

# *The Land Stewardship*



LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

*37 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together*

## *Letter*

Volume 37

[www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org)

Number 2, 2019



*LSP Photo*

A ground level look at a flexible approach to soil health economics (page 24).

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— *Vision for the Future: A New LSP Long Range Plan* —

— *Mark Schultz to Step Down* —

— *Crisis Management & Soil Health* —

— *2019 MN Legislative Wrap-up* —

— *Kernza's Continuous Living Cover* —

— *Non-Operating Landowners & the Future of Land* —

— *Public-Private Prairie Partnership* —



The *Land Stewardship Letter* is published by the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization. The Land Stewardship Project's mission is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture, and to develop healthy communities. Members of the Land Stewardship Project receive this publication as a benefit. Annual membership dues are \$35.

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This LSL printed by Johnson Printers, Rochester, Minn.

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# LSP Launches New Long Range Plan

*Document Will Shape the Future of the Land Stewardship Project*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In July, the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors approved the organization's long range plan for 2019-2024. This plan, which is the result of input from hundreds of LSP members, among others, will guide the organization's work for the next five years and beyond. Below is the introduction to the plan, which was written by LSP board chair Jody Lenz and LSP executive director Mark Schultz.

*By Jody Lenz & Mark Schultz*

We have created this five-year plan at a time of much hardship in our communities. Many of us have seen our neighbors and relations lose their farms. Others of us have experienced this tragedy firsthand. For some, their farms — often having been worked for years, even generations — are at risk of disappearing forever. No one has escaped this crisis, whether they are farmers working in dairy, hogs, vegetables, row crops, or other enterprises. As the number of farmers declines, production of animals and acres is pushed to the max, consolidating more and more land in the hands of fewer and fewer people. This economic crisis in agriculture, caused in large part by the control of production, markets, and credit by major corporations, is forcing small- and mid-sized farms out of business and off the land. The impact to our land and communities is dire — economically, socially, environmentally. All of us are affected.

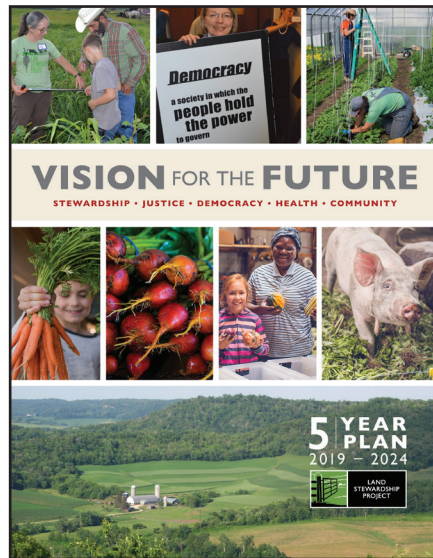
While this farm crisis is happening, it is compounded by an expanding climate crisis. We are all seeing increased flooding and other extreme weather events that threaten the stability of our food system and our communities. This state of crisis throughout society continues because of the effect of the abuse of corporate power on our systems of government, decision making, and human rights. This abuse is often encouraged by elected officials.

These are the times we're in.

But together, we have built an organization from the ground up that is both willing and able to work effectively for what's good and right, and to achieve positive change. That means we have a responsibility to address these times with vision, determination, and hope.

The Land Stewardship Project's *5-Year Plan: 2019-2024* is a document that will shape the future of LSP. The writing of this

plan was a task taken on by many member-leaders of the Land Stewardship Project. We want to take some time to explain what has helped to shape this plan as well as encourage you to read it and then engage with us to carry this important work forward.



Make no mistake, carrying out this plan will stretch us a great deal, because it means we must stand with people in their hardship and pain and assist them to find solutions for themselves, their families, and their communities.

At the same time, we must organize for larger changes in our society — in public policy, in corporate accountability, in food and farming systems, even in what people believe is possible to accomplish — changes that make a difference for everyone, whether or not they are a Land Stewardship Project member, and for the land itself.

To accomplish this, we must work to create networks of people and communities that connect across differences of race, geography, gender, and age; that connect people who will support and teach and learn from each other — who will organize together — to find and implement the real solutions we

need. Our goal is to revamp our agriculture and food systems so a multitude of small- and medium-sized farms can thrive, access to land and healthy food is available and affordable to everyone regardless of race, gender, or income, and the health of the land is restored and enhanced.

We believe that the Land Stewardship Project is up to the challenge of this historic moment. It is clear that far-reaching change is needed, and that LSP needs to be a part of making that happen.

The members of LSP called for these changes in February 2019 by sending us 535 completed surveys saying what they valued about our work, and what they think we should do now. LSP members who serve on our board, steering committees, and campaign committees met in day-long sessions in February to dig into what LSP needs to focus on. Our board/staff Long Range Plan Committee deliberated, drafted, and revised this plan, and our board met over two days to work it through, with a final deliberation and decision at our July 2019 board meeting.

As an organization, LSP is hopeful about the future. We know that it will take a lot of hard work — our members and staff are used to that. It will take good ideas too, organized into action. We have those ideas, and will develop more from the experience, wisdom, and vision of people directly impacted by the issues we face. And it will take all of you, our members and allies, working together for a better future. What we can't do alone, we can do together.

In this plan you will see a vision for a brighter, healthier future for all, along with actions to get us there. Then, get back to us with how you can be part of this work with grit, determination, real food, and yes, joy. Join us! ☐

*Jody Lenz and Mark Schultz co-chaired the Land Stewardship Project's Long Range Plan Committee. Other members of the committee included LSP board members Deborah Allan, Aleta Borrud, Andrew Ehrmann, and Loretta Jaus, as well as staff members Mike McMahon, Johanna Rupprecht, Karen Stettler, and Terry VanDerPol.*

### Read the Long Range Plan

*Land Stewardship Project's 5-Year Plan: 2019-2024* is available at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/history](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/history). Free paper copies are available by calling LSP's Minneapolis office at 612-722-6377.

To comment on the plan, contact Mark Schultz at 612-722-6377 or [marks@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:marks@landstewardshipproject.org).

# True Independence Lies in Community

## Neighbors Near & Far Teach a Valuable Farm Lesson

By Jody Lenz

I came to Farm Beginnings, and the Land Stewardship Project, because I wanted to farm, have a connection to the land, be outside and feel the healing rhythms of nature. I loved the idea of being independent, living off the land, and seeing what I could do. To me, farming was a challenge that I could shape the outcome of by what I did.

But, even more than that, I wanted my children to be farm kids. I wanted my kids to be surrounded by farm animals, places to explore, and farm neighbors. I wanted them to know that the day's successes and failures depended on us. I wanted them to see that our family could work together for something while giving them the space to experience things that were uniquely their own.

I wanted them to gain practical skills around growing and raising food that only can be taught on a farm. Having grown up on a family dairy farm, I knew what I was getting into. But my vision was still pretty narrow. And thank goodness, because my husband, Mike, really didn't want to farm at this point in our lives. If he knew then, what we know now, he never would have believed it and I'd never have gotten him to go along with me.

But, I did get him to go to the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course. And that started us on a path of the life I had hoped for, but *so much more*. My children are surrounded by farm animals— not just ours. Who would ever have guessed that our daughter Claudia would be blessed with a love of dairy cattle and be able to live next to dairy farmers that had award-winning show cattle and would be willing to take her under their wing? How did I know that another neighbor would be raising pigs and would want to keep them on our farm so that we could give them vegetable scraps and they could improve our landscape with their digging?

Our neighbors quickly taught us about independence. Mostly, that we were not independent. They showed up the first spring after a tornado to make sure we were okay. They showed up to plow our driveway for us the first winter. Every snowfall. And still do. They let us know how to get into the 4-H

club. They brought us their bad hay to use as mulch. The list goes on-and-on. And we did what we could for them. There is no such thing as independence on our farm. We are deeply connected with our neighbors and we couldn't imagine doing what we do without them. My kids get that.

We also can't do what we do without our



Jody Lenz (left) with some of Threshing Table Farm's workers. "There is no such thing as independence on our farm," Lenz writes. (Photo by Ilisa Ailts, [www.ilisaailts.com](http://www.ilisaailts.com))

city neighbors. They buy our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares. They are our employees. Our hardware store keeps our animals fed and our water heaters operating. Our chiropractor keeps us going. Our t-shirt printers, brochure designers, photographer, and chef friends highlight what we do. Our Chamber of Commerce is proud to have a farm as a member and supports us. Business owners and employees purchase our shares. The United Way, local food pantries, the County Family Resource Center, and other nonprofits benefit from us and we from them. These community members love coming to the farm, getting a chance to connect to the land, the space, and us, as farmers. My kids know that we couldn't do what we do without these people.

As my children grow older, I wonder what they are taking from the farm? What lessons, what experiences, and what memories will stick with them? Only time will tell. I do know that they've been given the tools to live in a community and support one another. They know how to grow food and I

hope they will remember to cook it.

But that is not enough for me. I look at all the other children in my community, and this country. They are not as lucky as mine. How will they gain these skills? How will they know the importance of community? Growing food? Will they have clean water? Healthy soils? Will they know how to be a good consumer and supporter of the things that will keep their communities healthy? Will they have access to land for farming? Will they know to want that? Will my children fight for these things? Or will they become like so many my age, sharing stories of growing up on a farm but hopeless that they will ever see another generation get those experiences?

This is what pushes me to continue working with LSP. This vision, of another generation on the land. And another-and-another. It can't happen without the community as a whole, all working towards it and understanding why. We have a lot of work to do. It can be overwhelming, but I know it's worth it. When I am overwhelmed, I like to find things that calm me down and fire me up. I have two short things I want to share with you. First, the calm, offered up here by poet and farmer Wendell Berry:

### The Peace of Wild Things

*When despair for the world grows in me  
And I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's  
lives may be,*

*I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water,  
and the great heron feeds. I come into the  
peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still  
water.*

*And I feel above me the day blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am  
free.*

And after I am at peace, and relaxed, I read this from Pope Benedict XVI to keep me fired up:

*The world offers you comfort.*

*But you were not made for comfort.*

*You were made for greatness. □*

Jody Lenz, along with Mike Lenz, owns and operates Threshing Table Farm in Star Prairie, Wis. She is also chair of the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors. For more information on LSP's Farm Beginnings course, see page 18.





