating diversity on the land.

That's why Forever Green will require an investment of public dollars over a number of years. After all, Wyse points out, it was public funding that helped spawn the revolution in Minnesota corn and soybean production during the 20th Century. □

MN Legislative Update

HMOs Fight Transparency Requirement

LSP & Allies Work to Hold Them Accountable

By Megan Buckingham & Paul Sobocinski

As the final weeks of the 2014 legislative session were coming to a close, Minnesota's health maintenance organizations (HMOs) were busy lobbying to keep secret the details of their management of billions of dollars of public money. The Legislature was taking up a bill—HF 2167/SF 1770—that would require businesses that contract with the government to disclose how they spend public money. Only one industry lobbied for an exemption: the HMOs that contract with the state to manage Minnesota's public healthcare programs.

That the HMOs would even ask for an exemption is laughable. In the midst of Minnesota's 2011 \$5 billion budget crisis, the HMOs that administer most of the state's public health insurance programs came under intense scrutiny. The biggest HMOs were getting \$3 billion a year to manage Medical Assistance (also called MA or Medicaid) and MinnesotaCare. Meanwhile, the same HMOs had racked up billions of dollars in excessive "reserves." The Land Stewardship Project, TakeAction Minnesota and allies campaigned for reform, and ultimately won an executive order from Governor Mark Dayton that put a cap on HMO profits from public programs.

Capping HMO profits was an important step forward. And yet, while spending on public healthcare programs per person enrolled has continued to grow, hospitals,

doctors and especially dentists say their reimbursement for treating patients with public coverage has not gone up. Low reimbursement rates for medical providers make it difficult for the people who have public coverage to find nearby doctors and dentists who can afford to treat them. Where is the extra money going? It's not clear. That's because a cap on profits comes up short if the industry isn't required to disclose how they're spending the money they don't call "profits."

Reports show that secret price negotiations between health insurance companies and healthcare providers, like hospitals, drive up the cost of healthcare. Making those prices public keeps both the insurance companies and big hospital chains accountable. Financial accountability is especially critical now that over 150,000 Minnesotans have used MNsure to enroll in Minnesota's public healthcare programs, MinnesotaCare and Medical Assistance.

Both the House and the Senate passed amendments to SF 1770 that exempted HMOs for at least one year. Those bad amendments were authored by Senator Kari Dziedzic and Representative Melissa Hortman. But Representatives David Bly and Tina Liebling, working with Senator John Marty, offered additional amendments to limit the exemption given to the HMOs. Rep. Bly proposed a successful amendment that clearly limits the HMO exemption to one year, after which their exemption expires and they will be held to the same data disclosure requirements as every other

industry in Minnesota. The Senate, with help from Sen. Marty, also agreed to end the exemption after one year.

Rep. Liebling proposed a good amendment that would have required HMOs to disclose their management of Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare dollars to legislative leaders, who are responsible for overseeing the Health and Human Services budget. Liebling's amendment did not pass, which means the Legislature will also have to wait until June 2015 to gather information on the HMOs' administration of the expanding pool of MinnesotaCare and Medical Assistance funding.

Ultimately, SF 1770 passed with a one-year exemption for HMOs. It's a good law: Minnesotans deserve to know how public dollars are used. But delaying the law's application to HMOs is bad policy, especially without the Liebling amendment, which would have at least allowed for needed legislative oversight. To learn how your legislators voted on the bad Hortman amendment, and the good Bly and Liebling amendments, visit the **Affordable Healthcare for All** page on the Land Stewardship Project's website: www.landstewardshipproject.org.

It is increasingly clear that Minnesota's HMOs value their bottom line over efficient use of public funds and quality care for the people enrolled in their coverage. The new law will help hold these insurance companies accountable. But there is no role for a secretive, profit-driven health insurance industry if Minnesota's healthcare system is to be truly efficient, transparent, well-managed and easy to use. And that's the kind of healthcare system Minnesotans deserve. □

LSP organizers Megan Buckingham and Paul Sobocinski are working on the Affordable Healthcare for All Campaign. Buckingham (meganb@landstewardshipproject.org) can be reached at 507-523-3366 and Sobocinski (sobopaul@redred.com) at 507-342-2323.

USDA Announces \$19.2 Million in Funds for Groups Assisting Beginning Farmers

By Adam Warthesen

The USDA announced this spring the availability of \$19.2 million in funds for groups that assist beginning farmers through training and other support initiatives. This is the first grant cycle of the newly reauthorized Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), which is part of the 2014 Farm

Bill signed into law in February. In total, Congress authorized BFRDP to make available \$100 million for beginning farmer initiatives over the next five years.

Securing funding and reauthorization of the BFRDP was a top priority for the Land Stewardship Project in the 2014 Farm Bill. The resources available through this program are going to support groups that help beginning farmers build sound farming

enterprises and add to the economic vitality of their rural communities.

BFRDP was originally funded through the 2008 Farm Bill, and since then has awarded more than \$70 million through 145 grants to organizations that have developed education and training programs.

According to the USDA, more than 50,000 beginning farmers and ranchers have participated in projects funded by BFRDP.

Projects funded in the past have provided

BFRDP, see page 15...

new farmer training in, for example: farm production methods, business and marketing strategies, mentoring and apprenticeships, farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities, financial and risk management and land access options.

Among the many groups which have received support through BFRDP are Practical Farmers of Iowa, Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, Dakota Rural Action and Farmers' Legal Action Group. LSP has also received BFRDP funding.

"I see a lot of opportunities for beginning

farmers in Minnesota," says Minnesota U.S. Representative Tim Walz, a member of the House Agriculture Committee and chief author of legislation which included BFRDP as well as other new farmer conservation and credit provisions that are part of the 2014 Farm Bill. "But we know there are a lot of barriers new farmers need to overcome. The grants offered through this program allow organizations to do the work needed to help new farmers overcome those barriers. We know it makes a difference and that's why it was included in the Farm Bill."

The BFRDP application deadline for this funding cycle was June 12. Priority was

given to projects that are partnerships and collaborations led by or including non-governmental, community-based, or school-based agricultural educational organizations.

For more information on how to apply for BFRDP money during future funding cycles, see www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/bfrdp/bfrdp.html. □

LSP organizer Adam Warthesen works on federal farm policy issues. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.

Minnesota Cattle Producers Vote Down Proposed Doubling of Beef Checkoff

By Adam Warthesen

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) announced April 1 the results of the proposed referendum by the Minnesota Beef Research and Promotion Council that sought to double the existing beef checkoff paid on each head of cattle sold. Sixty-three percent (963) of the 1,525 voting producers voted against the referendum, with just 37 percent (562) voting in favor.

The wide margin of this vote clearly shows doubling the checkoff is not what Minnesota cattle producers wanted.

Passage of the referendum would have increased what Minnesota cattle producers are required to pay through the beef checkoff by a full \$1—an expected collection of nearly \$700,000 per year. This would have

been in addition to the mandatory \$1 per head checkoff currently collected on cattle sold in the state.

While the Land Stewardship Project took no formal position on the proposed referendum, during a December 2013 MDA listening session the organization successfully advocated for extending the timeline for producers to request ballots. LSP also conducted significant outreach in the following months to 18,000 Minnesota cattle producers urging them to vote on the proposed referendum.

"Like many cattle producers I had really heard nothing of this referendum and proposed beef checkoff increase until late December," says Jim Joens, a cattle and crop producer from Wilmont, Minn. "The outreach the Land Stewardship Project did and informational letters they sent out was probably the most concrete way many farm-

ers found out about this referendum and how to get a ballot."

The rejection by Minnesota cattle producers to shoulder another \$1 per head in checkoff remittance puts to rest the issue for at least a full year. According to Minnesota Administrative Rules, if a referendum fails the MDA commissioner is prohibited from issuing another referendum on any promotional order on the same agricultural commodity until one year has elapsed.

"It's important in any kind of election or referendum that people who are going to be affected by the outcome have a say," says Joens. "If you ask me, I think every cattle producer in our state should be sent out a ballot and verification form on a referendum like this. It should not be on the producer to first find out a referendum is happening, and then go through a process to request a ballot and finally vote. It should not be this hard." □

Why Should We Care About the Trans-Pacific Free Trade Agreement?

EDITOR'S NOTE: The proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) treaty is being touted as the biggest free trade agreement ever, currently involving 12 countries. Promoters of the TPP, like Cargill and other agribusiness firms, say it will create jobs and provide a boost to the American economy, including agriculture. The Land Stewardship Project believes, however, that if we want vibrant local economies and food systems, as well as a healthy environment, then people who are directly concerned with those issues need to have a say. A highly restricted and secretive process is being used to push through this trade deal, and that excludes people in favor of corporations, says LSP Policy Program Director Mark Schultz. In addition, so-called "fast track" authority is being proposed as part of this deal. This would give the U.S. President excessive power over trade negotiations while largely excluding Congress from the debate. LSP recently joined with several allies in calling for a TPP development process that is open and adheres to basic fair trade standards, while respecting the authority of local, state and national governments. Schultz, who is also LSP's Associate Director and Director of Programs, recently talked to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about concerns with the Trans-Pacific Partnership treaty and fast track authority.

LSL: Negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership treaty have been going on since 2009, but little is known about its content. Why?

Schultz: Basically, the promoters of TPP fear the treaty would be voted down if the public knew what it was about. There has been an unprecedented amount of secrecy surrounding this treaty. Parties taking part in the development of the TPP have signed a confidentiality agreement requiring them to share proposals only with "government officials and individuals who are part of the government's domestic trade advisory process." Members of Congress and law experts

TPP, see page 16...

are kept out of the loop. Meanwhile, some 600, mostly corporate, “advisers,” including megafirms like Cargill, have had access to the text. So a handful of multinational corporations control the content of a trade agreement that could have major impacts on a public that has no say in it.

LSL: *What are some of those potential impacts?*

Schultz: One thing we have learned about the TPP is that it will contain something called “regulatory coherence.” That’s a benign-sounding term that would have major adverse impacts on critical issues that LSP members care about.

For example, TPP may allow countries and even foreign corporations to challenge the use of Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), which was passed by Congress 12 years ago. COOL requires identifying the source of meat products, something the majority of consumers and farmers support. International agribusinesses oppose COOL and would love to use TPP to get rid of it.

Hitting even closer to home, the TPP is being written so that corporations and foreign governments could prevent people from working through their local units of government to stop or regulate unwanted development, like corporate-backed frac sand mines or factory farms. There are examples of this already, such as in 2012, when a U.S. energy firm used the authority it said the North American Free Trade Agreement granted

it to level a \$250 million lawsuit against a Quebec town, which had put in place a moratorium on fracking. The justification? That the local ordinance would impede the corporation’s “expected future profits.” Well, Midwesterners value local democracy, and we have fought hard to maintain the right of local control. We don’t want an imposed trade policy that prevents people from doing what they know is right for their community and the land.

This take-away of power from the people impacts a host of other priorities that people have, like creating public policy so our schools and hospitals can choose to buy local sustainably-raised and culturally appropriate food for better health. Talk about impeding corporate “expected future profits.”

LSL: *How would “fast track” authority affect TPP?*

Schultz: Fast track gives the President power to make trade deals without consulting Congress, subverting any opportunity for regular people to have a say about these agreements, through their elected representatives or otherwise. President Barack Obama and pro-corporate allies in both parties are pushing hard for fast track. Allowing it to happen would be an economic and democratic disaster, pure and simple.

LSL: *Supporters of TPP say its benefits far outnumber the negatives. It will produce unprecedented job growth and economic development, for example.*

Schultz: To listen to major corpora-

tions and their supporters in Congress, we are always just one trade deal away from unlimited riches. The facts just don’t support that. Consider the Korean Free Trade Agreement signed in 2011. According to a March report from Public Citizen, U.S. exports to Korea are down 11 percent two years after that agreement went into effect. Meanwhile, imports from Korea are up 47 percent. U.S. agriculture has been hit particularly hard, with exports of meat and other products to Korea down 41 percent.

And then there are the hidden costs of these trade deals. The North American Free Trade Agreement has created huge disruptions in places like Mexico, causing people to flee rural areas in search of low-paying jobs here in America. Who really benefits from this insecurity in the lives of people, created in the service of “trade”?

LSL: *So what kind of timeline are we on with TPP?*

Schultz: There is a hard push to get all of the participating countries to sign off on the agreement and for fast track authority to be granted to the President yet this year. It’s time members of Congress heard from average citizens that this secretive, undemocratic process is no way to do business, here or internationally. □

For details on how to make your voice heard concerning Fast Track and corporate trade deals, see www.landstewardshipproject.org or contact Mark Schultz at 612-722-6377, marks@landstewardshipproject.org.

Farm Beginnings

LSP’s Farm Beginnings Course Accepting Applications for 2014-2015

The Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings course is now accepting applications until Sept. 1 for the 2014-2015 class session. There will be three classes—one in Watertown (central Minnesota), one in La Crosse, Wis. (southwestern Wisconsin-southeastern Minnesota), and one in Ashland, Wis. (Lake Superior region).

In 2014, LSP’s Farm Beginnings program is marking its 17th year of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is designed for people of all ages just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers

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

This 12-month training course provides training and hands-on learning opportunities in the form of classroom sessions, farm tours, field days, workshops and access to an extensive farmer network.

Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the area. The classes, which meet approximately twice-a-month beginning in the fall, run until March 2015, followed by an on-farm education

component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 650 people have graduated from the Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings program. Graduates are involved in a wide-range of agricultural enterprises, including grass-based livestock, organic vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture and specialty products.

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

The Farm Beginnings class fee is \$1,500, which covers one “farm unit”—either one farmer or two farming partners who are on the same farm. A \$200 deposit is required with an application, and will be put towards the final fee. Applications received by

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...Farm Beginnings, from page 16

Aug. 1 receive a \$100 discount. Payment plans are available, as well as a limited number of scholarships.

For application materials or more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org.

Journeyperson Course Deadline Sept. 1

This year marks the second time the Land Stewardship Project has offered the Journeyperson Farm Training Course.

Journeyperson provides new farmers who are in their first few years of launching their operations assistance through mentorship, financial planning assistance, whole farm planning and peer-to-peer learning.

Participants work with both a farmer mentor and a financial adviser on their individual farm planning.

Each farm in the course also takes part in a matched savings program, where on a

monthly basis participants will deposit up to \$100 in a savings account. After two years their money will be matched and they will be able to use it toward a capital improvement on the farm.

Details about the Watertown and La Crosse classes are available by contacting Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or karenb@landstewardshipproject.org. For the Lake Superior class, contact Cree Bradley at 218-834-0846 or creeb@landstewardshipproject.org. □

LSP is now taking applications until Sept. 1 for the next session of the Journeyperson Course, which will begin this fall. For more information or to apply, contact LSP's Richard Ness, rness@landstewardshipproject.org or 320-269-2105. Details are also at www.farmbeginnings.org. □

Is Farming in Your Future? Let Farm Dreams Help You Find Out

Farm Dreams is an entry level, four-hour, exploratory Land Stewardship Project workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether sustainable farming is the next step for them. This is a great workshop to attend if you are in the exploratory stages of getting started farming. Farm Dreams is a good prerequisite for LSP's Farm Beginnings course.

Upcoming classes:

- **Aug. 10**—Minneapolis, Minn.
- **Aug. 17**—Viroqua, Wis.

For more information or to register, see www.farmbeginnings.org. Details are also available by calling LSP's Nick Olson at 320-269-2105 or 320-269-1057, or e-mailing nicko@landstewardshipproject.org.

2014 LSP Farm Beginnings Field Days

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program offers on-farm field days throughout the spring, summer, fall and winter. Each event covers a specific topic on a farm. Members of the public interested in farming (limited to 20 people) may attend for a fee. Farm Beginnings participants and LSP members can participate in field days at no charge. Here are the scheduled field days thus far:

- **July 16: Fruit Production**, Sam Kedem Nursery & Garden, Hastings, Minn., 6:30 p.m.-9 p.m.
- **July 27: Vegetable Production**, Sweet Beet Farm, Watertown, Minn.
- **Aug. 16: Producing Grass-Finished Beef/Livestock & Soil Health**, Compton Farm, Dassel, Minn., 1 p.m.-4 p.m.
- **Aug. 24: On-Farm Education Events**, Deep Roots Community Farm, La Crosse, Wis. (*time to be determined*)
- **Sept. 14: Vegetable Production Start-up**, Living Land Farm, Saint Peter, Minn., 2 p.m.-5 p.m.

If you are interested in attending one of these field days, contact LSP's Dori Eder at dori@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-578-4497.



Field Day Opportunities in the Lake Superior Region

Several Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota educational field days are also being offered in the Lake Superior region (northeastern Minnesota-northwestern Wisconsin) with the support of LSP:

- **July 26: Urban Farm Tour**, multiple sites, Duluth Minn.
- **Aug. 6: Whole Farm Synergy: Stacking Livestock & Veggie Enterprises**, Great Oak Farm, Mason, Wis., 10 a.m.-1 p.m.
- **Aug. 6: Useful Tools and Infrastructure for Vegetable Farms**, Hermit Creek Farm,

High Bridge, Wis., 2 p.m.-5 p.m.

- **Aug. 23: Restorative Agriculture—Restoring the Abandoned Farm**, University of Minnesota Duluth Research Farm, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.
- **Sept. 20: Small Fruit Production**, Shubat's Fruits, French River Minn., 2:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

To register or for more information about the Lake Superior area field days, contact LSP's Cree Bradley at creeb@landstewardshipproject.org or 218-834-0846. (Photo by Nick Olson)

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland in the Upper Midwest? Or are you an established farmer/landowner in the Upper Midwest who is seeking a beginning farmer to purchase or rent your land, or to work with in a partnership/employee situation? Then consider having your information circulated via LSP's *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse*. To fill out an online form and for more information, see www.landstewardshipproject.org. You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Doris Eder at dori@landstewardshipproject.org, or by calling her at 612-578-4497. Below are excerpts of recent listings. For the full listings, see www.landstewardshipproject.org.

Seeking Farmland

◆ Felicia Hobert is seeking to rent a quarter-acre of tillable farmland in **Minnesota**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and has access to water is preferred. Hobert would prefer to rent the land for at least three years. Contact: Felicia Hobert, felicia.hobert@gmail.com, 414-678-9409.

◆ Martin Lucas is seeking to purchase 160+ acres of farmland in **Iowa**. He would prefer that the farm include pasture and land that has not been sprayed for several years; no house is required. He would be ready to move in 2015. Contact: Martin Lucas, 515-210-9250.

◆ Randy Barnes is seeking to rent 50+ tillable acres of farmland in **southeastern Wisconsin's Jefferson County**. No house is required. Contact: Randy Barnes, 920-222-1786; randywbarnes91@gmail.com.

◆ Kevin and Christine Ballman are seeking to purchase 40 or more acres of farmland in **southeastern Minnesota (Goodhue County) or southwestern Wisconsin (Pierce County)**. They would prefer land with pasture and a livable house, as well as outbuildings. The Ballmans want to "farm land right for the next generation," and they qualify for beginning farmer loans. Contact: Kevin Ballman, 1321 W. 5th Street, Red Wing, MN 55066; 651-385-0321.

◆ Meghann Schmidt is seeking to buy 10-20 acres of farmland in **Minnesota's Scott or Dakota County, near the Twin Cities**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that includes pasture and a house is preferred. Contact: Meghann Schmidt, schm2817@gmail.com, 612-232-7194.

◆ Becky Schmidtbauer is seeking to buy 25-50 acres of farmland in **Minnesota**. She would prefer that the land have pasture; no house is required. Contact: Becky Schmidtbauer, 612-750-2444, schm2245@umn.edu.

◆ Liz Rubesch is seeking to rent 10 acres of farmland in **Minnesota**. She would prefer that it have forestland, a house, outbuildings, electricity and water. Rubesch is interested in a rent-to-own situation. Contact: Liz Rubesch, 612-408-0012.

◆ Jesse Grothe is seeking to purchase tillable farmland in **Minnesota**. Water is preferred; no house is required. Contact:

Jesse Grothe, jfab92@gmail.com.

◆ Jeremy Leuer is seeking to rent tillable farmland in **south-central Minnesota's Wright County**. No house is required. Contact: Jeremy Leuer, 763-442-4792, Jeremy_Leuer@rdale.org.

◆ Rachael and Jon Ackerman are seeking to buy 5+ acres of farmland in **Minnesota**, preferably within 60 miles of the Twin Cities. They would prefer that the land have pasture, a pole barn or shed, and a house. Contact: Rachael Ackerman, 651-285-2931, rachael.blueskyfarms@gmail.com, or Jon Ackerman, 651-485-8006.

◆ Mai Ger Xiong is seeking to rent 1.5 acres of tillable farmland in the **Twin Cities, Minn., area**. No house is required. Contact: Mai Ger Xiong, 612-223-2209, maieryxg@gmail.com.

◆ Damian Coleman is seeking to rent 5-10 acres of farmland in **Wisconsin**. He prefers land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has water, storage sheds and a house. Contact: Damian Coleman, 414-688-3152, elyvel2@gmail.com.

◆ Jim Ford is seeking to purchase 5 or more tillable acres of farmland in **western Wisconsin or the Saint Croix River Valley region of eastern Minnesota**. Contact: Jim Ford, jimford82@hotmail.com.

◆ Mark Reisdorf is seeking to buy 5-50 acres of farmland in the **Des Moines or Council Bluffs, Iowa, area**. No house is required. Contact: Mark Reisdorf, 202-536-8990, reisdorf.mark@gmail.com.

◆ Ryan Erisman is seeking to buy 25-75 acres of farmland in **southern Wisconsin's Dane, Green or Rock County**. He would prefer land with pasture, a well and a salvageable barn; no house is required. Contact: Ryan Erisman, 608-616-9786, ryan@farmvetco.org.

◆ Ken Betzold is seeking to buy tillable farmland in **Rice or Dakota County, near the Twin Cities, Minn., area**. No house is required. Contact: Ken Betzold, 612-598-2788.

◆ Jim Mauck is seeking to buy 10-40 acres of farmland in **southwestern Wisconsin or southwestern Michigan**. He would prefer land that has not been sprayed for several years and that is isolated from fields with GMOs. Contact: Jim Mauck, 630-204-2497, 1stprinting@gmail.com.

◆ Cindy is seeking to buy 5+ acres of

farmland in **southern Wisconsin's Dane County**. Outbuildings, water and a building site are preferred. Contact: Cindy, 608-445-0607.

◆ Jason and Melissa Landrath are seeking to purchase 10-100+ acres of chemical-free/non-GMO farmland in **southeastern Wisconsin's Vernon, Richland or Sauk County**. They have extensive farming background in conventional dairy but wish to pursue non-conventional pasture-based poultry, pork, beef and silviculture. The Landraths are open to lease or transitional purchase over five years. Contact: Jason and Melissa Landrath, jmlandrath98@bugnet.net, 920-716-1229 or 920-944-3606.