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# LSP News

## Schultz Stepping Down as LSP Leader

### Search for New Executive Director Begins This Fall

The Land Stewardship Project announced in September that Mark Schultz will be stepping down as executive director. Schultz will be working closely with LSP's board of directors in coming months to ensure a seamless and effective transition.

He became executive director in 2017, taking over the reins from George Boody, who had occupied that position since 1993. Before becoming executive director, Schultz was the organization's Policy and Organizing Program director, as well as its associate director. He first joined LSP's staff in 1987, and with the exception of a period when he worked for other grassroots organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, has been an organizer and program director for the organization ever since.

"I have been honored and blessed to be associated with the Land Stewardship Project for the past three decades," said Schultz. "When I became executive director in 2017, I took the position knowing that it would be a transition to the next generation of LSP leadership. I will be leaving the Land Stewardship Project knowing that we're in an extremely strong position organizationally and financially to bring about positive changes for the land, people, and communities. I'm excited to see this work move forward under new leadership."

LSP board chair Jody Lenz thanked Schultz for his years of service to LSP, as well as grassroots, rural organizing in general. Lenz, who farms near Star Prairie in western Wisconsin, said Schultz has had a "deep and broad presence" both within LSP and the greater community, and his ability to inspire others to work for positive change has been particularly key.

"I have never worked with someone who has been such an excellent leader and who is so good at bringing out leadership skills in others," said Lenz. "I certainly experienced that firsthand."

During Schultz's tenure as executive director, LSP launched a major soil health program, established a 501(c)(4) political



Mark Schultz

action arm called the Land Stewardship Action Fund, advanced work on racial and gender justice, grew the organization's membership base, and developed strong relationships with allied groups locally, regionally, and nationally.

Lenz said the organization is in a particularly good position for a leadership

transition as a result of a new "Vision for the Future" five-year plan (see page 3) that was released in early September. The plan, which was the result of input from hundreds of LSP members, lays out seven strategic initiatives the organization will advance in the next five years and beyond. These initiatives include: addressing the agricultural economic crisis; increasing land access for small- and mid-sized farmers; building a functional local and regional food system; advancing solutions to the climate crisis;

*"We may be losing Mark, but in some ways, there couldn't be a better time for this transition."*

— Jody Lenz

expanding LSP's membership base; growing the organization's work on economic, racial, and gender justice; and increasing LSP's organizational effectiveness by upgrading its internal systems of operation.

"We believe that the Land Stewardship Project is up to the challenge of this historic moment," Lenz and Schultz wrote in the introduction to the five-year plan. "It is clear that far-reaching change is needed, and that LSP needs to be a part of making that happen."

Lenz, who, along with Schultz and other members of the long range plan committee, helped develop the "Vision for the Future" document, said it provides a critical roadmap for the next executive director and the organization as a whole moving forward.

"We may be losing Mark, but in some ways, there couldn't be a better time for this transition," said Lenz. "The five-year plan, along with our phenomenal staff and highly motivated membership base, gives LSP the kind of depth needed to do the important work that needs to be done."

The Land Stewardship Project has begun an extensive search for a new executive director, according to Aleta Borrud, an LSP board member who chairs the executive director transition committee. She said the transition occurs at a time when the organization is in a good position to build on its current work while addressing evolving challenges like the farm financial crisis and racial injustice.

"We are looking for a strong candidate who is aware of the challenges facing our rural communities and farms," said Borrud, a retired physician from Rochester, Minn., "and who is also committed to leading an organization like LSP that's dedicated to utilizing people-centered power to create a positive future for everyone." □

*"I have been honored and blessed to be associated with the Land Stewardship Project for the past three decades."*

— Mark Schultz

## Give it a Listen

In a 2016 episode of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast (no. 186), Mark Schultz discusses his personal passions and how LSP brings about positive change: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/892](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/892).



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# LSP News

## LSP Staff Changes

**Dori Eder** has departed the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings team to pursue farming in Ireland. Eder began serving as a Farm Beginnings course facilitator in 2013 and suc-



**Dori Eder**

cessfully led four classes, graduating over 90 beginning farmers. She also coordinated numerous field days and in 2017 led the Journeyperson Course. Eder worked as the lead staffer on the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Viability Committee and helped coordinate the development of the online Farmer Network Directory, which will be launched later this year. Most recently, she authored a Farm Beginnings Collaborative report on best practices for beginning farmer financial education.

**Ben Helvick Anderson** has left LSP's Policy and Organizing team to direct public policy for the Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative. Since joining LSP's staff in 2016, Anderson was focused on federal farm policy, and, most recently, helped launch the new Local Foods Initiative. He also served as the associate director of LSP's Policy and Organizing Program. Helvick Anderson was the lead staffer on LSP's Organizing and Social Change Leadership Development Cohort, and played a key role in organizing members around the "Our Farm Bill Campaign," which helped advance LSP's priori-



**Ben Helvick Anderson**

ties in the 2018 Farm Bill.

**Maryan Abdinur's** work with LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program has concluded. Abdinur joined LSP's staff in 2016 to advance communal gardening, food preservation, and cooking classes in partnership with Hope Community in the Phillips neighborhood of south Minneapolis. Through her work with the Food, Land, and Community Team, she helped Phillips residents gain a better understanding of how gardening, cooking, soil health, and learning together can be utilized to create a food system that meets their needs as well as benefits the overall community. Abdinur's work has also helped advance initiatives such as Minneapolis Green Zones, as well as improvements to Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board policies related to access for various communities.

**Megan Jekot** has joined LSP's staff as a Policy Program organizer. Jekot has a bachelor's degree in political science from St. Olaf College, and has worked as a legislative aide, political organizer, and campaign manager. Most recently she worked in communications and development for the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy.

As part of her work, Jekot is coordinating the Land Stewardship Action Fund, a 501(c)(4) organization that was established by LSP's board of directors in 2018 as a way to engage more freely with candidates for public office during election cycles. She is working to build new bases of permanent progressive leadership and support in Minnesota's rural communities and small towns and cities.

Jekot can be contacted at [mjekot@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mjekot@landstewardshipproject.org)



**Maryan Abdinur**



**Megan Jekot**

landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377. For more on the Land Stewardship Action Fund, see [www.landstewardshipaction.org](http://www.landstewardshipaction.org).

**Hanna O'Neill** served a summer internship with LSP's Bridge to Soil Health Program. O'Neill's family has a grass-based livestock farm in southeastern Minnesota, and she recently started her senior year at Grinnell College, where she is majoring in biology, with a concentration in neuroscience. She has worked as a camp counselor, lab assistant, student researcher, and student teacher/intern, and served spring break internships with LSP in the past.

During her recent internship, O'Neill conducted extensive interviews with graziers in southeastern Minnesota and collected information on the various challenges they face. She also conducted research on how grass-based livestock production can help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

**John Seng** is serving an internship with LSP's Policy and Organizing Program. Seng has a bachelor's degree in biology from Grinnell College, where he worked as an herbarium assistant and a project researcher. He also did independent agroforestry research and has worked as a senior laboratory technician. Seng is currently a psychiatric associate at the University of Minnesota Medical Center.

Through his LSP internship, Seng is compiling research around what legislation is being proposed in other states related to soil health and climate change. He is also developing videos on soil health and climate change. □



**Hanna O'Neill**



**John Seng**

## Land Stewardship Talk

The Land Stewardship Project's award winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast features over 230 episodes. Check them out at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast). *Ear to the Ground* is also available on iTunes and Stitcher.



# LSP Takes Next Step in Racial Justice Work

By Amy Bacigalupo

The Land Stewardship Project has long believed that our food and farming system will never be truly sustainable until it provides fair opportunities for black, white, brown, immigrant, and indigenous people to farm and produce food. Just as land is most bountiful when we nurture a diverse abundance of crops, our communities are most bountiful when we nurture a diverse abundance of ideas, which means nurturing a diverse abundance of people that form those ideas. Over the years, we have acted on that belief, and we've increasingly heard from members, staff, and allies that it is critical for a rural grassroots organization to address racial inequality. The silence in rural communities around racial inequality is harmful for everyone.

In 2010, LSP's board of directors issued a Racial Justice Statement that challenged staff and members to "...speak out evermore clearly on matters of economic and racial injustice... to point out examples of economic and racial injustice in a way that teaches about the unfairness of our current system and helps pave the way for a society based on stewardship, sustainability, economic justice, and racial equity."

Directly following this charge, we met with members in their homes and on their farms, we built strategic alliances with organizations of color like Hope Community, the Upper Sioux Community, Voices for Racial Justice, and the HEAL Food Alliance. We have moved, as a primarily white organization with a large rural membership, to take on racism and racial equality.

LSP's ability to bring people together to have tough, but critical, conversations about issues puts us in a very good position to do

this kind of work. For example, LSP can help community members—black, white, brown, immigrant, and indigenous—identify the fact that we all share the same problems posed by an extractive economy.

Through my own experience with Farm Beginnings, I have seen the need for integrating racial justice into our daily work. I joined LSP's Farm Beginnings Program as an organizer in 2000 and have been its director since 2009. During that time, some Farm Beginnings graduates have shared with me and other organizers that because they are not white, they don't see themselves as part of the Land Stewardship Project. We need to change that.

In 2016, Farm Beginnings organizer and western Minnesota farmer Nick Olson partnered with various black, brown, and indigenous-led groups to develop the "Racial Justice in the Food and Farming Systems Cohort," a new leadership training model. Since 2016, over 100 rural LSP members, primarily farmers, have participated in trainings and action to advance racial justice through this cohort. (See the article below for details on the convening of our newest Racial Justice in the Food and Farming System Cohort.)

As we strengthen our relationship and collaboration with allies, we learn that it is not enough for us to situate racial justice work in just a few areas of our organization. We need to ask how LSP can most effectively move the dial on racial justice issues that matter to black, white, brown, and indigenous people and have an impact on existing disparities in our food and farming system. We also need to assess how we work and the internal structures within LSP that may be excluding and/or discouraging people who share our values and want to be a part of our work as allies, staff, members,

and supporters. LSP has recently deepened its commitment to both racial and economic justice, as well as gender equity, in its latest long range plan, which is described on page three of this *Land Stewardship Letter*. Such a commitment is important if LSP is to build on 10 years of effective work with allies of color and indigenous communities, and with our members, by expanding and deepening our work.