◆ Mike Bruckner is seeking to purchase 40+ acres of farmland in **east-central Minnesota's Carver or Wright County**. Bruckner is open to various lease/purchase options. Contact: Mike Bruckner, 612-730-6839.

◆ Joel and Beth Chavez are seeking one acre of farmland to rent in **Minnesota or Wisconsin**. They are looking for land to grow hops on and would prefer property that has not been sprayed for several years. Contact: Joel or Beth Chavez, 651-330-9090, muttonhops@gmail.com.

Farmland Available

◆ Roxanne Stuhr has for sale 70 acres of farmland in **northwestern Minnesota's Clay County**. The land has not been tilled since 1959, and of the 70 acres available, approximately 30+ could be farmed (38 +/- acres are enrolled in a Department of Natural Resources program). Stuhr would prefer to sell, but is open to renting. Contact: Roxanne Stuhr, 612-558-3161.

◆ Sally and Josh Messner have for sale a single-family home in **South Minneapolis** on .2 acres of urban farmland. The double lot is almost entirely in full sun and includes a 1,000 square-foot tilled garden space, 400 square-foot raspberry patch, strawberry patch, small rhubarb patch and herbs, large rain garden with Minnesota native species, rainwater collection system, five plum trees, one cherry tree, two Nanking cherry bushes,

Clearinghouse, see page 19...

...Clearinghouse, from page 18

and space left for more garden beds, fruit trees, chickens, etc. The asking price is \$289,900. Contact: Shari Seifert, 612-558-1134, Shari@ShariSeifert.com.

◆ Elmer Hillukka has for sale 15 acres of farmland in *central Minnesota's Wright County*. The land has not been sprayed for at least 15 years and it includes pasture, a Quonset hut and a house. Contact: Elmer Hillukka, hhillukka@gmail.com.

◆ Steve Grotting has for sale 9.58 acres of farmland in *Independence, west of Minnesota's Twin Cities*. There is fertile pastureland that has not been sprayed for several years and that could be tilled. The asking price is \$539,000. Contact: Steve Grotting, Windsong Realty, steve@thegrottings.com, 952-451-8800.

◆ Pete and Pam Augustyn have for sale an 11.7 acre farm with a hydroponic tomato greenhouse in *northeastern Wisconsin's Langlade County*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and there is a heat plant, feed building and sorting facility. This is a turnkey business selling hydroponic tomatoes; equipment is negotiable. Contact: Pam Augustyn, canopygardens@yahoo.com, 715-623-7373, 715-216-3442.

◆ Joey Cramer has for sale a 10.5-acre certified organic farm in *Wright County, near Minnesota's Twin Cities*. It has a 30 x 60 pole barn and a three-bedroom house with a double attached garage. The asking price is \$379,000. Contact: Joey Cramer,

763-972-6647, racramermn@yhoo.com.

◆ Brian Budenski has for sale 8+ acres of farmland in *Minnesota's Dakota County, near the Twin Cities*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and includes pasture, fencing, a shed and a house. The asking price is \$300,000. Contact: Brian Budenski, brianjbud@gmail.com.

◆ Linda Dahl has for rent 1 acre (or more) of certified organic farmland in *southeastern Minnesota's Winona County*. The property includes pasture, outbuildings and a house. Moveable chicken pens are available. The rental price is \$750 per month for the house. The price for the farmland is negotiable. Contact: Linda Dahl, 507-272-7201, ldahl@winona.edu.

◆ Paula Manor has for rent 20 acres of farmland near Dundas, in *southeastern Minnesota's Rice County*. It has been planted in alfalfa for the past four years and no chemicals have been used on it during that time; it is ready to be certified organic. Contact: Paula Manor, 507-301-9601.

◆ Steve Larson has for sale a homestead near the *Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Ely, Minn.* Fenced backyard has 200 feet of raised beds, drip irrigation, 10 x 22 greenhouse, chicken coop with 12-bird capacity and a woodshed. Ricing beds, white fish/tulibee netting and public access nearby. The asking price is \$52,500. Contact: Steve Larson, 360-918-8397.

◆ Brenda Berkebile has for sale 65.54 acres of farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin's Monroe County*. It includes 45 acres of agri-

cultural land; the balance is wooded. The asking price is \$250,000. Contact: Brenda Berkebile, crash-override@integra.net.

◆ Janice Marquardt has for sale 40 acres of farmland in *south-central Iowa's Jasper County*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it includes pasture, a shop/retail space, outbuildings and a house. There is an established market in the community of Pella, Iowa, for local meats. The asking price is \$180,000. Contact: Janice Marquardt, kaeledra@gmail.com.

◆ Michelle Keller has for sale a 19.6 acre (14 tillable) farm near *Faribault, in southern Minnesota*. More information and pictures are at www.themlsonline.com. The MLS number for the house is 4449097. Contact: Michelle Keller, michelle@livinggreens.net, 651-335-1531.

◆ Terri M. has for sale 15.93 acres of farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin's Driftless Region*. The land has not been sprayed for over three years and includes pasture. There are plums, apple trees and black raspberry. The asking price is \$225,000. Contact: Terri M., 773-391-5509.

◆ John Hutchinson has for sale 24 acres of farmland in *south-central Minnesota's Sibley County*. It borders Washington Lake and has approximately 15 acres of fenced pasture. There are outbuildings and a house; it is 48 miles from downtown Minneapolis. The asking price is \$299,000. Contact: John Hutchinson, 952-223-1020, john.hutchinson@results.net.

Lightening the Load of Looking for Land

Beginning Farmer Meetings Provide Support, Resources

By Paula Foreman

In a corner of a South Minneapolis café, eight land-seeking beginning farmers came together in April for the first time to help each other in their search for farms. Organized by me and Land Stewardship Project organizer Sarah Claassen, the "Looking for Land Group" has been meeting one Sunday afternoon a month since that first meeting. I came up with the idea as I went through my own process to find a farm, and realized that this daunting task could be eased by finding support from other people undertaking a similar search. Designed to be friendly and informal, the group has identified specific topics for discussion that will help them find their first farm, and the agenda for each gather-

ing is based on those topics. Participants are sharing what they've learned in their land search, trading tips on available land and helpful resources, and generally encouraging each other to keep going.

At the first two meetings, people wrote down their vision for their ideal farm, then shared and workshopped each other's descriptions in order to help participants clarify what they are looking for. Most recently, guest Sara Morrison spoke about her recent experience of buying a farm. She left the group with reminders that everyone has an "unfair advantage" and that persistence pays off. Future gatherings will feature a farm-friendly banker who will share advice on finding community-motivated lenders and applying for loans.

There has been enthusiastic response to the Looking for Land gatherings. Busy

beginning farmers are taking time out of the season to come together, and several farmers who can't make it to the Twin Cities metro area gatherings have expressed interest in convening their own meetings in their local communities.

If you would like to attend the Looking for Land gatherings in the Twin Cities area, or are interested in organizing one in your region, contact me at encoreforeman@gmail.com or Sarah Claassen at sarahc@landstewardshipproject.org. You can also call LSP's Twin Cities office at 612-722-6377.

Looking for a farm can be a complicated and difficult process, but the load is considerably lightened with the support of peers committed to stewarding the land. □

LSP member Paula Foreman is the owner-operator of Encore Farms and a graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings course (see page 16).

The Incubator Acre

A to Z's Mini-Plot is a Vital Link in the Beginning Farmer Chain

When Lauren Barry pulls a weed or harvests a tomato this summer, she's doing so on a one-acre plot of land steeped in history. Not the ancient, dusty kind that may or may not have relevance to the current situation, but history rooted in recent growing seasons, when other beginning farmers faced the same meteorological, agronomic and economic challenges Barry is grappling with in her first foray into producing vegetables as an entrepreneur, rather than an employee or student.

"All that information just adds more pieces to the puzzle," says Barry, 26.

As she says this, the beginning farmer is sitting in the kitchen of A to Z Produce and Bakery near the western Wisconsin community of Stockholm. Down the hill is that one-acre plot, a mini-farm of sorts that A to Z's Robbi Bannen and Ted Fisher have offered to beginning farmers for the past four years. Bannen and Fisher, who operate a farm, "pizza night" and bakery on 80 acres of high ground just a few miles from the Mississippi River, see that acre as a way for new farmers to make mistakes, but not the kind that can squash a dream before it gets off the ground.

"I just feel like if you can somehow find a way to do those first few years without incurring debt that you can't pay off within the year, the kind that eats you, then you can avoid fatal errors," says Bannen.

As it happens, this "incubator acre" has turned out to be a valuable resource for several graduates of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program, a hands-on course taught by established farmers where participants learn goal-setting and business planning, as well as innovative marketing and financial management skills (see page 16).

The A to Z plot has become a stepping-stone for neophytes looking to bridge

that gap between training/internships and actually raising food for the market as an independent business owner.

"We wanted to do something more than just intern," says Anna Racer. She and her husband Peter Skold were the first beginning farmers to use the plot. "It allowed us to push ourselves."

An 'Odd Acre'

The incubator acre got started a bit by accident in 2011. The first interns on A to Z were Farm Beginnings graduates Betsy



Lauren Barry (middle right), shown here with A-Z Produce's Robbi Bannen and Ted Fisher (rear), along with 2014 interns Liz Davey and Steve Jones, says the "incubator acre" is a step between learning about farming and actually running her own enterprise. (LSP Photo)

Allister and Andrew Ehrmann, who went on to start Spring Wind Farm, a successful CSA in Northfield, Minn. After that, Racer and Skold served an internship on A-Z in 2010 and, at Allister and Ehrmann's urging, took Farm Beginnings the following winter. By 2011 they had solid training under their belt and were ready for the next step in their agricultural career. But the young farmers, who were in their late 20s at the time, were having a hard time finding land.

As it happens, in addition to their own farm, Fisher and Bannen have access to 12 acres adjacent to their property that's owned

Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming



by Bannen's sister, who lives in Ohio. On the property is an "odd acre" that works well for producing vegetables, as well as a house. That acre needed farmed, and the house needed to be occupied to keep it from falling into disrepair.

"I think we originally offered it to Pete and Anna because we thought they might stick around," recalls Bannen. "It was an informal conversation—we never thought of it as an incubator in the formal sense."

Racer had seen a similar incubator acre while interning at Foxtail Farm in Osceola, Wis., and she and Skold used that extra year at A-Z to launch Waxwing Farm, a 25-member CSA. They also sold

produce at a farmers' market in the Twin Cities and raised chickens and a couple of pigs for customers. Racer says that year on the small plot gave them the confidence to try a variety of things, since they were not heavily invested in purchased property.

"We knew we had Ted and Robbi's support and we didn't have all this debt," says Racer.

Soon after, Racer and Skold bought 40 acres south of the Twin Cities and moved there operation there to be closer to that market. Since then, Waxwing CSA has grown to almost 100 members, and Racer and Skold recently added more hoop house space to extend the growing season (see the No. 2, 2012, Land Stewardship

Letter for more on Waxwing Farm).

Mike Loeffler concurs that an incubator can be a good way to forge a critical link when considering farming as a career. He and Julie Benda had served an internship on A to Z in 2011, and, at Bannen and Fisher's recommendation, took Farm Beginnings the following winter. In 2012 they came back to A to Z to raise produce on the mini-plot.

"It was a really nice progression of things," says Loeffler. "You can work on farms almost endlessly without having those critical experiences you need to succeed."