With this need in mind, I have taken on a new role within LSP to shepherd a participatory process to assess LSP's strengths, weaknesses, and gaps as a racial justice organization, with the goal of integrating racial justice work across the organization and to transforming internal systems that we identify are limiting our capacity to advance racial justice. As LSP's Racial Justice Assessment and Integration Coordinator, I will work closely with allies who will train, coach, and challenge LSP to become a racial justice organization. My role is to help staff and member-leaders reflect on themselves and their work and provide support for transforming what we do and how we do it.

A key part of this work will be selecting a partner organization that can guide us in developing a roadmap for integrating racial justice into all aspects of our work. I am excited to take on this role and its creation is the natural next step in our organization's racial justice work. But make no mistake, this is long overdue and the work is urgent — we have a lot to accomplish in the next few years.

If you have any questions about this work, or want to know how to get involved, contact me at 320-269-2105 or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org. □

*Amy Bacigalupo is based in LSP's Montevideo office in western Minnesota, where she and her family farm.*

## New LSP Racial Justice Cohort Being Formed

The Land Stewardship Project will be hosting its third "Racial Justice in the Food and Farming System Cohort" this coming winter. This cohort is open to LSP members who are interested in taking a deeper look into their own relationship with white supremacy, systemic racism in our food and farming system, and how to advance justice in their own communities.

This cohort will meet five times from November 2019 to March 2020. The sessions will be held on Tuesdays, with the majority of them taking place in the Twin Cities. Exact dates will be announced at a later date. Each session will provide opportunities to connect LSP's members with a partner organization doing work in the region, as well as an opportunity to process and reflect with fellow LSP members in the cohort.

If you are interested in joining the cohort or want additional information, contact LSP Farm Beginnings organizer Nick Olson at 320-269-1057 or nicko@landstewardshipproject.org.

**In 2017, members of LSP's Racial Justice Cohort spent a day in training at the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) in Saint Paul, Minn. Here, HAFA executive director Pakou Hang explains to the group the different foods available at the Hmong Village Shopping Center. (Photo by Mike Hazard/HAFA Farm)**





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*LSP News*

## LSP Potluck-Cookout

The Land Stewardship Project's 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Potluck Cookout was held July 25 in the yard of the organization's Minneapolis office. The event featured food from LSP member-farms, local beer and cider, a sing-a-long led by LSP staffers Barb Sogn-Frank and Clara Sanders Marcus, and a musical performance by the Brass Messengers, as well as a silent auction and a pie raffle. LSP would like to thank all the volunteers, silent auction donors, and businesses (Tiny Diner, East Lake Brewery and Tavern, and Keepsake Cidery) that made this event a success. (LSP Photo) □



## Policy & Organizing

# Carbon's Crisis Management Potential

*MN Lawmakers & Ag Officials Get a Firsthand Look at the Role Soil Health Can Play in Dealing With 2 Major Challenges in Farm Country*

During a few hectic weeks this summer, Land Stewardship Project policy organizer Amanda Koehler visited over 30 farmers around Minnesota, discussing with them what issues they'd like to see addressed in future state legislative sessions. Two major concerns emerged from these conversations: economic devastation and the repercussions of yet one more year of dealing with extreme climate change. No wonder—crop and livestock producers are struggling with one of the wettest years on record, and commodity prices are in a years-long slump that shows no signs of bouncing back.

Southern Minnesota farmer Tom Cotter finds that one major way to manage these twin crises is by focusing on a common solution: building healthier soil.

"This is a way to deal with an economic storm," Cotter recently told a group made up of farmers and around a dozen Minnesota state legislators, as well as Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Thom Peterson and Deputy Commissioner Andrea Vaubel, along with staff from local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Soil and Water Conservation District offices. Cotter, who along with his wife Alma, farms near the Cedar River outside of Austin, was pointing to a PowerPoint slide that outlined how he integrates field crops, cover crops, and livestock production via rotational graz-

ing in one field during the same growing season. "How many farmers can say they get three acres out of one acre? Every acre I have, I'm double-dipping—getting multiple enterprises," Cotter said.

The farmer went on to show slides that illustrated how such a system relies on building healthy soil. His use of cover crops, diverse rotations, and managed rotational grazing is building organic matter in his fields, and that increased organic matter is, in turn, reducing the need for chemical inputs while breaking up weed cycles, improving the farm's ability to manage precipitation, increasing fertility, and sequestering carbon.

"Capturing water, capturing carbon—I know if I get those two things, I will get a pretty good crop," said Cotter.

In late July, LSP and the Cotter family invited the lawmakers and officials to the farm to showcase the benefits of soil health and to give them a chance to interact with other farmers in the region who are utilizing various methods to develop acres that are economically and ecologically resilient. Pursuing such solutions has become even more critical as states like Minnesota grapple with water quality problems related to intensive

monocultural plantings of corn and soybeans, and scientists show that regenerative farming practices that build soil health can sequester significant amounts of greenhouse gases while helping the land deal with extreme weather conditions.

In a 2018 paper, the journal *Science Advances* published results showing that soil health practices like cover cropping and restoring grasslands could help suck enough carbon dioxide out of the air to equal the equivalent of 21 percent of current net annual U.S. emissions. In August, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

cited farm practices like cover cropping and improved grazing management as major factors in helping to deal with the climate crisis by improving soil health.

Soil health's potential role in cleaning up water and managing it is also significant. The NRCS estimates that on a per-acre basis, 1 percent of organic matter can store 25,000 gallons of water in the top six inches of soil. Cover crops have the potential to reduce nutrient and pesticide runoff by 50 percent or more, slash erosion by 90 percent, reduce the amount of soil sediments in water by 75 percent, and cut pathogen contamination in water by 60 percent, according to Ohio State University.

"We cannot have good water quality in the state until we have good soil quality," Myles Elsen, an NRCS soil scientist, told the field day participants while spading up a soil sample from one of the Cotters' cover cropped fields. "It starts with the soil."

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*"This is a way to deal with  
an economic storm."*

— farmer Tom Cotter

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*Crisis, see page 9...*



And as farmers like Tom Cotter have discovered, building soil health produces economic benefits by reducing the need for inputs and bolstering the land's resiliency. A recent analysis based on five years of national cover crop surveys conducted by the Conservation Technology Information Center showed that by the third year of utilizing a cover crop under normal weather conditions, the practice can return a modest net profit for corn and soybean farmers. Because they can provide both short-term (breaking up pest cycles, cutting erosion, managing moisture) and long-term (building organic matter, increasing fertility, reducing compaction) benefits, the positives from cover crops begin to compound the longer they are used.

Under normal weather conditions, covers have a net per-acre return of roughly \$18 and \$10 on corn and soybean fields, respectively, by the fifth year they are used. When mitigating circumstances like extreme weather, compaction, or herbicide-resistant weeds are thrown into the mix, cover crops pay off sooner, according to the survey analysis, which was released in June by the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program. For example, they can produce a net per-acre return of over \$27 the first year they are planted when drought afflicts a cornfield; the net payoff more than doubles during a drought if a farmer has been using covers for three years. The returns are particularly attractive if cover crops are grazed—in year one, the net per-acre return of running livestock through covers is over \$17, a figure that triples by year three, according to the analysis.

Soil health's potential to help farmers deal with the economic and climate change crises is one reason LSP has been spending the past few months talking to members and conducting research on what state policy options could help advance regenerative production practices like cover cropping.

"Since the moldboard plow tore up the prairies, we have been carbon mining our soils to depletion," Shona Snater, an LSP Bridge to Soil Health organizer, told the group gathered at the Cotter farm. "We need policies that reinvest in our soils by building

resiliency, not dependency."

Koehler added that farmers have mentioned several policy proposals that would help advance soil health, including cost-share funding to help get started with practices like cover cropping, and supporting markets for small grains and other crops



**Tom Cotter described to lawmakers and government officials the role soil health practices like cover-cropping play in keeping his farm economically and environmentally resilient. "Capturing water, capturing carbon—I know if I get those two things, I will get a pretty good crop," said Cotter. (LSP Photo)**

that can help diversify the corn-soybean system. The University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative (*see page 15*) is an example of how a relatively modest amount of legislative funding can prime the pump for advancement of farming systems that provide widespread public goods.

According to an LSP analysis, numerous states, including Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, New York, New Mexico, and Vermont, have proposed, and in some cases passed, legislation that provides financial incentives for farmers to build soil health and sequester carbon. In 2019 alone, 10 states introduced new policies that relate to research, tax exemptions, or technical assistance that promotes building healthier soil, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists. California's Healthy Soils initiative is in its third year, and it pays farmers to put in place practices like cover cropping and no-till. Farmers who have enrolled in that state's program find that the practices they are implementing in order to qualify provide specific benefits to their own fields, such as a greater ability to weather drought.

### A Landscape View

Such a win-win situation doesn't surprise Cotter. Through his PowerPoint presenta-

tion and during a tour of a few of his fields, he outlined the agronomic, economic, and environmental benefits of building soil health. He also drove home the importance of taking the long view when working with the land's natural forces to produce crops and livestock—a philosophy that could also be applied to developing innovative public policy that benefits the land, farmers, and communities.

"Every year, I like to think one or two years ahead," he said while standing in a 20-acre field planted to a cocktail mix of sorghum-sudangrass, brassicas, peas, rye grass, sunflowers, vetch, clover, millet, and oats. He explained that he hayed this field earlier in the season and his plan was to break the field up into seven or eight paddocks during late summer, graze it down with his beef herd, and plant winter rye in the fall. After the rye is harvested in 2020 for seed, he will plant a legume to build up a nitrogen source for organic corn in 2021. All the while, he will have opportunities to produce forage for his cattle herd. Such a multi-year strategy was developed based not only on what Cotter is learning from day-to-day observation and networking with other farmers, but also lessons gleaned from 20 years of cover-cropping. "I also like to look in the past," he added. "You can learn a lot from that." □

### Soil Building Policy

For more information and to get involved with the Land Stewardship Project's work to advance public policy that supports soil health, contact LSP's Amanda Koehler at 612-722-6377 or [akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org).

### Join the Soil Builders' Network

LSP invites crop and livestock farmers to join the Soil Builders' Network to get regular updates on soil health workshops, resources, field days, on-farm demonstrations, and research. For more information on the Network and LSP's soil health work, *see page 24*.