Fresh Faces, see page 21...

They sold their produce at the Red Wing farmers' market and a local restaurant, and sales "exceeded expectations," says Loeffler.

Bannen and Fisher loan out equipment and offer advice when it's asked for, but otherwise the mini-plot farmers are pretty much on their own.

"I barely have time to do my own work," quips Bannen. "I'm not going down to snoop around on your little acre."

But Loeffler says it was invaluable knowing that when needed, expertise was available literally just a few hundred feet away.

"It could be something like a pest infestation that we would spend hours on the Internet freaking out over, and we could talk to Robbi or Ted and learn exactly what it was," he says.

Trading Knowledge

Bannen and Fisher know full well the importance of benefiting from the experience of others. When they bought this former dairy farm in 1995 and expanded their vegetable raising enterprise from a few gardens to larger, contoured fields, information was hard to come by.

"We didn't know anyone who raised vegetables to market," says Bannen, 55. One marketing system they were interested in was Community Supported Agriculture. Also called CSA, it's a system where people pay up-front to join a farm. In return, they get deliveries of food, usually produce, throughout the growing season.

"It's hard to remember that pre-Internet era, where you couldn't just say, 'Oh, CSA, I'll just look it up,'" says Fisher, 56.

They were eventually able to network with other innovative farmers, and today A to Z has a small CSA enterprise and a thriving weekly pizza night business which runs from March to November and produces most of their income. At the peak of the season, around 1,000 people can turn up at the picturesque farm for fresh brick oven pizza made from ingredients raised on the farm.

Fisher and Bannen see working with beginning farmers through internships and the incubator acre as not only a way to pass on some of their hard-earned knowledge, but to get exposed to new ideas themselves.

"Teaching forces you to look at how you do things and look at what the reasons are for how you do things," says Fisher.

Homework

Barry is asking a lot of questions this growing season as she pursues a dream she's had since she began doing wilderness trips as a teenager: making a living working

outside. After studying ecology at Washington University in Saint Louis, Barry did internships at CSA farms in Minnesota and Wisconsin. She approached A-Z about interning, but the timing didn't work out. Even so, Bannen and Fisher invited Barry over for lunch to talk about her farming future.

"Even though we couldn't hire Lauren I knew it was a connection I didn't want to let go of," says Bannen. "It was very obvious she had something."

That something was the ability to work outdoors for extended periods and a good idea of where she wanted to go with her farming career. So they offered her a deal: she could rent the one-acre plot in 2014. But first, Barry needed to do some homework and interview other beginning farmers who had worked that plot.

So this past winter Barry not only took Farm Beginnings but interviewed Racer, Skold, Loeffler and Benda about everything from the type of soil she'd be working with on the plot to how they marketed and set up their financials. She also interviewed via e-mail 2012 incubator acre farmer Kiri Thompson, who now lives in New Zealand.

"I was interested to see how different approaches could be on the same piece of land with the same type of scenario," says Barry. "It's kind of cool to see how everyone, even in the same base situation, brings their own flavor to it. They were showing me their spreadsheets with their budgets for the first three years."

Barry says spending the winter conducting the interviews and taking the Farm Beginnings class not only helped her start thinking about what it takes financially to farm, but also to look at her personal goals.

"I went through my own process of taking an introspective look at what I really want," she says.

Some of that self-examination can take place in the classroom, but it can also occupy one's thoughts under a summer sun while kneeling between rows of snap peas. Loeffler says farming the incubator acre taught he and Benda everything from how to manage finances and time to dealing with customers. But it also helped the young couple—they are both 28—realize they weren't ready to dive into full-time farming just yet. Loeffler has a passion for woodworking and Benda is a print maker. While farming may still be in their future, they are focusing on these other endeavors for the time being.

"The experience made it clear it would be hard to pursue anything else if you farm," says Loeffler. "It can be all-consuming."

Taking Root

Fisher and Bannen's strategy for giving Barry her winter homework was two-fold:

Farm Beginnings Profiles

To read more profiles of Farm Beginnings graduates, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/meetourgraduates.

for one thing it gave her an opportunity to see what she was getting into. They also hope her notes will serve as a basis for documenting season-to-season experiences before they are lost. This information may come in handy if the incubator acre ever becomes a more formal entity—ideas include making it a nonprofit education center.

"Is there a consistent pattern of what farmers are experiencing? And if we do want to formalize it, what would that look like?" Fisher asks.

Whatever the future holds, the incubator acre is taking on the trappings of permanence. Not only is it accumulating agromonic and intellectual history, but also some physical infrastructure. Past farmers have added a deer fence and a walk-in cooler. Barry's contribution is a new compost pile.

This spring, Barry worked as an employee of A to Z, along with interns Liz Davey and Steve Jones, who recently took LSP's Farm Dreams class (see page 17). Like her incubator acre predecessors, this summer she is splitting her time between A to Z and the mini-lot. Barry's Dancing Gnome Farm has an 11-member CSA enterprise and is selling at the Hopkins, Minn., farmers' market. Her near-term goal is to farm part-time, using other employment to fill in the financial gaps—one thing all of the mini-plot farmers learn is that producing food on an acre doesn't provide a full-time living.

"I can dream farther ahead, but in terms of planning farther ahead, it's kind of hard at this point," says Barry on a rainy afternoon as she heads out to check on A to Z's fields and hoopouses with Davey, Jones, Fisher and Bannen.

During the impromptu tour, it's clear Bannen and Fisher enjoy having so much young energy on the farm, especially now that they are empty nesters—all three of their children are in their 20s and are off on their own adventures (one, Emmet Fisher, farms with his wife Cella Langer near Mount Horeb, Wis.; they are 2013 Farm Beginnings graduates). Bannen says the relationships they've forged with beginning farmers over the years are about more than passing on the nuts and bolts of raising food.

"There are also the things on the level of what happens when you share your lives and you're doing management and mentoring," she says. "That's stimulating for us. We need these young people." □

History, Hopes & Plans

Women Caring for the Land Meetings Highlight an Important, but Often Ignored, Voice in Farm Country

By Rebecca White

Sometimes, the introductions take over an hour. But it's always an enjoyable part of the free-flowing agenda when women landowners come together to discuss conservation and their farms. There's a lot of history, hopes and plans to share, and the interactions between the mostly 60-and-over assemblage can be alternately informative, supportive and occasionally spur knowing nods of, "Haven't we all been there!"

"I like the idea of a group of women," says Sandra Bessingpas of Kensington, in western Minnesota. "It helps to know there are more people out there [like me], and the group has made me feel a lot more confident talking to my renter."

Bessingpas, who manages pasture and tillable acreage she and her husband purchased 30 years ago, participates in a Women Caring for the Land group, which meets regularly during the spring, summer and autumn months in Glenwood, Minn. Women Caring for the Land brings together women who own land and rent it out for agricultural production, and who are interested in learning more about conservation on that land—whether it be grassed waterways, field windbreaks, strip tillage, grazing or cover crops. Many of the participants are widowed, self-identified "farm wives" or have inherited the land from parents who farmed. Some were active in farming at some point in their lives, and some pursued careers that took them far from their land. All are eager to understand more about what takes place on their land and how to work with their renter or renters to increase stewardship while maintaining good production and good relationships.

Women Caring for the Land groups in

both eastern and western Minnesota are facilitated by the Land Stewardship Project. These groups are based on a model developed by the Iowa-based Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN), which was created after it emerged that more than half of all farmland in Iowa is owned by women—most over the age of 65. Like WFAN, Women Caring for the Land groups employ an informal, "learning circle" method of



Kylene Olson (second from right) led a tour of the Minnewaska Schools prairie area near Glenwood, Minn., during a Women Caring for the Land meeting. The land Minnewaska Schools occupies was once part of Helen Claire Anderson's family farm. (Photo by Rebecca White)

education, support and empowerment for women engaged in agricultural land management—often seen as a "man's world."

The trend towards women ownership of agricultural land in Minnesota is also on the rise, with the percentage of women farmland owners estimated to rival Iowa's (although exact figures are not known at this time). Coupled with a troubling rise in soil erosion, habitat loss and water quality issues which can be exacerbated by poor farming practices on rented land, it is becoming clear that non-operating landowners, and particularly women, can play a significant role in

curbing the degradation of our region's most important resource.

The lengthy introductions process that takes place at the meetings encourages group members to share their connections with the land as well as their needs, values and concerns. The women also participate in pasture walks, field days and other "hands-on" activities as allowed by weather and the physical abilities of those participating. Last summer, Women Caring for the Land participants toured a local USDA service center and met several employees of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). In the fall, a prairie walk and plant identification field trip was led by Kylene Olson, Director of the Chippewa River Watershed Project. In addition, Susan Stokes of Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG) connected

with the group via weblink to discuss the basics of conservation leases. The group has also hosted local farmers like Jess Berge, who spoke about soil health and cover crops in his own operation (see page 25).

However these women come together, they always find an opportunity to share their stories. For example, Judith Rose, an active participant of the Glenwood area Women Caring for the Land group, lives in Milota, Minn., but owns farmland on the Pembina Ridge in North Dakota. The land includes numerous wetlands, a "tree claim" planted under the Timber Culture Act of 1873, and a couple hundred acres of tillable land she rents to a man she baby-sat as a teenager. ("Tree claims" were provided for under the Timber Culture Act of 1873.

Under the provision, settlers could claim another quarter section of land provided they planted trees on ¼ of it and maintained them for 10 years.)

When their parents passed away, Rose bought out her siblings, who did not have as strong a connection to their farming roots; she believes that her own "connection to the land is innate—it can be learned, but [I] was born to it." She has a strong relationship with her renter and visits the land three or four times a year to walk the boundaries,

Women, see page 23...

check on the crops, look for wildlife and maintain the tree claim. She hopes that one day the installation of wind turbines along the ridgeline might fund the “retirement” of her land back to prairie. But for the time being, Rose plans to talk to her renter about including cover crops in his rotation, with the goal of building soil health.

When Helen Claire Anderson inherited her family’s farm in Glenwood, much of the original 120 acres had been sold following her father’s retirement in the 1970s. Anderson initially placed the remaining land in the Conservation Reserve Program, and when the contract expired, she decided to enroll in the Wetlands Reserve Program. The change entailed removal of scrub trees and planting new grasses and wildflowers. She is delighted with the variety of birds and wildlife that now dwell in the wetland areas and visit her yard. Additionally, Anderson co-owns an 80-acre parcel of tillable land with a cousin, and hopes to engage with their renter about potential conservation measures there. Anderson feels supported in her land management decisions by the members of her Women Caring for the Land group.

Looking to Transition Your Farm to the Next Generation? Check out the *Farm Transitions Toolkit*

Owners of farmland who are looking to transition their enterprise to the next generation of farmers can now turn to the *Farm Transitions Toolkit*, a comprehensive Land Stewardship Project/Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture resource. The target audience for the *Toolkit* is those people who want to pass their farm on in a way that supports healthy rural communities, strong local economies and sustainable land stewardship.

The *Toolkit* contains resources, links to services and practical calculation tables to help landowners establish a commonsense plan. It also features user-friendly resources on the economic, legal, governmental, agronomic, ecological and even social issues that must be considered in order to ensure a successful farm transition. It is rounded out with profiles of farmers who are in various stages of transitioning their enterprises to the next generation. For more on the *Toolkit*, see the No. 4, 2013, edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

An online version of the *Toolkit* is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmtransitionstoolkit; paper versions can be purchased by calling 800-909-MISA (6472).