## 2019 State Legislature

### LSP Members Advance Positive Initiatives, but Session Reveals Need for Transparent, Informed Policymaking

By Amanda Koehler

During the 2019 session of the Minnesota Legislature, Land Stewardship Project members from across the state were deeply engaged in advancing our vision for a transformational farm and food system that fosters strong farms, vibrant rural communities, and healthy land:

→ Hundreds of members and supporters from around the state attended the LSP Family Farm Breakfast, Water Action Day, and other Capitol events and rallies.

→ Over 2,000 postcards supporting local control, investing in a new agricultural economy, and strengthening our healthcare system were delivered to legislators and Governor Tim Walz.

→ Thousands of members and supporters responded to LSP action alerts by calling or sending a message to their legislators, legislative leadership, and the Governor's office.

→ Dozens of members shared powerful testimony before legislative committees about investing in emerging markets, addressing the current farm economy that's driving family farmers off the land, healthcare, and more.

→ Dozens of members volunteered at events and telephone banks, as well as from their homes, to build grassroots power on our issues.

→ A number of members wrote letters-to-the-editor on funding sustainable agriculture research, protecting public comment periods, supporting paid family leave, supporting drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants, and more.

Here's a summary of where LSP's issues ended up by the end of the session:



#### Secured \$4.3 Million in Forever Green Funding

This session, we secured \$4.3 million for the biennium (two-year budget cycle) for the Forever Green Initiative at the University of Minnesota. Forever Green (*see page 15*) is doing cutting-edge science to develop and create markets for cover crops and perennials that are profitable for farmers and build soil health, clean our water, and



**LSP member Carmen Fernholz, shown here on his western Minnesota farm with a sample of Kernza he's raising, testified at the Legislature in favor of increased Forever Green research. See page 15 for more on the research. (LSP Photo)**

sequester carbon. This program is critical for a number of reasons, such as increasing continuous living cover on the land and producing viable forages for grazing. Historically, we have secured \$1.5 million to \$2 million in legislative funding, on a biennial basis, for Forever Green.

This was the first legislative session where full funding for Forever Green—\$10 million—was included in a finance omnibus bill. The two bills we supported were authored by Rep. Jeff Brand, Rep. Ginny Klevorn, Sen. John Marty, and Sen. Scott Dibble, and championed by additional legislators: Rep. Rick Hansen, Rep. Leon Lillie, Rep. Ami Wazlawik, and Rep. Todd Lippert,

for example.

We will continue to push for the full state investment of \$10 million during future legislative sessions, but it is clear that our organizing—involving a coalition of allies and legislative champions—demonstrated that this program is broadly supported, needs more legislative attention and investment, and is a critical piece of the puzzle if we are to transform the landscape in a positive way.



#### Advanced Farm-to-School

The farm-to-school and early care stakeholder group, which LSP was a part of, was successful in getting two pieces of legislation in the final Agriculture Finance Bill, which was originally based on a bill authored by Rep. Todd Lippert and Sen. Mike Goggin. These proposals were:

##### → Farm-to-School Staff Position

A new position will be created at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). This position is an international/domestic marketing person whose job description explicitly includes expansion of “domestic and international marketing opportunities for farmers and value added processors; including staffing to facilitate farm to school sales...” See page 14 for more on LSP's farm-to-school work.

##### → Grants for Reimbursing Schools That Purchase Local Foods

An existing MDA grant program, which allows for school kitchen equipment upgrades and planning grants, was expanded to allow the reimbursement of schools for purchases from local farmers. This will encourage MDA to pilot our idea of a grant program that will reimburse schools and early care centers for their purchases of local foods. However, the amount of money in the program was kept at \$400,000, so we will have to work with the MDA to figure out how to allocate this money to be effective in balancing the possible pilot of this new reimbursement program and the kitchen equipment grants. The good news is that MDA staff have been very open and communicative with us, and have said they will engage with stakeholders to figure out the implementation structure.

**Legislature, see page 11...**





### **Secured Needed Beginning Farmer Tax Credit Technical Changes**

The Minnesota Beginning Farmer Tax Credit became law in 2017. This program, which was championed by LSP, provides a tax credit to land and asset owners who rent or sell to beginning farmers, as well as provides for beginning farmers to take an approved farm business management course. This year, we secured adjustments needed to ensure that beginning farmers who already completed a farm business management course such as LSP's Farm Beginnings Program would qualify without having to retake the course. There is also language that allows the appropriate authority to waive this requirement if the applicant has a four-year degree in agriculture, has reasonable agriculture job-related experience, or is a certified adult farm management instructor. Our version of the bill was authored by Rep. Todd Lippert and Sen. Melissa Franzen.



### **GEIS without Commitment to Action on Polluted Water Fails**

In December, then-Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) commissioner John Linc Stine denied a request from over 700 Minnesotans to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a proposed 5,000-head factory hog farm. Instead, he recommended to the Environmental Quality Board that a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) be completed for Minnesota's karst region. (Stine also gave the go-ahead to the expansion of the largest dairy in Minnesota's karst region; it was stopped at the county level.)

When the Governor included \$2 million for the GEIS in his budget recommendations to the Legislature, LSP members engaged in long conversations about what the karst region really needs and if LSP should support this proposal. Ultimately, members felt like completing a study without a commitment to real action is studying something we already know the causes of while allowing it to get worse. LSP requested that if this GEIS were to be part of the legislative budget, it be paired with a moratorium on new or expanding factory farms in the karst region, or a requirement for such proposals to complete an EIS. Funding for the GEIS proposals or a scoping study were not included in the final legislative budget.



### **Increased Funding for Meat & Poultry Inspection Services**

For many years, LSP has lifted up the need for increased funding for meat and poultry inspection services. This is particularly important for Minnesota's independent meat processors and small- and medium-sized livestock farmers who sell directly to consumers and are a critical part of a healthy local foods system. The final budget included an additional \$300,000 for expanded meat and poultry inspection services for this biennium.



### **Stopped Attack on Free Speech**

Last year, LSP organized with allies to stop the "Guilty by Association" bill that attacked our rights to organized free speech and association. This bill was being pushed around the country by the corporate-backed think tank American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). After insisting it be removed from the Omnibus Finance bill, it was passed as a stand-alone bill and vetoed by then-Governor Mark Dayton.

This year, a similar bill was introduced by Rep. Tim Mahoney and Sen. Paul Utke aiming to criminalize peaceful climate justice protesters by lowering the threshold of what protesting actions constitute a felony charge; the bill also created two new felony charges. It was included in the Senate's Jobs and Energy Budget Bill, but didn't make it through conference committee. The language was also offered as an amendment on the floor of the House during the special legislative session that ran May 24-25, but was voted down.

This legislation would have had a chilling impact on the free speech of Minnesotans, especially for indigenous people, and it is expected to be back on the table next session. A similar bill was recently passed by the Texas House of Representatives.



### **Township Local Control Kept Strong**

Keeping local control strong is continually a priority for LSP. Rural communities are stronger when they have the power to shape their landscape. No proposals to weaken township local control advanced this legislative session. In January, LSP sent a letter signed by members who are township officers to the 9,000+ township officers in our state asking them to contact their legislators and Governor Walz with the message: "Weakening township local control

must be off the table." And it was!



### **Addressing the Farm Crisis**

Family farmers across Minnesota—especially dairy producers—are facing a farm crisis after several consecutive years of low prices. The average farm income in Minnesota is the lowest in 23 years and, on average, Minnesota is losing one dairy farmer per day. We were able to secure a small increase in funding for the MDA's Farm Advocates Program — up \$47,000 from \$220,000. Unfortunately, although the House included a \$50,000 grant for Farmers' Legal Action Group based on a bill authored by Rep. Jeff Brand, that grant was not included in the final budget.

LSP also supports the fact that the Legislature funded a Dairy Assistance, Investment, and Relief Initiative (DAIRI) grant program at about \$8 million per year. (The Agriculture Bill has \$5 million for the DAIRI grants and the Jobs Bill has \$3 million.) These grants will be available to Minnesota dairy farmers who enroll for five years of coverage under the federal dairy margin coverage program and produced no more than 16,000,000 pounds of milk in 2018.

It's clear that the approach of the Legislature is to address some of the symptoms of the farm crisis, rather than work on the root causes. We will continue to organize to find and implement solutions that address these root causes, such as the corporate consolidation of markets, land, and seed.



### **No Reinstatement of MPCA Citizens' Board**

Between 1968 and 2015, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Citizens' Board served as a testament to our Minnesota value that people deserve a say in the decisions that impact their lives and communities. However, after the Citizens' Board ordered a full environmental review of a proposed 9,000-head factory dairy farm, the state Legislature abolished it literally in the dark of night during the final hours of the 2015 session. Reinstating the Citizens' Board would reestablish a public environmental review process of factory farms and other industries regulated by the MPCA.

Legislation to reinstate the Citizens' Board, authored by Rep. John Persell and Sen. John Marty, passed through three committees in the Minnesota House and, for the first time since its elimination, was included in the House Omnibus Environment and

**Legislature, see page 12...**

## ...Legislature, from page 11

Natural Resources Finance bill. We made our voices heard and it made a difference. Unfortunately, it did not make it into the final budget bill, which was mostly negotiated behind closed doors.

A contributing factor to it not being included was the opposition from the Governor's administration. MPCA Commissioner Laura Bishop wrote in her letter to the Senate and House conference committee members:

"MPCA has serious concerns about the language in Sec. 44 of the House bill that reinstates the Citizens' Board. Citizen engagement is a priority in the Walz-Flanagan administration, and there are already several opportunities to accomplish this including the Environmental Quality Board, the MPCA Advisory Committee, and the MPCA Environmental Justice Advisory Group. I am also concerned that this provision removes decision-making authority from the Governor and the Commissioner. While our position has been neutral, this provision carries a fiscal note of \$669,000, including 3 FTEs, that is unfunded. These costs cannot be absorbed into our budget, which leads us to oppose this policy measure."

Creating government structures that are transparent and allow for meaningful citizen participation is important to creating a Minnesota that works for the people, not corporate interests. While not perfect, the Citizens' Board was a powerful model of this type of government structure. Not reinstating it is yielding to powerful corporate interests, and the public is paying the price.



### Weakening Public Participation in Environmental Review

Over the past year, LSP members have fought for and won public comment period extensions for proposed factory farms to give communities a fair chance to engage and respond. Corporate ag interests sued the MPCA over a short two-week comment period extension in October and lost, so they shifted their attention to change state law at the expense of rural communities and family farmers.

Originally, the provision would have lim-

ited the public comment period on any environmental assessment worksheets (EAWs) to 30 days, unless approved by the project's proposer. The final provision allows the MPCA Commissioner to extend the 30-day public comment period by 30 days, but then requires any further extensions to have the permission of large-scale project proposers. We know why they did this: corporate interests do not want rural communities to be heard. This legislation was improved because of public outcry, but is still a step backwards.

In essence, this strips the ability of the state to extend a comment period a second time when it's in the best interest of the public, and gives that authority to the proposer of a large-scale project. Before this was passed, state law did not specify a limit to comment period extensions, as proven by the result of the October court case. The fact is, the public comment period is rarely extended — and when it is, it is to ensure the public has an appropriate amount of time to understand and comment on the proposal.



### Definition of 'Pasture' Expanded

Earlier this session, the Senate Ag Policy Committee amended language into its omnibus bill that inappropriately expanded the definition of "pasture" to include feedlots, in some cases. This language was never introduced as a stand-alone bill and never received a public hearing as such.

Originally, the provision would have allowed an operator to keep an undefined number of livestock on an undefined amount of unvegetated land for an undefined period of time and have it be considered and regulated as pasture. The MPCA does not have regulatory authority over pastures, only feedlots, so this is an important distinction. To make it worse, according to Senate rules, this provision is not under the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Committee and, to follow the proper legislative process, should have been included in the Environment Bill.

But because of public outcry and House opposition to this provision, the conference committee decided to alter the provision. Not only did legislators break the rules by putting this provision in the wrong bill, but the final language was created behind closed doors and did not become available to the public until less than an hour before the vote. The final provision that was passed allows a feedlot operator to keep an undefined number of livestock on an undefined amount of unvegetated land for up to 90 days during the growing season to accommodate an undefined "extraordinary situation." The final provision was never given a public hearing

and so there were no opportunities for public engagement and for livestock farmers to provide input.

Something as important as the definition of what constitutes a "pasture" or "feedlot" should not be altered with only two days left in the session in a conference committee that allows no opportunity for public review and comment.



### No Set-Aside in Beginning Farmer Tax Credit

LSP, along with allied organizations, pushed for 20 percent of the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit's \$6 million pot to be set aside for beginning farmers of color, indigenous beginning farmers, women beginning farmers, and farmers with disabilities. It is our state's responsibility to intentionally create land access and farm business management training for groups of Minnesotans who have been historically and systemically denied access to land and resources.

As our state's diversity has increased, only .7 percent of land-operating farmers in Minnesota are people of color, according to the USDA. Women make up half of our population, yet only 25 percent of land-operating farmers in Minnesota are women.

The bill, authored by Rep. Todd Lippert and Sen. Melissa Franzen, was not given a hearing in the Senate. It was passed by the House Agriculture and Food Finance Committee and referred to the House Taxes Committee, where it was never given a hearing.



### No Repeal of the Manure Lagoon Property Tax Exemption

This session, we introduced a bill to repeal the manure lagoon property tax exemption. Lagoons, used by factory farms to store millions of gallons of liquid manure, are considered "environmental improvements." In reality, these storage facilities and the large operations that rely on them negatively impact our water and air, health, economies, and more. And they don't pay their fair share of property taxes—those who benefit the most are the largest operators that own dozens of factory farms. Property taxes are the cost of doing business and factory farms should pay their fair share.

The bill repealing the manure lagoon property tax exemption, authored by Rep. Aisha Gomez and Sen. Chris Eaton, was never given a hearing in either the House or Senate.

Legislature, see page 13...





## No Legislative Approval to Restore the Name “Bde Maka Ska”

LSP supports the renaming of Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis as “Bde Maka Ska,” as well as other decisions to strengthen visibility and truth telling for the indigenous peoples who have been systematically erased from Minnesota history and places. We stood with our state leaders taking legislative action to ensure the lake’s rightful name is restored permanently, but this proposal was ultimately not included in the final Environment and Natural Resources Finance Bill.

## We Made an Impact

It’s clear that our organizing and our voices made an impact, but it’s also clear that we need to continue to build grassroots power across the state to win the transformational change our farmers, rural communities, and land need.

While there were important gains for our issues, the main budget bills and some policy provisions that were passed during the 2019 session represented setbacks for our overall vision of creating a vibrant rural Minnesota. We need to boldly invest in and build an agricultural economy that serves independent farmers, the health and viability of rural communities, and the health of our land and natural resources. We need new market opportunities that provide our farmers with equitable wages. We need justice, equity, and stewardship to be interwoven into our policies.

We also need a legislative process that’s transparent, publicly accessible, and people-centered. A lack of transparency benefits special interests at the expense of the people. A number of bad policy provisions moved forward through backroom deals with no chance for public comment on their final form; a couple of LSP-backed proposals were traded away using the same process. We need public processes that benefit the public, not corporate or big money interests.

Ultimately, we can and need to create a new status quo. The 2020 legislative session begins Feb. 11, and now is the time to get organized, to make our voices heard, and to build people power at the Capitol.

*LSP organizer Amanda Koehler focuses on state policy issues. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or at [akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org).*

## Healthcare: LSP Members Score a Victory

*But A Divided Legislature Produced No Real Bold Steps Forward*

*By Johanna Rupprecht & Paul Sobocinski*

**T**he Land Stewardship Project organizes for healthcare for all because we believe high-quality care is a basic need and something every person deserves, and because our current healthcare system that prioritizes corporate profits above all else is a major barrier to having thriving rural communities with more farmers on the land.

Preserving a critical source of funding for public healthcare programs in the state was a priority and a major victory for LSP and our allies during the 2019 session of the Minnesota Legislature. Since 1992, stable funding for public healthcare programs and public health initiatives in Minnesota has come from a small tax paid by healthcare providers. However, unless Minnesota legislators took action this year to save it, the Health Care Access Fund would have been eliminated at the end of December, creating a hole in the state budget of roughly \$700 million annually.

Minnesota’s Health Care Access Fund is used to fund public health programs and healthcare for one million Minnesotans enrolled in Medicaid and MinnesotaCare. This money has come from a 2 percent tax paid by healthcare providers, a formula which has worked successfully since 1992, when it was created with bipartisan leadership and signed into law by then-Governor Arne Carlson. But as part of a deal to end the 2011 state government shutdown, Republican

leadership of the Minnesota House and Senate struck an agreement with then-Governor Mark Dayton to set a December 2019 sunset date on the provider tax.

During the 2019 session of the Minnesota Legislature, LSP members testified at hearings, spoke directly to lawmakers, and participated in public actions at the Capitol. We also conducted a major postcard campaign calling on legislators to support the provider tax and to undertake other concrete actions to bolster quality, affordable healthcare in rural Minnesota. We and a broad coalition of allies told powerful stories of what’s at stake: this issue is about people’s lives.

Despite this public outcry, less than a week prior to the budget agreement that was reached before the special session, Minnesota Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka stated that keeping the provider tax was completely off the table for his caucus.

Thanks to organizing by our members and allies, during the session we secured:

→ Continuation of the provider tax at a 1.8 percent rate and elimination of the sunset date.

→ Stopping the Senate language that would have cut the value of MinnesotaCare and would have eliminated dental and vision care from required coverage.

→ Extending the moratorium for four years that stops nonprofit insurance companies from switching to for-profit status and running away with billions of dollars of the public’s assets.

## We Can Do Better

Unfortunately, the 2019 Minnesota Legislature continued “reinsurance,” which gives public money to insurance companies to pay a significant chunk of insurance claims with no real accountability. Most importantly, the Legislature did not take bold steps forward to expand public healthcare coverage or directly help people facing unaffordable costs and poor coverage on the private market. It left on the table a buy-in plan for a public healthcare coverage option and a proposal that would have used the state’s purchasing power to lower costs for prescription drugs, which was advanced by Governor Tim Walz and the Minnesota House.

We stopped some big steps backward on healthcare this session, but Minnesota failed to take the big steps forward that we need. Rural Minnesotans, including farmers who are in an economic crisis, as well as other Minnesotans, are in desperate need of relief from a healthcare system that puts corporate profits above people’s well-being.

Together we must build more power so we can achieve the kind of healthcare system that values human life, one where everyone is in and nobody is out. As the late U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone often said, “We all do better when we all do better.” □

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## 2019 State Legislature

### Farm-to-School: A Key Step for Local Foods

*Farmers & Others Made Their Voices Heard at the Capitol—What's Next?*

By Ben Helvick Anderson

With autumn in full swing, many of us are enjoying the beautiful bounty available from local farmers. We can and should feel proud and excited about the growth of local foods in our communities.

But the hard truth that Land Stewardship Project members know all too well is that beyond our small local foods worlds, our state and federal public policies continue moving food and farming in the opposite direction, consolidating the system and stifling opportunity and access. It can feel daunting to start to change that reality.

But our recently completed farm-to-school campaign demonstrates that change is possible. When we show up, we can start to modify the narrative and leverage our collective public dollars towards significant change. Last fall, LSP's Local Foods Initiative was created to organize the power of local foods farmers and advocates. In January, we launched the farm-to-school campaign, joining a larger group of stakeholders who had been working for a number of years already to create a new Minnesota farm-to-school program.

The farm-to-school bill we successfully pushed through the Legislature during the 2019 session would create a new state grant program to reimburse schools for their purchases of local foods. It would also create a new position at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to support farm-to-school efforts. LSP members saw this bill as an excellent opportunity to join with other groups to advance our goals of shifting the public narrative of who counted as “farmers,” and where our public investment in the food system should go.

Member-farmers Anna Racer, Josh Reinitz, and Aaron Wills formed a team and helped strategize and organize a robust campaign. We launched a social media push, lobbied at the state Capitol, held a press conference, and created a postcard drive. Our consistent message was that farmers who produce for local markets exist and the farm-to-school bill is good for our kids, farmers, and local communities. Hundreds of LSP members took part in the campaign.

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***“For me, public schools are an important customer, representing a growing portion of our overall sales. It has enabled us to scale our operation, staff our farm, purchase seeds and soil and safely invest in the resources needed to grow our business...Local farms are growing, even with little or no public support and we can do more to help them grow by systematically supporting and investing in them through the farm-to-school bill.”***

— Becca Carlson, Seeds Farm, Northfield Minn., testifying in front of the House Agriculture & Food Committee in February

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In collaboration with allies like the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Renewing the Countryside, and the Hmong American Farmers Association, we communicated a strategic, resounding demand to the Legislature that it needed to act on farm-to-school.