“I’m surprised more people don’t come,” she recently said.

Along with their participation in the Women Caring for the Land group, Bessingpas, Rose and Anderson remain active and engaged in their communities through activities such as quilting classes, the League of Women Voters and the local Garden Club. Their values of stewardship and caring are reflected in positive relationships with their renters, the women’s community spirit and an enthusiasm for learning more about how

to manage their agricultural assets with both production and conservation in mind. □

Rebecca White is a Community Based Food Systems organizer based in western Minnesota. For more information on the Women Caring for the Land group in Glenwood, Minn., contact White at 320-305-9685 or rwhite@landstewardshipproject.org. For information about Women Caring for the Land gatherings in southeastern Minnesota, contact LSP’s Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

Profits from Perennials

To Till or Not to Till

Conservation Tillage in Western Minn.—the Good, the Bad & the Practical

By Robin Moore

In my job with the Chippewa 10% Project in western Minnesota, I get to work with farmers, promoting and supporting practices that will improve this watershed’s soil and water quality. One topic that comes up often is no-till farming, which seems like a great solution to a lot of soil and water quality issues. Farmers themselves have said to me, “We need to do a better job of keeping our soil on our fields.” No-till farming could be a big step in that direction.

This technique can take many forms, but basically under such a system the residue from the previous year remains on the field during spring planting. No-till planters fitted with narrow disks designed to cut through the litter are used to open the soil just enough to deposit seeds directly into the oth-

erwise undisturbed field. Besides preserving soil, no-till can be a way to cut down on the number of trips a farmer makes across a field, saving expensive fuel.

But it’s a hard sell in a region where farmers commonly till fields in the fall to get a jump-start on the following growing season. Farmers face many practical barriers when it comes to adopting and implementing the practice.

I recently asked four farmers in and around the Chippewa River watershed to give me a better perspective on what these barriers are, and what can be done to overcome them. The farmers were: Pat Byrne, who has been no-till and ridge-till farming since the 1970s; Jon Roisen, who employs a combination of conventional and no-till planting; John Ledermann, who started no-till farming in the 1980s and left the practice in the 1990s; and Jess Berge, who just bought a no-till drill for his farm. I asked

them what influenced their decisions, what difficulties they have, what advantages they see and what they would recommend to others. They had quite a bit to say for a bunch of quiet Minnesota farmers.

Worth the Extra Trouble

When driving up to Pat Byrne’s house for an interview, I could see that the snow around his farm was much whiter than on the rest of the landscape that day, and that all the fields surrounding the neat farm-site had residue poking up from under the snow.

Byrne farms with a combination of no-till and a modified form of conservation tillage called “ridge-till,” which consists of creating ridges during the growing season with cultivations that the following year’s crop is then planted into. Ridge tilling requires more field time than no-till, but eliminates deep tillage and leaves the field litter undisturbed in the fall. Byrne is quite proud of his system, and wonders why it hasn’t become more popular in this area.

Byrne lives in the Mud Creek area and his soils are a mix of heavy and sandy loam, most of which is tilled to drain off excess

No-Till, see page 24...

moisture. He feels that no-tilling is extremely feasible, but less convenient than conventional tillage. By the farmer's account, the practice takes more "fussing," more patience and smaller equipment that is more difficult to operate than larger equipment. These smaller implements are usually older, but also more sensitive to terrain difficulty and often not linked to Global Positioning System (GPS) planting equipment. Many operators, used to big equipment that operates uniformly on most landscapes and with more computer assistance, grow impatient with the slower process.

Sometimes a wet spring will keep Byrne out of a field or from forming ridges. Without the ridges providing an elevated plane to plant on, he will rent his neighbor's chisel plow and do fall or spring tillage to dry out the soil, losing the advantage of ridge-tilling's minimal soil disturbance (however, Byrne said he doesn't resort to that very often).

Ridge-tilling requires the equipment operator to drive the tractor very steady and straight to keep the planter on the ridge, which GPS auto-track would make easier. He says he has good levels of organic matter in his fields and likes leaving cover on the soil. Byrne feels that tiling to drain off wet fields and the Roundup Ready herbicide system are really what make his system feasible. Before Roundup, he had quack grass in his fields and no-till couldn't withstand the pressure from the rhizomatous plant, requiring much more tillage to set back the grass. He thinks that anyone could do no-till and ridge-till with some patience.

John Roisen: A Modified System

Jon Roisen, who farms in Lac Qui Parle County, has been using no-till for his soybeans since the 1990s. He has always noticed that when he chisel-plows fields that have been in no-till, the plow "pulls like a knife through butter"—the fields are mellow and have better organic matter. He prefers this method both for erosion control and moisture management. Roisen tries to no-till in fields he knows to be more erodible and prone to water stress. He said that

spring plowing can cost an inch of water per pass in a field and prefers to avoid tillage when he can. He doesn't currently no-till corn, although he has tried it by planting the seed into wheat stubble. The farmer found that the soil was too wet and cold under the wheat straw for timely corn germination, and he ran into trouble with mice and grubs going after the seed. Roisen says maybe it would work if he baled the wheat straw, but he feels strongly about leaving that plant material on the field.

Roisen chooses fields according to their fitness for no-till every year, and this year he has modified his planter to be able to accommodate either regular planting or no-till planting with an attachment of no-till coulters and trash whips that he can raise and lower to the ground. This means that he can easily transition between a no-till and a tilled field without going home to change implements. The modification cost about \$7,000, which is extremely economical when compared with the price of a new no-till drill. Quality used drills are hard to come by; if you can find one used it's usually already "beaten to death," says Roisen.

Too Much Variability

John Ledermann lives in the glacial till region of the east branch of the Chippewa River. He began farming in the 1980s, started no-till farming in the early 1990s, and by the end of that decade had left the no-till system. Ledermann and his father switched from ridge-tilling to no-tilling with soil conservation in mind, but there were many more advantages. No-till did not require as much precision as ridge tilling, freed up the month of June that one spent cultivating the ridges in the field, and was much easier on equipment—when you have to drive over

the ridges to avoid wet spots it's like "driving over piles of rocks," says Ledermann. He noticed that under no-till the organic matter also went up in his fields.

However, this was around the time when Roundup Ready soybeans came onto the market and in using them, Ledermann started to notice a lot of variability in his fields. The best yielding field was always no-till, but so was the worst yielding field. Ledermann couldn't say for sure, but he doesn't believe the soybean genetics were fit for no-till, and after several years of highly



John Ledermann examines a cover crop of tillage radish. He uses such plantings to build nutrients and organic matter, as well as protect the soil from wind and water erosion. (Photo by Robin Moore)

variable yields, he started to feel like he needed to change the way he farmed his soybeans. He says that it really wasn't about the money—the no-till system was profitable, but he wasn't happy with the variability of the fields.

"It was sort of an issue of pride," he recalls. "It's a farmer's natural instinct to try and do better, so we went back to something that we knew worked," which was conventional tilling and planting. At this point he also started tilling more acres. Ledermann did retain certain practices of the no-till system, like leaving all of the soybean stubble untouched over winter.

According to Ledermann, no-till farming actually made more sense before Roundup Ready genetics. The no-till system suppressed more weeds by leaving litter on the ground and by reducing soil disturbance, which stimulates weed growth. Weed control used to mean cultivation, which had a very small window to be successful. The weeds have to be small and the ground dry, and the farmer has to have good timing. Because the Roundup Ready system allows the farmer to spray for weeds after the crop is well established, it not only eliminates any need to cultivate but significantly lengthens the window the farmer has available to control weeds.

Ledermann says good used equipment is much more available when one is using a conventional tillage system. In alternative systems like no-till, equipment is expensive and it's difficult to find quality used parts.



Switching to no-till can involve a significant investment in specialty equipment. (Photo by Robin Moore)

"It's hard to spend tens of thousands of dollars on a piece of equipment you're not sure about, and no one around you knows anything about," he says, adding that the resale value was unreliable as well.

On the other hand, Ledermann is still disappointed about leaving no-till, and his goal is to get back to that system as soon as he can. He has switched to strip-tilling in the last five years. Strip tilling is the practice of tilling a narrow band—six to eight inches wide and six to eight inches deep—creating a seedbed for the row, while leaving the rest of the field undisturbed. Strip tilling also allows for simultaneous deep application of fertilizer directly into the row, which Ledermann finds more efficient when compared to the broadcasting he used to do with no-till.

Applying nitrogen in-between the rows of established plants, called side dressing, is also feasible in a no-till system and is generally a more timely and efficient use of fertilizer. However, both Ledermann and Roisen say that unless you own your own equipment, it's hard to get side dressing done in the short weather window available.

For the past two years, Ledermann has been experimenting with cover crops, which he plants in the late summer after he harvests his wheat and leaves over winter undisturbed. He strip-tills into the cover-cropped ground the following spring. The farmer uses the cover crops to build nutrients and organic matter, as well as protect the soil from wind and water erosion.

Adding No-Till to the Mix

Finally, Jess and Tammy Berge are farmers who are ready to commit to integrating no-till into their farm's planting system of soybeans, small grains and cover crops. Jess began with livestock and added row crops in the early 2000s, with his primary focus being forage and feed for his cows and sheep. When I asked Jess why he invested in a no-till drill, the first reason he gave was

cost. The row crops take second place to the livestock as a moneymaking enterprise, and Berge doesn't own all of the bigger equipment for cropping, including a combine and deep tillage equipment. When he considered the equipment needed for conventional planting versus no-till, especially with the variety of crops and cover crops he is interested in, it was more economical to go with



Tammy and Jess Berge are integrating no-till into their farm's mix of row crops, small grains, cover crops and livestock. (Photo by Robin Moore)

the no-till drill. That way Berge could skip the plow and the stalk chopper—mainstays of conventional tillage.

For the past several years, he has been hiring the use of his neighbor's no-till drill to plant some of his fields. But lately his neighbor has been too busy doing custom work, and Berge decided that it made sense to have his own drill. He likes the no-till system because it means less time in the field, less equipment and fewer input costs. An initial drop-off in yields is a common problem for farmers who transition from conventional tillage to no-till, but so far Berge has not noticed a yield drag. And although the presence of corn stalks on the soil surface is of concern to farmers who worry about the soil remaining too wet and cold for spring plantings, Berge sees this dead plant material as a way to build organic matter and soil health. These are biological bonuses on top of the economic sense the system makes. The young farmer also thinks the drill will make some custom work available to him.

No Clear-Cut Answer

I have come to realize I had an over-simplified understanding of how no-till farming can be done in this part of western Min-

nesota. I would love to be able to bite into a clear story about how no-till is the answer to all plowed fields, how no-till works for corn, how it is a no-fail system that will keep soil in the fields. Sustainable agriculture/soil health innovator Gabe Brown has achieved this with many years of dedication and experimentation on his farm in south-central North Dakota. See the No. 3 and 4, 2012, issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for more on Brown.

Here in the Chippewa watershed, the farmers I talked to do not have that fix-all solution yet; they all tell me that it's hard, that it doesn't work well with corn, and that the genetics and soil-temperatures make it a challenge. But they are all still committed, all working hard to move in a direction that's good for their farms and the watershed.

All four farmers recognize the need to cover the soil, to build it, to keep the residue on top, to be good stewards, and that, ultimately, no-till does pencil out financially. Most of them express a wish to ultimately move away from the Roundup Ready system, and they see no-till as a way to move in that direction with the weed suppression benefits it provides. I appreciate their honesty and feel more able to talk about no-till with others. I think we need more experimentation, risk mitigation and community support for those who are trying to implement innovative systems like this.