Representative Todd Lippert of Northfield became the chief author and champion of the farm-to-school bill and relentlessly worked through the grind of the legislative session to keep the issue front and center. The competition for public dollars is fierce at the Minnesota Capitol. Public budgets are particularly tight in the agricultural realm,

**Ben Doherty, an LSP member who, along with Erin Johnson, owns and operates Open Hands Farm in Northfield, Minn., spoke during a farm-to-school Capitol press conference last winter. “Farm-to-school provided the income we need to grow and stabilize our farm business,” he said. “We have been able to triple our business, hire more employees and support other local businesses.” (LSP Photo)**



where the allotment of dollars often does not come anywhere near meeting the demand.

Despite the circumstances, our organizing and action achieved part of our goals. The state agriculture budget passed by the Legislature did include the farm-to-school reimbursement grant program and a new domestic marketing position at the MDA that lists “farm-to-school” work as part of the job description. Unfortunately, the new reimbursement grant program did not get new funds. Therefore, the MDA will have to use the existing farm-to-school funds and will only be able to pilot the program at a small scale. MDA officials have communicated their desire to make the new pilot successful by working with stakeholder groups, and LSP members are committed to staying involved in this implementation process.

While the road toward rebuilding local food systems seems long and full of potholes, we are taking steps forward individually and collectively to make change. Land Stewardship Project members showed up at the Capitol with a direct demand, forced our elected officials to recognize them, and in the end, were given a piece of what we wanted. Considering that it was a short campaign launched right before the Legislature convened, LSP members and our allies should be proud of what we accomplished.

The next time you are at a farmers’ market or are on the receiving end of a Community Supported Agriculture share, think about this question: what significant policy changes would be possible if we took more time to activate all our networks involved in the local food movement and made their voices heard at the Capitol? □

*Ben Helvick Anderson recently left LSP’s Policy and Organizing team to direct public policy for the Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative. For more information on LSP’s organizing work around local food systems, contact Amanda Koehler at 612-722-6377 or at [akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org).*



# Public Research, Public Benefits

*Kernza & Other Forever Green Innovations Show the Power of Ag Policymaking that Looks Beyond Corn & Soybeans*

By Brian DeVore

Publicly funded agricultural research can sometimes take decades to show clear-cut, practical results, the kind that are evident to the naked eye. But on a hot July afternoon in western Minnesota, Carmen Fernholz was able to vouch for a significant return on investment in a relatively short amount of time when it comes to breeding a more farm-friendly form of perennial grain.

“When I planted that seed the first year, I could hardly see it, it was so small,” said Fernholz. “And when I got the seed last fall and took the husk off it, it was double in size. I said, ‘That’s what they did in six or seven years?’ That tells me we’re moving quickly.”

He said this while standing in a field on the more than 350 acres he and his wife Sally farm near Madison in western Minnesota. Growing in that 15-acre field was a lush, thick stand of a variety of wheatgrass with the trademarked name “Kernza.” As the chest-high plants bent to the breeze, they bore a strong resemblance to annual wheat. In fact, intermediate wheatgrass is a perennial grass that is a genetic cousin of common wheat, and in the Fernholz field grain kernels were maturing on the ends of the stalks. Carmen explained that what sets this stand of grain apart is that it won’t have to be replanted next year. In other words, this field represents a key step in developing the world’s first commercially-viable perennial grain.

Gathered around the edges of the field were more than 70 farmers, plant breeders, natural resource agency personnel, and people involved in the food industry. It was fitting that such a wide spectrum of the farm and food system was represented on this particular day. After all, from the time University of Minnesota scientists like Dr. Don Wyse started developing this form of wheatgrass back in 2011, they made it clear that research related to it wouldn’t just focus

on improving agronomic characteristics like seed size and harvestability. Through the U of M’s Forever Green Initiative, researchers have also been examining what impacts this deep-rooted plant can have on building soil health and keeping contaminants out of water, as well as how well it lends itself to being milled into flour and utilized for everything from baked goods to beer. They’ve even been studying its use as a source of



**As a result of public investment in the Forever Green Initiative, Kernza’s practical potential to produce grain, forage, and ecosystem services in corn country is emerging. (LSP Photo)**

livestock forage.

The U of M got its first Kernza seeds from the Land Institute in Kansas, which has been working on developing perennial grain for decades. Wyse and other researchers have spent the past eight years developing a line of the wheatgrass that is adapted to a more northern climate. The 15 acres growing on the Fernholz farm represents the first Minnesota variety of the plant. This will be the first of many U of M Kernza varieties, according to Dr. Jake Jungers, a perennial cropping systems ecologist in the university’s department of agronomy and plant genetics. Seven more varieties are in the pipeline, ready to be rolled out in the next several years. Minnesota-born Kernza is now being raised on around a dozen farms—some as far north as the Canadian border and some in the southeastern and southwestern regions of the state.

“This is the honeymoon period for Kernza research,” said Jungers as he examined the stand, which he and wheat breeder Dr.

Jim Anderson said was the best they’d seen yet. They were particular impressed by the stand considering that it, along with the rest of the land the Fernholzes farm, is certified organic. “Things are happening fast and furious,” added Jungers.

Over the past five years or so, the U of M’s success in doubling seed size has increased productivity of the grain kernel. Increased size also has a practical benefit for farmers come planting time. “If you’re not used to planting light, fluffy seed, you can lose your religion quite quickly,” quipped Fernholz.

Another critical improvement is Minnesota Kernza stalks are shorter—tall, rangy wheatgrass tends to fall over and lodge when the seed size is increased. Researchers have also been working on improving the grain’s ability to separate from the hull during harvest without sticking. As was made clear during the field day, this “fast and furious” activity is not restricted to seed size and harvestability; results are emerging as to its environmental benefits as well—it can keep nitrates out of groundwater while helping soil better manage runoff in general (*see the sidebar on page 16*). The

fact that it is a perennial with an extensive root system also means it can build soil organic matter, which, among other things, sequesters greenhouse gases.

In addition, the food company General Mills had samples of a Kernza-based cereal on-hand at the Fernholz farm, while the Birchwood Café and Bang Brewery offered

**Kernza, see page 16...**

## Give it a Listen

On episode 229 of LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast, farmer Carmen Fernholz and researcher Dr. Jacob Jungers talk about the agronomic, economic, and ecological benefits the world’s first commercially-viable perennial grain could produce: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1215](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1215).

...Kernza, from page 15

up baked goods and beer, respectively, that were produced with the perennial grain. Finally, feed trials show that it compares well to pasture grass as a source of forage for cattle.

Kernza still faces plenty of roadblocks before it is commercially feasible—yield and harvestability are just two issues scientists and farmers are struggling with. But in just a few short years, intermediate wheatgrass science has shown the sweet spot

publicly funded agricultural research can fit nicely into: while providing public goods like environmental sustainability, products can be created that benefit a specific group, in this case the farmers who derive economic value from raising a soil-friendly crop.

## A Public Investment

The research on Kernza is being coordinated by the Forever Green Initiative, a U of M program that is working to develop a variety of crops that can provide an alternative to annual plantings of corn and soybeans. Besides Kernza, Forever Green is working with, for example, pennycress and winter camelina, oilseeds which can be grown alongside soybeans as a kind of relay crop.

During the past several years, the Land

Stewardship Project has worked with other groups to procure funding from the Minnesota Legislature for Forever Green to the tune of \$1.5 million to \$2 million for two-year budget cycles. In the 2019 legislative session (see page 10), \$4.3 million was secured for the biennium, and LSP plans to push for \$10 million in funding during future sessions.

Kernza and the other plant systems being studied by Forever Green represent a slight change in attitude on the part of policymakers. By helping to fund this research, members of the Minnesota Legislature are acknowledging that the future of agriculture does not need to be completely wed-

Kernza, see page 17...

## The Power of Perennial Roots

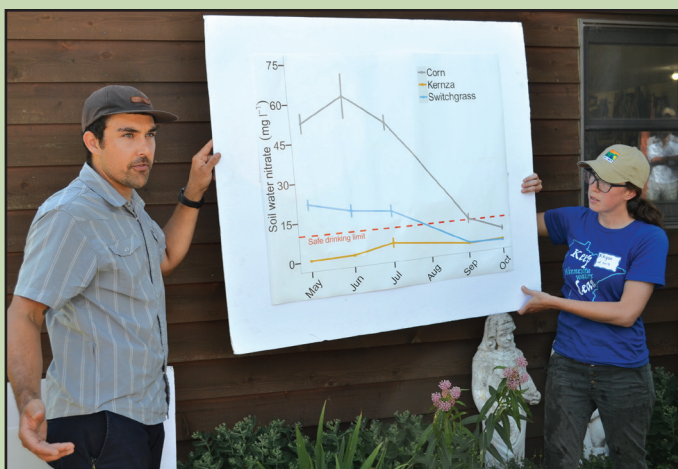
Because Kernza is a wheatgrass, it has the deep, curtain-like root system so characteristic of perennials. In fact, University of Minnesota researchers say Kernza roots often extend deeper than they are able to dig with a shovel. That's good news when it comes to water quality, since having a living root system present in a farm field 365-days-a-year helps build the soil's ability to manage and store water runoff, while soaking up contaminants.

Kernza's knack for taking up nitrates is of particular interest in farm states like Minnesota, where nitrogen fertilizer used in the production of crops like corn has become a major pollutant in many rural communities. Since 1994, the Minnesota Department of Health has found 51 community wells drawing water with nitrate levels near or above federal safety standards. Some communities have had to install water treatment systems, while others have simply drilled new wells in an attempt to bypass contaminated aquifers. And then there are all the private wells on farms and other rural properties that have been contaminated with high levels of nitrates, making the water unsafe for drinking, particularly for infants. All of the options for procuring safe drinking water in an area where nitrate contamination is prevalent are expensive.

"An alternative approach here is to prevent the contamination from happening in the first place, and that's by making changes

on the landscape," says Dr. Jake Jungers, a perennial cropping systems ecologist who is researching Kernza at the University of Minnesota.

Jungers, along with other researchers at the U of M and the Kansas-based Land Institute, recently conducted a study where they compared the amount of nitrates escaping fields planted to three different plant systems: corn,



**Research by the U of M's Dr. Jake Jungers, shown here with Rhyen Schicker of the Lac qui Parle Soil and Water Conservation District, indicates Kernza's extensive root system helps keep nitrates from leaching into groundwater. (LSP Photo)**

switchgrass, and Kernza. According to the study, which was published earlier this year in the journal *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*, the amount of nitrate leaching in the Kernza field was two orders of magnitude lower than it was in corn (it was one order of magnitude lower when compared to switchgrass, which is also a perennial). During a July field day at the Carmen and Sally Fernholz

farm (see page 15), Jungers displayed a chart showing that during the entire growing season, nitrate leaching under a Kernza field was well below the federal drinking water standard. The ability of switchgrass to keep nitrates below the standard kicked in by July, while corn produced unsafe levels of leaked nitrates all the way until September. Michigan State University research found nitrate leaching beneath Kernza was 86 percent less when compared to wheat.

Such results have caught the attention of municipalities. In southeastern Minnesota, where karst geology makes groundwater particularly vulnerable to contamination, officials in Chatfield are growing Kernza on a few acres to protect their city's well field. It's hoped a pilot program will provide more communities a chance to utilize the perennial grain as a water quality protector.

During the Fernholz field day, a "one inch rainfall" simulation was applied to a chunk of soil that had been dug out of one of the farm's fields. The soil sample was sprouting Kernza that had been seeded into the field in 2018. In comparison, soils dug up from cornfields utilizing various tillage practices were also soaked with the faux precipitation. When compared to the corn, the wheatgrass retained more of the moisture in the soil and had less runoff, and the water that did percolate through the Kernza roots and down into a jar below was clear.

As she examined the aftermath of the artificial rainfall, U of M soil scientist Dr. Jessica Gutknecht was impressed by a plant that was going to be providing such ecological services for years to come.

"It's amazing what we saw in only one year of Kernza," she said.



ded to ever-increasing corn and soybean production, and that there are advantages to borrowing from a plant's wild side when creating a viable agricultural crop.

The experience the Fernholzes are having with Kernza offers a glimpse at how publicly-funded innovation can prime the pump for widespread innovation on the land.

## A Hoof in the Door

Trials show that after year three, Kernza's productivity drops off significantly. Carmen Fernholz likes the fact that after planting the wheatgrass, he will have at least three years of continuous living cover on a field, which will build organic matter with its deep roots and biomass, eliminating the need for tillage and other means of weed control. Because he is organic, Fernholz relies on tillage for weed control more than he likes, and a perennial grain like Kernza can help deal with that issue while producing cash flow year-after-year.

"I've really become sensitized to tillage," the farmer said. "With things like Kernza, through a natural system we can suppress our weed seed banks, and then we have a much greater opportunity to eliminate this tillage we are so dependent upon now. Kernza is its own cover crop."

Since a conventional field must be chemical-free for three years before it can be certified organic, Kernza is the perfect

transition crop for farmers looking to go organic, said Fernholz.

And Kernza's ability to be grazed makes it a multifunctional crop. Jungers laid out a scenario where a grower with cattle could plant Kernza in the fall and then graze it early the following spring—trials show that grazing in the spring typically does not reduce grain yield; in fact, it may improve stand longevity. In mid-August, the grain could be harvested and the straw baled.



**"Hey, if we can produce a revenue-generating perennial grain on our farms while improving soil health, let's do it, let's move forward," says farmer Carmen Fernholz, shown here describing his farm's Kernza plot during a recent field day. (LSP Photo)**

Later in the fall, it could be grazed again.

"So, there could potentially be four sources of revenue in one season: spring grazing, grain harvest, straw removal, and a fall grazing," said Jungers.

That potential for utilizing livestock in such a system has Fernholz excited. He and Sally started farming in 1972 and have been certified organic since 1975. Recently, they

have been working with a beginning farmer, Luke Peterson, who is interested in carrying on the land's organic legacy. As part of that plan, Peterson wants to integrate livestock into the operation, something the Fernholzes have not done. Carmen feels Kernza could provide that entry for animals. In fact, this summer the Fernholzes and Peterson signed a contract with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service that qualifies them for cost-share funds to put in rotational grazing infrastructure.

All of this is exciting stuff for Carmen, a longtime pioneer in organic and regenerative agriculture who has been doing joint, on-farm research with the U of M since the mid-1980s. When he was first approached by Wyse about planting a few acres of intermediate wheatgrass, the farmer agreed to it quickly—mostly, he said, because he already had a good working relationship with U of M researchers and was used to them "tossing things" at him. But it soon became evident that this research could have deeper implications, from an agronomic, environmental, and economic point of view.

"Hey, if we can produce a revenue-generating perennial grain on our farms while improving soil health, let's do it, let's move forward," said Fernholz. "It's exciting." □

*For more information on the U of M's Forever Green Initiative, see [www.forevergreen.umn.edu](http://www.forevergreen.umn.edu).*

## LSP Members Meet with Pollution Control Officials

In August, Land Stewardship Project member Kaleb Anderson hosted a meeting with Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Commissioner Laura Bishop and an Assistant Commissioner, Katrina Kessler, on his crop and livestock farm near Goodhue, Minn.

During the meeting, LSP members talked to Bishop and Kessler about environmental review for factory farms, protecting local government control, the climate crisis, soil health, and regenerative agriculture. LSP pastured hog farmer Dayna Burtness also hand delivered to the MPCA officials more than 580 postcards from people living in 75 Minnesota counties. The postcards call on the MPCA to protect rural communities and their natural resources. For more on LSP's factory farm organizing, contact Barb Sogn-Frank at 612-722-6377 or [bsognfrank@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bsognfrank@landstewardshipproject.org). (Photo by Amanda Koehler) □



## Farm Beginnings

### Applications Open for 2019-2020 FB Course Minnesota-Wisconsin Region Class Begins Oct. 26

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program is accepting applications for its 2019-2020 class session. The class will be held at the Menomonie Market Food Co-op in western Wisconsin. The first class will be held Oct. 26.

LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its second decade of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farm management. The course is for people just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers looking to make changes in their operations. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial and enterprise planning, and innovative marketing techniques.

This 12-month course provides training and hands-on learning opportunities in the form of nine classroom sessions, as well as

#### Farm Beginnings in Other Regions

Besides Minnesota and Wisconsin, Farm Beginnings classes have been held in Illinois, Nebraska, and North Dakota. Local community-based organizations have also launched Farm Beginnings courses in South Dakota, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, New York, and Maine.

For information on Farm Beginnings courses in other parts of the country, see the Farm Beginnings Collaborative website at [www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org](http://www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org). More information is also available by contacting LSP's Amy Bacigalupo at 320-269-2105 or [amyb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:amyb@landstewardshipproject.org).

farm tours, field days, workshops, and access to an extensive farmer network. Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the region. The classes, which meet on Saturdays beginning in late October 2019, run until March 2020, followed by an on-farm component that

includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 800 people have graduated from the Minnesota-Wisconsin region Farm Beginnings course. Graduates are involved in a wide-range of agricultural enterprises, including grass-based livestock, organic vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture, and specialty products.

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 toward the final fee. Payment plans are available, as well as a limited number of scholarships.

Completion of the course fulfills the educational requirements needed for Farm Service Agency loans and the Minnesota Beginning Farmer Tax Credit ([www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/beginningfarmertaxcredit](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/beginningfarmertaxcredit)).

For application materials or more information, see [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org). You can also get details from LSP's Annelie Livingston-Anderson at 507-523-3366 or [annelie@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:annelie@landstewardshipproject.org). □

### LSP's Farm Dreams Can Help You Figure Out if Farming is in Your Future

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

prerequisite for LSP's Farm Beginnings course (*see above*).

LSP holds Farm Dreams workshops at locations throughout the Minnesota-Wisconsin region over the course of a year. The cost is \$20 for LSP members and \$40 for non-members.

For more information, see the **Farm Dreams** page at [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org).

Details are also available by contacting LSP's Annelie Livingston-Anderson at 507-523-3366 or by e-mailing her at [annelie@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:annelie@landstewardshipproject.org). □

For the latest field days and workshops, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmbeginningscalendar](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmbeginningscalendar).

## Renting It Out Right

### The Other Half of the Land Stewardship Equation With So Many of Our Ag Acres Rented, it's Time to Reach Out to NOLOs

By Robin Moore

Over the years, when Land Stewardship Project staff such as myself talk about stewardship, climate change, soil health, water quality,

etc., we have communicated that message primarily to farmers. But around 40 percent of the 911 million acres of farmland in the contiguous United States is rented. That means a farmer does not own the land being farmed, but rather is making lease payments to a landowner for the right to produce crops

and livestock on those acres. More than half of the nation's cropland is rented, and a quarter of the pastureland is.

And here's another important number: 80 percent of rented farmland is owned by non-operating landowners. Non-operating landowners are people who are not active in agricultural production. They may have inherited the land, and may not even be living in the same county or even the same state as where their farm is located.

The fact is, the owners of that rented land

**Renting It Out Right**, *see page 19...*



make the ultimate decisions on how it is managed. We need to work more directly with this group of non-operating landowners — otherwise known as NOLOs.

To not work with NOLOs means giving up on a huge piece of the land stewardship pie. We often hear from farmers statements like, “I’ll plant cover crops or utilize no-till on my land, but there’s no way I’d do that on my rented acres.” The reasons that it’s harder to adopt practices like no-till, cover crops, or grazing on rented land include: year-to-year leases, top dollar rental rates, the insecurity of long-term investment and infrastructure, and the landlord’s perceptions of the conservation practices as untidy.

### Rental Car Economics

LSP organizer and farmer Terry VanDerPol recently put this issue in perspective with a succinct statement: “No one ever washes a rental car.” She adds, “We’ve been trained to think of farming as an exchange of money, and landowners have been trained to think of their rented-out farm as just a yearly check.”

When we think of rented property and rental relationships as revenue and transactions, it’s hard to understand the immediate and long-term value of investing in soil building. LSP believes that directly engaging landowners who rent out their acres is the best way to work on changing this way of thinking about farmland rental.

Landowners as a group of people come from a range of backgrounds and may live close by or far away. These are people who for the most part haven’t been reached, or don’t even think of themselves as a group, let alone agents of change. But that is precisely what we are reminding them of—that land ownership is power, and they can use that power to effect positive change on the landscape and in our communities.