We also need more voices—tell us your experience with no-till in Minnesota, what you've learned and ideas you might have to share. Contact me at 320-269-2105 or rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Robin Moore is the coordinator of the Chippewa 10% Project, a joint effort of the Land Stewardship Project and the Chippewa River Watershed Project. The 10% Project is working to help farmers develop watershed friendly farming systems that are economically viable. More information is at www.landstewardshipproject.org under the Stewardship & Food section.

Community Conservation

Good Fences Make Good Neighbors, but Sometimes so do Open Gates

By Brian DeVore

It's that age-old struggle: accepting a little short-term disturbance in the name of long-term stability. Dave Trauba regularly faces the challenge of explaining that tradeoff to hunters who visit the Lac Qui Parle Wildlife Refuge in western Minnesota only to find their favorite spot for shooting pheasants has recently been grazed by cattle from a neighboring farm. Why, they ask sometimes with more than a little anger and frustration, are domestic livestock being allowed to wander around in a place supposedly reserved for wild animals?

"We try to explain to them the big picture, but..." says Trauba, his voice trailing off. Trauba, the manager of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) refuge, knows that the big picture is this: the soil and vegetation on wildlife refuges and other natural areas require regular, sometimes violent, disruption to remain healthy and resilient. That has become evident to natural resource managers in places like western Minnesota as they watch grasslands deteriorate under a ragged blanket of invasive species like red cedar and buckthorn.

In the past, these grasslands were kept healthy thanks to bison and wildfires. Now, innovations in managed rotational grazing make it possible to expose natural habitat to short-term impact followed by long rest periods—just the kind of disturbance it requires to be healthy. The DNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and even private

groups like the Nature Conservancy are inviting domesticated hooves—mostly cattle, some sheep and goats—onto lands to help manage them. In recent years, conservation grazing has proven it can not only bring back threatened habitat like grasslands, but keep it resilient into the future (see "Grazing as a Public Good," No. 1, 2014, Land Stewardship Letter).

Minnesota natural resource professionals have ambitious plans for conservation grazing.

The DNR is working with farmers to use conservation grazing on around 10,000 acres of its 1.4 million-acre Wildlife Management Area system, for example. The DNR's goal is to use the tool on 50,000 acres by 2015. But numerous obstacles must be overcome before conservation grazing becomes a consistent tool on natural areas. For one thing, many refuges lack the basic infrastructure needed to host livestock (see sidebar below).

But perhaps an even bigger challenge is changing the conventional wisdom that livestock and natural areas do not mix. Much of this perception is based on the reality of what's occurred in Western states, where livestock producers have been given almost unfettered, long-term access to public areas, causing major ecological harm in some cases. As a result, mention "public grazing" in any other part of the country, and the typical reaction is decidedly negative.

"Sportsmen beware of this latest craze in grazing on public lands," wrote Renville County (Minn.) Soil and Water Conservation District technician Tom Kalahar in a commentary for *Outdoor News*. "If we go down that path, be ready for fences, cows,

Give it a Listen

Episode 151 of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast features wildlife and grazing experts talking about the benefits and challenges involved with using grazing to improve natural areas: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

and less grass."

Wildlife professionals say privately that agencies like the DNR have been experiencing significant internal and external push back on proposals to increase the use of conservation grazing. That's why Minnesota conservationists are using public tours, articles and other forms of educational outreach to explain the difference between using well-managed rotational grazing systems to manage habitat on a limited basis and simply letting livestock run amuck on the taxpayer's real estate. There has also been an emphasis on working closely with livestock producers and refuge managers to develop grazing plans that put the health of the resource front and center.

"The worst thing we can do is have people use this management system without proper training," says J.B. Bright, a Fish and Wildlife Service specialist who works with graziers in western Minnesota.

The way Dan Jenniges sees it, the best way to get the non-agricultural public on board with conservation grazing is to find a common goal that farmers, wildlife professionals, environmentalists and hunters can agree on. In this case, that means a mutual desire for a healthy grass system.

Jenniges, who has a pasture-based livestock operation in west-central Minnesota, has watched over the years as grasslands in his area get plowed up for crops or are closed off to livestock by conservation

Community Conservation, see page 27...

Grazing Natural Areas: Not Business as Usual

Refuges and other natural areas may have plenty of cheap forage available for grazing, but make no mistake, it's not like having livestock browse pastures on the home place.

"When you're on the Fish and Wildlife land, it's a little more of an inconvenience," says Jim Wulf, a beef cattle producer who grazes U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service land near his operation in west-central Minnesota. "You have to have some flexibility. You can't just do it by the book."

Livestock producers who graze refuges face issues such as lack of fencing and good

water supplies, having to transport livestock to get access to an area and difficulties in checking on animals regularly. They also have to be mindful that the health of the resource trumps the farmer's desire to get access to low-cost feed.

Livestock producers pay a fee to graze wildlife refuges and natural areas, but in some cases refuge managers work out deals where farmers receive a discount for putting in fencing and other infrastructure. Acre-for-acre swaps have also been done where a livestock producer rests home pastures that contain valuable native species and in turn can graze public

lands. "We can do all sorts of deductions to make it worthwhile," says Bruce Freshke, manager of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Morris Wetland District in Minnesota.

To support grazing infrastructure on public lands, in 2013 the Minnesota Legislature allocated \$600,000 of Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund money for fencing. That's a big help, but doesn't address one of the biggest bugaboos conservationists face when utilizing domestic animals to manage habitat: the loss of local farms that raise livestock.

"We have a lot of land we'd love to graze, but there's no cattle, or people don't want to haul them an hour away," says Freshke.

agencies, environmental groups and private landowners who want more wildlife habitat. The result has been less perennial forage, and what remains is being threatened by invasive species on idled land. Meanwhile, livestock producers hoping to graze are forced to put too many animals on too few acres, or get out of the business altogether.

"No matter what they want grass for, nobody's getting it with the way the land is being managed today," says Jenniges, who grazes cattle and sheep on DNR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service land. "Without livestock, there is no reason for a community to have grass."

Bruce Freshke, manager of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Morris Wetland District in Minnesota, agrees. "You see people who change their farming, and if they don't have cattle, the grass is just a waste," he says.

A Team Approach

That's why some years ago Jenniges started talking about an initiative that would help bring together as a community all those individuals and groups who want more grass on the landscape.

Such a system would not only expand the benefits of conservation grazing beyond refuge boundaries, but would make private, non-farming landowners a part of this team effort. Steve Chaplin, senior conservation scientist with the Nature Conservancy's Minnesota field office, calls such a concept "coordinated landscape management"—it's a way to prevent the creation of islands of habitat that are overwhelmed by bad land use throughout the rest of the region.

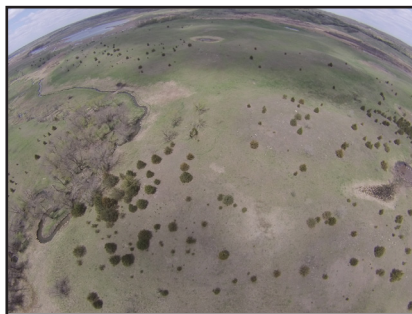
"By having a mixture of private and public lands managed well, we can have a wider landscape level impact," says Chaplin. "We need to talk about the overall landscape and not just a particular plot of ground."

Such a community approach to conservation is the focus of the "Simon Lake Challenge," an initiative launched by the Land Stewardship Project in west-central Minnesota last year. In the vicinity of Simon Lake, which lies mostly in Pope County, is a gently rolling landscape dotted with farms, a mix of DNR and Fish and Wildlife Service land, and property that has been bought up by non-farmers looking to use it for hunting or other recreational purposes.

Unfortunately, much of that land—public and private—is getting overgrown with invasive plants, says Andy Marcum, who

does landowner outreach for the Chippewa 10% Project, a joint initiative of LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project.

During community meetings in the winter of 2012-2013, it became clear that, despite some differences of opinion, many Simon Lake landowners, farmers and non-farmers alike, share one goal: bring back healthy grasslands and other perennial plant systems. In that light, many landowners are starting to see the value of teaming up to battle a denizen that doesn't respect even the



These photos, taken with an aerial drone, show the before (left) and after (right) effects of cedar tree removal this year on grassland near Simon Lake. The left photo was taken in mid-May and the right photo in late June. Fencing is being erected this summer to prepare it for grazing. (Photos by Andy Marcum)

stoutest fence: invasive species.

"Landowners were finding it didn't do any good to control invasives if your neighbors didn't, so they wanted to work communally, across property lines," says Marcum. "You can't spray, mow or chainsaw enough to control these plants, so they are willing to try anything, including livestock, even if they were anti-grazing before."

During 2014, LSP is working with seven landowners representing 1,500 acres in the Simon Lake area—another five landowners are working with the project through the Working Lands Initiative of the Glacial Lakes Prairie Implementation Team. The Nature Conservancy is renting to the participating property owners a skid steer loader with a rugged carbide cutter so they can remove cedar and sumac. Marcum and Chippewa 10% Project coordinator Robin Moore are then meeting with the landowners to set up five-year management plans. These plans will cover getting rid of the invasives as well as setting up, among other things, rotational grazing systems that can keep the plant pests at bay while improving grassland habitat.

Marcum is using an aerial drone to take before and after photos (see above) of the impacts of invasives removal.

"It's a huge difference," he says.

Cattle herds owned by four different producers are already this summer being used to control invasives on land in the area. The ultimate goal is to combine many smaller herds that could be moved across public and

private property lines in long-term rotations, providing the right mix of large-scale impact and rest natural habitat requires while giving livestock producers flexibility. In the next year or two, around 6,000 acres of public and private land will be included in the Simon Lake demonstration area, but there is the long-term potential for as much as 50,000 acres in the region to be managed this way.

"The focus of this is to create a community-based approach to conservation," says Marcum. "We want to make sure this is completely run by the landowners."

Jenniges, who farms in the Simon Lake area, sees an opportunity where farmers and non-farmers could be a part of a common marketing cooperative in which they own a percentage of the livestock being used to manage the landscape. Such a cooperative would not only help bring together the large numbers of animals needed to manage a large expanse of land, but could provide natural, grass-

fed meat and other products to consumers who want to know their food choices support healthy habitat. Through such an effort, a whole new group of people could be drafted into a community effort to create more resiliency: conscientious eaters.

Jenniges says this could have a trickle-down effect. More cattle being marketed directly, for example, means a local locker plant stays busy processing meat, creating economic activity year-round.

"That kind of activity starts to add up," says the farmer. "Somebody coming hunting for a few months in the fall isn't going to do it. It's not going to support schools, churches and businesses the rest of the year." □

LSP & Perennial Landscapes

The Land Stewardship Project is working in western Minnesota to promote diversified farming systems that build soil health, are economically viable and improve the environment. This work is centered around the Chippewa 10% Project, a partnership of LSP and the Chippewa River Watershed Project. The Simon Lake Challenge is one aspect of this work.

For details, see the **Chippewa 10%** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org. More information is also available by contacting Robin Moore at 320-269-2105 (rmoores@landstewardshipproject.org) or Andy Marcum at 320-634-5327 (andym@landstewardshipproject.org).



The Meat Racket

The Secret Takeover of America's Food Business

By Christopher Leonard

2014; 370 pages

Simon & Schuster

www.simonandschuster.com

Reviewed by Dana Jackson

Unlike Michael Pollan books that expose the power of industrial food companies in the U.S. and suggest how consumers can undermine it by alternative purchasing practices, Christopher Leonard offers no encouragement for escaping the “meat racket.” A former national agribusiness reporter for the Associated Press, Leonard’s *The Meat Racket: The Secret Takeover of America’s Food Business* chronicles the sad story of how consumers in the U. S. “traded away the U. S. farming system” (which includes the kind of stewardship farmers and rural communities the Land Stewardship Project has championed for three decades) in order to get “upfront savings from industrial meat.”

Leonard tells the story of the Tyson meat empire, which was launched in the early 1930s when John Tyson started a business with his only asset, a truck, and began hauling live chickens from Springdale, Ark., to markets in Chicago, Detroit and Saint Louis. Then Tyson bought the chickens himself and gave farmers the feed to raise them for a fixed price on delivery. That model transformed U. S. chicken and hog farming, and this small company grew to be the corporate meat giant called Tyson Foods.

The author believes that the Tyson meat system is so entrenched in the economy of this country and the world that it cannot be dismantled. So why write the book? Because “consumers and farmers are at least entitled to understand the company, and to see it from the inside,” says Leonard.

That inside view is ugly, as Leonard learned through interviews with farmers and former Tyson employees. Many chicken farmers in Arkansas and Oklahoma went bankrupt after borrowing huge amounts of money to build chicken houses and buy equipment because the company delivered bad feed or diseased baby chicks to them. They couldn’t truck enough pounds of grown chickens back to Tyson slaughter-

houses to pay for the feed and make a profit, nor make loan payments to the bank. Still today, when bankruptcy forces families off their farms, Tyson signs contracts with new farmers, and the banks, backed by taxpayers through the federal Farm Service Agency, sets up new farm loans, leading to another round of bankruptcies. All farmers are paid according to a secretive “tournament” system based on an equation that ranks each producer against his neighbors, although names of “competitors” aren’t made known to each other. Best prices go to the most “efficient”—those with the best feed conversion ratio. Tyson decides who will survive and who will go out of business.

John Tyson himself was forced to leave the family farm in Missouri after the stock market crash of 1929. But by 1947, this hard-working man bought both a hatchery and a feed mill in Springdale without borrowing money. His son Don grew up in the business, as obsessed as his father with making money, and in 1958 the younger Tyson talked his father into building an industrial slaughterhouse with borrowed money, integrating the chicken business one step further. After John’s death, Don Tyson continued growing the firm, buying up 33 rival companies between 1962 and 1997. He convinced McDonald’s to put chicken on its menu, and Tyson retrofitted a Nashville plant exclusively for the McNugget, which it efficiently delivered to the McDonald’s distribution center. Then Tyson made the chicken “tender” for Burger King.

These steps revolutionized the American consumers’ relationship with chicken. Leonard says that in 1969 the average American ate about 39 pounds of chicken; by 1995 the average was 70 pounds per person. By the mid-1990s, Tyson controlled 25 percent of the U. S. chicken market, with just a handful of giant companies controlling the rest.

Tyson “chickenized” the hog market by developing nurseries of piglets specially bred for thick legs and haunches and contracting with farmers to raise them to slaughter weight. Smithfield copied the model, bought up small operations and surpassed Tyson. Feed became dirt-cheap after Congress passed the Freedom to Farm Act of 1996 and abandoned production controls. Farmers overproduced because disaster payments sustained them when prices plummeted, and the cheap grain was “financial jet fuel” for industrial meat producers, according to Leonard. Diversified grain and livestock farms began to disappear, replaced by operations that specialize in either pork or crop production. In 1998, when global de-

mand for pork fell and hogs were selling for 10 cents a pound, many family swine farms couldn’t weather the storm, but the corporate operations used their connections to the processing end of the business to survive.

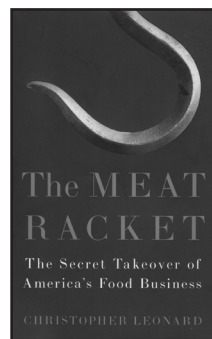
Small towns chosen as sites for corporate operations suffered too. Waldren, Ark., where Tyson has a chicken plant, once had an economy based on diversified farms and the businesses that supplied them. Such towns welcomed the jobs promised by corporate meatpackers that built plants just outside the city limits. Today, the jobs are filled mostly by Asian and African immigrants paid minimum wages, and businesses on Main Street are boarded up. But there is a creepy kind of acceptance of corporate bondage by townspeople—low paying jobs are better than no jobs at all.

This story should be familiar to LSP members and staff who have worked since the mid-1990s to oppose the growth of factory livestock farms and the consolidation of the meatpacking industry. LSP joined with other groups across the country to get U. S. antitrust authorities to enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921 and worked with the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (now the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition) to pass farm bills to help family farms instead of corporate farms. The industrial meat system has prevailed, but LSP’s efforts in the Minnesota Legislature have enabled townships and counties in the state to retain the ability to control the placement of large livestock factories.

Local control truly has been a savior for many rural communities, especially as Big Meat does all it can to undermine state and federal regulations. Leonard describes in detail how Iowa officials challenged the contract hog farming system that had grown in Iowa from 2 percent of hog farmers in 1980 to 40 percent in 1998 (it’s now 70 percent), when the hog market crashed. Iowa’s attorney general sued Smithfield for violating the state’s law banning meatpackers from owning animals.

Corporate meatpackers wielded political clout to defeat the Iowa attorney general’s valiant efforts to stop vertical integration by scaring legislators into thinking such restrictions would drive the hog business out of the state. The result was an agreement in 2005 to allow vertical integration to continue, but it included important protections, such as outlawing the tournament payment system.

Leonard also reports how President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of



Meat Racket, see page 29...

Agriculture Tom Vilsack tried to reform the meat industry. The big meat companies and various industry groups spent \$7.79 million in 2010 fighting a proposed rule that would reduce the control that corporate meatpackers had over farmers and rural communities. It was money well spent: the rule was killed in Congress. And they aren't through yet. Just this summer Big Meat is attempting to weaken protections for livestock farmers through changes to an appropriations bill being considered in the U.S. House.

What makes my heart sink is the reason Big Meat has prevailed. The industry and its supporters in Congress have convinced the nation that a production/processing system that is non-competitive and industrialized is the *status quo*, and it's scarier to change the *status quo* than it is to live under its oppression. But Leonard emphasizes that the real driving force behind the industrial meat system is the American consumer, who supposedly just wants cheap and plentiful protein. Ironically, since the price is controlled completely by an unchallenged "oligarchy of meat companies," the supermarket price of meat has risen steadily since the mid-1980s. So much for a free and open market. □

Dana Jackson is a former LSP board member, Associate Director and senior staff member. She co-edited the 2002 book, The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems With Ecosystems.

Quarter-Acre Farm

How I Kept the Patio, Lost the Lawn, and Fed My Family for a Year

By Spring Warren
Illustrated by Jesse Pruet
2011; 336 pages
Seal Press
www.sealpress.com

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

The *Quarter Acre Farm* is the story of Spring Warren's adventure in urban, or more appropriately, "suburban" agriculture. The author describes how she took her northern California yard and turned it into a small-scale subsistence farm capable of meeting many of her family's nutritional needs for a year.

Warren was raised in Wyoming and the Black Hills of South Dakota and after col-

Plant a Pocket of Prairie

By Phyllis Root

Illustrated by Betsy Bowen
2014; 40 pages; 30 color plates
University of Minnesota Press
www.upress.umn.edu

Reviewed by Brian DeVore

Back when my kids were too young to read but old enough to know what books were worth repeating ad nauseam, I lost count how many times I performed *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* for them. It's a book with a circular "one thing leads to another" kind of logic. The plot goes like this: if you give a mouse a cookie, he's going to get thirsty and want some milk, and then a mirror to make sure he doesn't have a milk mustache and then nail scissors to give himself the hair trim the mirror shows he needs, etc., etc., until we are back at square one, with the mouse asking for another cookie.

It's a silly story, but one that teaches kids that there are results to every action, even in your own kitchen (or maybe I'm just telling myself that to justify reading the same book four trillion times).

Phyllis Root's new children's book, *Plant a Pocket of Prairie* also teaches about connections in a fun way, as in what

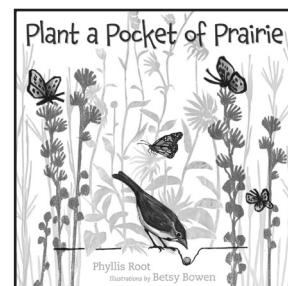
happens if you plant foxglove beardtongue in your backyard? Well, a hummingbird might stop by to sip the nectar, which will prompt you to plant other prairie species

like butterfly weed, which in turn will attract monarchs, which will lead to more plants, more critters...you get the picture.

Root's straightforward story, helped along by Betsy Bowen's colorful illustrations, helps kids see that one small act can spawn a world of interwoven goodness. The book leads and ends with a brief history of the demise of the prairie ecosystem and the good that even remnant pockets of native grasses and flowers can provide. An added bonus is a handy glossary of terms.

But Root doesn't dwell on natural history or terminology. The meat of the book is a simple connect-the-dots lesson that entertains and teaches. Maybe kids won't see the intricate ecological connections the first time around, but as with any good children's book, there will be plenty of opportunities to "repeat" the lesson. □

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter and a retired expert on children's literature.



lege became an apartment dweller in Connecticut before settling in a suburban home in northern California. Her husband and two teenaged boys were initially skeptical of her idea to farm their yard. This wasn't just about digging up some Kentucky bluegrass and planting it to vegetables—Warren for all practical purposes created an organic subsistence farm with the goal of providing 75 percent of the family's food for a year. It eventually proved itself and improved her family's nutritional and economic situation, and they finally saw the wisdom of Warren's efforts, becoming her biggest supporters.

In addition to being a personal biography and history of this micro-farm, the book is a how-to guide of ideas and approaches to resolving many of the challenges that could face anyone attempting this sort of project. Warren was particularly focused on establishing this farm at a minimum of cost and was able to get free materials such as old bricks to build her plant beds. The irony of

all this is she's doing it in the town of Davis, which is in the heart of the Central Valley, one of the biggest centers of large-scale food production in the world.

The author describes the benefits of having a mentor, in this case a local farmer named Lloyd, who evaluated her farm and gave her practical feedback on her operation. Warren also goes into great detail about natural approaches to pest and weed management—these are useful ideas for any food producer, whether they be in an urban, suburban or rural area.

Although the book is set in northern California, the ideas are practical and general enough that they can be used almost anywhere. The recipes would work in any kitchen, and the use of barter trade and recycling of free and inexpensive used materials could reduce costs and save resources in a variety of settings. □

Frequent Land Stewardship Project volunteer Dale Hadler lives in southeastern Minnesota.



Admin Corner

Volunteers Fuel Our Work

By Karen Benson

“**Y**ou have to have many thanks.” That is what my Grandpa Olaf would say with a big smile on his face when someone took him to an appointment, brought him a meal or stopped to visit. He would then offer you a piping hot cup of *the strongest* coffee and a cookie. He was a hard-working, lifelong farmer who loved to tell us stories, especially about neighbors helping neighbors on the farm, and he truly appreciated what people did for him.

To our many, many volunteers we say, “*You have to have many thanks.*”

As the mission and work of The Land Stewardship Project continues to grow, we appreciate the many folks who lend a hand. Without the energy and input of our volunteers we would not be able to accomplish all of the important work we do.

Our volunteers play a big part in “getting the job done.” Some of the roles they have filled include silent auction organizers, event greeters, phone bankers, bulk mail assemblers, data entry managers, committee participants, farm hosts and event speakers.

Two of our southeastern Minnesota volunteers have long been there to lend a hand when needed. Nine-year veteran Kaye Huelskamp has been involved in a number of activities, ranging from silent auction organizing, steering committee organizing and Winona County activities organizing to data entry and Healthcare Committee participant, just to name a few. Kaye says she volunteers “to work for change on really important issues that impact all of us” in our communities. Kaye has donated countless hours of time, research and dedication to LSP’s mission.

Arlis Ellinghuysen is another veteran



Kaye Huelskamp



Volunteers helped prepare food, wash dishes, clean up and sign people in during LSP’s 9th Annual Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol (see page 8).

in our southeastern Minnesota office. She first connected with LSP in the 1980s when she and her husband Eddie farmed in rural Lewiston. Since she began volunteering, Arlis has served on various committees and has lent a hand with numerous bulk mailing projects. She also recalls the many hours she spent assembling *The Monitoring Tool Box*, page-by-page. Arlis volunteers because she “believes in rural Minnesota, a healthy lifestyle and helping others.”

Recent Twin Cities-based volunteer Carolyn Bussey says she got involved with LSP because she wanted to get more involved with the sustainable agriculture movement.

“Although I don’t desire to move off to the countryside myself, I do strongly feel that our agriculture system is in need of a change towards support of land stewardship and sustainability,” she says. “I have really enjoyed helping with the program work that LSP does, and it has been a wonderful opportunity to meet other like-minded people in the sustainable ag community. Volunteering is a way for me to provide support during a time when I have more time than money.”

LSP policy organizer Kaitlyn O’Connor says she has worked with numerous volunteers on key initiatives in recent months.

“I’ve had 32 volunteers help with the petition drive, many of them came in more than once,” she says. “For the Family Farm Breakfast, 53 volunteers donated their time, either stuffing invitations, doing turnout calling, helping with set-up, or working at the

breakfast itself. The value of volunteer work cannot be overstated.”

LSP member Mark Rusch has been volunteering in the Twin Cities office for at least five years.

“When I started volunteering, I worked on the *CSA Directory*,” he says. “Since then I’ve assembled mailings, sealed envelopes, pasted mailing labels, monitored compost bins at the summer cookout, entered frac sand petitions into LSP’s database and a whole lot more. I find it gratifying to work with Minnesota farmers and landowners dedicated to sustainability and stewardship.”

Volunteer positions may be on a regular basis within a particular time frame, or on-call as needed. We welcome anyone—from high school and college students to retirees.

If you would like to join this amazing group of volunteers, please contact the following folks in the area you would like to volunteer in:

- Amelia Shoptaugh, Twin Cities office, amelias@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-722-6377.
- Karen Benson southeastern Minnesota office (Lewiston), 507-523-3366, karenb@landstewardshipproject.org.
- Terry VanDerPol, western Minnesota office (Montevideo), 320-269-2105, tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Karen Benson is the office administrator in LSP’s southeastern Minnesota office in Lewiston.



Arlis Ellinghuysen



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Membership Update

Thanks for Contributing to a Common Vision

By Mike McMahon

In the Land Stewardship Project's Membership Program, we have been counting and sorting memberships in all sorts of ways recently—the number of new members, the number of sustaining members (monthly pledgers to LSP), the number of membership renewals and the total number of contributions provided to advance LSP's work.

It's one of the favorite parts of my job, because no matter how we sort and count LSP memberships, they are all contributions toward a common vision of stewardship and justice on the land. When people give what they can, and we add it all up, it has a major impact on what we can accomplish together.

June 30 marked the end of the first phase of a three-year plan to grow LSP's dues-paying membership by 30 percent and increase member contributions by 40 percent.

I am grateful to report that at the time of this writing LSP is very close to reaching the first year goals. LSP's membership has grown by more than 500 households and we are within spitting distance of LSP's membership fundraising goals for the year.

"Thank you" to everyone who recruited a friend to join LSP, renewed their membership, made a special gift, came to a meeting, responded to an action alert, taught a class or took action with LSP.

A growing, active LSP membership is essential to the work we do today and the foundation we are laying for the future. Turn to any page of the *Land Stewardship Letter*

and you'll see LSP members who are leading the movement for family farms, sustainable agriculture, healthy food and vibrant rural communities.

LSP is also moving forward with our new *Long Range Plan* (see pages 3-5), developed over several months with input from LSP members. The plan is firmly rooted in our mission and the lived experience, needs and aspirations of members.

LSP's growth as an organization is an integral part of this plan. To become a membership organization powerful enough to change the course of our farm and food system, and take control back from the corporations that don't look beyond a quarterly profit-and-loss statement, then we need to grow both the number of members and the contributions raised from within LSP.

There are several ways you can help LSP grow. You can renew your membership, sign up for a monthly pledge or ask someone you know to become a member. You can also volunteer your time, attend a meeting or a direct action, write a letter to the editor or share LSP information through your social media networks. All of these things will help us create a system of agriculture that cares for people and the land.

If you have ideas about growing LSP's membership, I'd appreciate the opportunity to talk to you about how we can create an even stronger, more effective LSP. □

Mike McMahon is LSP's Director of Individual Giving. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

In Memory & in Honor...

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

In Memory of Cletus C. Gacke

◆ Jennifer Meadows & Glen Goodsell

In Memory of Marie Boeder

◆ Loretta & Martin Jaus

◆ Dan & Norma Francis

In Memory of Bev Dillon

◆ Loretta & Martin Jaus

In Honor of Anne Sawyer-Aitch & Jemiah Aitch

◆ Judy Delaittre

In Memory of Betty O'Connor

◆ Vicki & Keith Poier

In Memory of Wayne Sauey

◆ Maryjude Hoeffel

In Memory of Roland Sigurdson

◆ Darren Lochner, Theresa

Stabo & Deb Vosler

◆ Lee Ann Landstrom

◆ Randolph & Dawna Sigurdson

◆ Fly Fishing Women of Minnesota

For details on donating to LSP in the name of someone, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

Membership Questions?

Contact the Land Stewardship Project's Membership Program at 612-722-6377 or aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Support LSP in Your Workplace

The Land Stewardship Project is a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, which is a coalition of 20 environmental organizations in Minnesota that offer workplace giving as an option in making our communities better places to live. Together member organizations of the Minnesota Environmental Fund work to:

- promote the sustainability of our rural communities and family farms;
- protect Minnesotans from health hazards;
- educate citizens and our youth on conservation efforts;
- preserve wilderness areas, parks, wetlands and wildlife habitat.

You can support LSP in your workplace by giving through the Minnesota Environmental Fund. Options include giving a designated amount through payroll deduction, or a single gift. You may also choose to give to the entire coalition or specify the organization of your choice within the coalition, such as the Land Stewardship Project.

If your employer does not provide this opportunity, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For details, contact LSP's Mike McMahon (mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org) or Abby Liesch (aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org) at 612-722-6377.






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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **JULY 24—Burleigh County Soil Con. District Dakota Lakes Research Farm Bus Tour**, Pierre, S. Dak. Contact: www.bcsd.com, 701-250-4518, Ext. 3

→ **JULY 26—Urban Farm Tour**, Duluth Minn. (see page 17)
→ **JULY 27—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on Vegetable Production**, Sweet Beet Farm, Watertown, Minn. (see page 17)

→ **JULY 30-AUG. 1 — Grassfed Exchange Tour & Conference**, Columbia, Mo. Contact: www.grassfedexchange.com, 256-996-3142

→ **AUG. 1 — Farm Beginnings Course Early Bird Discount Deadline** (see page 16)
→ **AUG. 1 — Land Stewardship Project Twin Cities Summer Cookout/silent Auction**, featuring Minnesota Congressman Keith Ellison & the Brass Messengers, 5 p.m.-8 p.m., LSP South Minneapolis office. Contact: www.landstewardshipproject.org, Carolyn Bussey, LSP, carolyn@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-722-6377.

→ **AUG. 3 — Gardens of Eagan/Organic Field School**, Northfield, Minn. Contact: www.organicfieldschool.org, 507-645-2544

→ **AUG. 6—Whole Farm Synergy: Stacking Livestock & Vegetable Enterprises**, Great Oak Farm, Mason, Wis. (see page 17)
→ **AUG. 6—Useful Tools & Infrastructure for Vegetable Farms**, Hermit Creek Farm, High Bridge, Wis. (see page 17)

→ **AUG. 9—Minnesota Garlic Festival**, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Hutchinson, Minn. Contact: SFA, www.sfa-mn.org/garlicfest, 320-543-3394

→ **AUG. 10—LSP Farm Dreams Workshop**, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., LSP office, Minneapolis, Minn. (see page 17)
→ **AUG. 16—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on Producing Grass-Finished Beef**, Compton Farm, Dassel, Minn. (see page 17)
→ **AUG. 17—LSP Farm Dreams Workshop**, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., Viroqua, Wis. (see page 17)
→ **AUG. 23—Restorative Ag—Restoring the Abandoned Farm**, University of Minnesota-Duluth Research Farm (see page 17)
→ **AUG. 24—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on On-Farm Education Events**, Deep Roots Community Farm, La Crosse, Wis. (see page 17)
→ **AUG./SEPT.—Chippewa Watershed 10% Cover Crop Network Tour**, Glenwood, Minn. Contact: Robin Moore, LSP, 320-269-2105, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org
→ **SEPT. 1—Final Deadline for LSP's 2014-2015 Farm Beginnings course** (see page 16)
→ **SEPT. 1—Deadline for LSP's 2014-2015 Journeyperson Course** (see page 17)

→ **SEPT. 6—Lake Superior SFA Harvest Festival**, Duluth, Minn. Contact: www.sfa-mn.org/harvest-festival, 218-393-3896

→ **SEPT. 14—LSP Farm Beginnings Field Day on Vegetable Production Start-up**, Living Land Farm, Saint Peter, Minn. (see page 17)

→ **SEPT. 14-26—Minnesota-Nicaragua**

Agriculture Exchange Trip, Jalapa, Nicaragua. Contact: Jon Kerr, jon@isla.cc, 612-819-8877, www.isla.cc

→ **SEPT. 20—Small Fruit Production**, Shubat's Fruits, French River, Minn. (see page 17)
→ **SEPT. 26—Field Day on Holistic Management, Biological Monitoring & Multiple Enterprise Management**, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. (joint LSP, PFI & Prairie Creek Seed event), Seven W Farm, Paullina, Iowa. Contact: www.practicalfarmers.org, 515-232-5661
→ **OCT. 25—First Farm Beginnings Class in La Crosse, Wis. & Ashland, Wis.** (see page 16)
→ **NOV. 1—First Farm Beginnings Class in Watertown, Minn.** (see page 16)

→ **NOV. 7-9—15th Fall Harvest Gathering for Women in Sustainable Agriculture**, Cedar Valley Resort, Whalen, Minn. Contact: Stacey Brown, staceyleighbrown@gmail.com

→ **NOV. 23—2014 Farm Art Bowl (fundraiser for LSP's Farm Beginnings Program)**, 5:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m., Bryant Lake Bowl, Minneapolis. Contact: Nick Olson, LSP, 320-269-1057, nicko@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **FEB. 14—Sustainable Farming Association of Minn. Annual Conference**, Saint Joseph, Minn. Contact: 763-260-0209, www.sfa-mn.org
→ **FEB. 26-28—MOSES Organic Farming Conference**. Contact: www.mosesorganic.org, 715-778-5775

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