Many landowners with great conservation values would love to support soil building on their land but may be facing obstacles such as lack of knowledge or experience with farming, belief that any request for soil building practices would be perceived as critical of their renter, dependence on income and/or that particular renter, or a familial/community relationship with the farmer that makes it hard to ask for change.

### Leases That Fit Your Stewardship Values

The Land Stewardship Project and the League of Women Voters have assembled a “toolkit” for people seeking to utilize leases that emphasize building soil health and other conservation practices. Tools include: tips on how to hold conversations with renters, lease examples, guides on setting rental rates for soil building practices, and background materials on soil health. For free copies of the **Conservation Leases Toolkit**, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/conservationleases](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/conservationleases). More information and one-to-one guidance is also available by contacting LSP’s Robin Moore at 320-269-2105 or [rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org).

Women, who make up a large percentage of non-operating landowners, sometimes come to land ownership through the loss of a partner, parents, or other family, and may not have been included in management decisions. Let’s face it, farming is still a male-dominated arena, and even though there are an increasing number of women who are primary operators, agriculture can be very difficult territory to navigate as a woman

### The Power of Land Ownership

Here is a special message for landowners: your actions are deeply critical to our efforts to continue improving our farms and communities. You as a landowner have the power to improve the soil on your rented acres, and when you support this, you are also fighting climate change by using your acres to sequester greenhouse gases.

You are improving the water holding capacity and infiltration rates on your land and improving water quality in your watershed and beyond. You are increasing the resilience and value of not only your land and assets, but your renter’s farm business, therefore strengthening the farming community around your land.

You could be creating habitat for wildlife and pollinators while reducing your renter’s input costs and increasing their yields over time. With a long view and some early investment, both you and your renter could be meeting your financial and sustainability goals.

In other words, when you begin to work closely with your renter, you are also strengthening the fabric of our rural communities, creating relationships that build opportunities for everyone,

investing yourself in the stewardship of the land, and truly building a legacy for yourself and the land. □

Organizer Robin Moore is based in LSP’s Montevideo office in western Minnesota. Non-operating landowners and renters are encouraged to contact her at 320-269-2105 or [rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org).



Non-operating landowners recently gathered before an LSP field day to learn more about production practices like managed rotational grazing and to discuss ways of working with renters. (LSP Photo)

unfamiliar with farming. Relationships with renters can degrade after the death of a partner, women may not feel confident asking questions, or renters may not know how to approach a woman new to agriculture.

These are all real challenges, but LSP has resources, both in materials and in dedicated staff (see sidebar above), to help landowners navigate their individual situations and figure out the best path towards supporting their renter’s soil building practices.

With LSP’s support, landowners can educate themselves about current practices, understand soil health building options, practice and prepare for challenging conversations with renters, and talk to landowners who have been successful in working with their renter, as well as farmers who have good working relationships with their landowners.

### Give it a Listen

On episode 230 of LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Robin Moore talks about how the Land Stewardship Project is using soil health to forge stewardship partnerships between non-operating landowners and the farmers who rent from them: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1222](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1222).

# Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland in the Midwest? Or are you an established farmer/landowner in the Midwest who is seeking a beginning farmer to purchase or rent your land, or to work with in a partnership/employee situation? Then consider having your information circulated via the Land Stewardship Project's *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse*. To fill out an online form and for more information, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse). You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Karen Stettler at [stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org) or by calling her at 507-523-3366. For the latest listings, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse).

## Seeking Farmland

◆ Simon Schneider is seeking to purchase 10-40 acres of tillable farmland in **northeastern Minnesota or northwestern Wisconsin** (in close proximity to Lake Superior). Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has quality soil and water, as well as a rolling topography and a combination of open and wooded acres, is preferred. Access to a paved road and utilities is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Simon Schneider, 510-437-0906, [simian@live.com](mailto:simian@live.com).

◆ Maggie Albright is seeking to purchase 20-50 acres of farmland in **Wisconsin**. Land with 10-20 acres pasture, 10-20 acres tillable, and 10-20 acres forest is preferred. Land that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred; a house is preferred. Outbuildings are preferred, but not necessary. A water supply is needed. Contact: Maggie Albright, 608-369-4579, [maggierandall@yahoo.com](mailto:maggierandall@yahoo.com).

◆ Gina Cook is seeking to purchase 100 acres of farmland in **Wisconsin**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has tillable, pasture, and wooded acres, is preferred. Land with an open barn and a house, as well as good fencing, water and power, is also preferred. Contact: Gina Cook, 360-463-6411, [stableminds7@gmail.com](mailto:stableminds7@gmail.com).

◆ Emily Thompson is seeking a farm that could house 15-20 dairy goats in **Minnesota's Rice County, near Northfield**. Ideally the farm owners would be able to assist with daily milking or feeding, although Thompson would plan on being at the farm three to four times per week. Management of farm (i.e. herd health, kidding, breeding) would be handled by Thompson. Farm owner could use the goats for 4-H and as a source of milk. She is not looking to move animals until around 2020-2021, but would like to start discussions now. Thompson would prefer a farm with a large pole barn to house animals and hay; water and electricity

on-site is needed. The costs of feed, electricity, and water would be covered by Thompson. Contact: Emily Thompson, 612-803-2427, [ekayet@hotmail.com](mailto:ekayet@hotmail.com).

◆ Hannah Arata is seeking to purchase 5-15 acres of tillable farmland in **Minnesota or Wisconsin**. Arata would prefer land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has water and electricity. No house is required. Contact: Hannah Arata, 303-912-6067, [soilandsunflowers@gmail.com](mailto:soilandsunflowers@gmail.com).

◆ Claire Roussos is seeking to purchase 20 acres of farmland in **Minnesota or Wisconsin**. Land with at least 2 tillable acres, 1 forest acre, and pasture is preferred. Land with a drilled water well and outbuildings is also preferred. No house is required. Contact: Claire Roussos, 608-692-3355, [c.b.roussos@gmail.com](mailto:c.b.roussos@gmail.com).

◆ Garrett Angell is seeking to rent 30 acres of tillable farmland in **Minnesota**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a well and electricity is preferred. A pole barn or storage on the property is a bonus; no house is required. Contact: Garrett Angell, 612-282-2387, [Garrett.a02@yahoo.com](mailto:Garrett.a02@yahoo.com).

◆ Gilbert Vereen is seeking to purchase farmland in **Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Iowa, or Illinois**. Land with 5 tillable acres, 4 pasture acres, and 10 forest acres is preferred. Land with fencing, electricity, and water is also preferred. No house is required. Contact: Gilbert Vereen, 803-662-5489, [doggytimezent@gmail.com](mailto:doggytimezent@gmail.com).

◆ Christopher Spears is seeking to purchase 5-15 acres of tillable farmland in **Wisconsin**. Land with a water source is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Christopher Spears, 608-341-9859.

◆ Cha Xiong is seeking to purchase up to 5 acres of farmland in **Wisconsin**. Land that has 1 acre tillable, 1 acre pasture and half-an-acre of forest is preferred. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has fencing is preferred. Outbuildings for storage would be nice; no house is needed. Contact: Cha Xiong, 541-292-2862, [tsasxjonj0@gmail.com](mailto:tsasxjonj0@gmail.com).

◆ Kirk Radtke is seeking a situation

where he could rent tillable acres in **Iowa or Minnesota**, and would be interested in working with a retiring or soon-to-be-retiring farmer. He would be interested in livestock as well. Contact: Kirk Radtke, 515-460-2201, [kradtke314@yahoo.com](mailto:kradtke314@yahoo.com).

◆ Grace Mikula is seeking to purchase 5 acres of farmland in **Minnesota or Wisconsin**. Land with 2 tillable acres, 1 pasture acre, and 1 forest acre is preferred. Land with a barn, garage, chicken coop, and a house, and that is on a well maintained road close to town, is also preferred. Contact: Grace Mikula, 202-573-4831, [grace.mikula@yahoo.com](mailto:grace.mikula@yahoo.com).

## Farmland Available

◆ Joe Carlson has for rent a 20-acre orchard operation in **Minnesota's Wright County (near Winsted; 40 miles west of Minneapolis)**. There is a 3,000-tree (15 acres) fenced/irrigated apple orchard available for lease or partnership, including equipment available for growing, harvesting, packing, and storing apples. In addition, there is a production bakery pie business (20,000 pies) available for sale which could be relocated. There is also 2-3 acres of vegetable/pumpkin land. No house is available. Carlson is willing to train the right person. Contact: Joe Carlson, 320-282-5913, [pies@tds.net](mailto:pies@tds.net).

◆ Lynne Reeck has for sale a 25-acre farm in **Minnesota's Rice County, south of the Twin Cities**. There are 15 pasture acres and 10 tillable acres and the land has not been sprayed for several years. The farm consists of pastures fenced for goats and sheep and it is set up to do paddock-style rotational grazing. There is a house, barn, storage shed, hay shed, goat barn, cheese plant, and milking parlor. The farm and goat cheese business are both for sale, and they can be purchased together or separately. The price range is \$419,000 to \$519,000 (the lat-

Clearinghouse, see page 21...



### ...Clearinghouse, from page 20

ter price includes the business). Contact: Jan Joannides, 612-251-7304, jan@rtcinfo.org.

◆ Sarah Woutat has for sale 18 acres of farmland in **east-central Minnesota's Isanti County (near Princeton)**. There are 3-5 tillable acres (depending on how you arrange the farm). The land has not been sprayed for several years and there is a house. Outbuildings include two 30 x 96 hoop houses, two 20 x 48 heated greenhouses, a 16 x 36 mini-tunnel, a granary, a garage, a pack-shed with two walk-in coolers, and a barn with a new roof. An irrigation well was dug in 2013 and there is solid set irrigation pipe and 3-inch lay-flat. Additional equipment and vegetable production supplies are available. The asking price is \$235,000. Contact: Sarah Woutat, 949-370-8258, info@uprootfarm.com.

◆ Steve and Karen Clindaniel have for sale 40 acres of farmland in **northeastern Wisconsin's Door County (near Egg Harbor)**. There are 26 tillable acres and 12 forest acres, and the land has been organically managed for over 18 years; previously it was certified organic. There is a two-stall garage with second story storage, along with an over-size two-car garage attached to a newly-remodeled house. The tillable soil is a deep, silty loam and border trees have been planted on the perimeter of the property. There is an orchard of approximately 30 fruit trees (apple, pear, cherry, and plum). There are also 2 acres of established asparagus beds, as well as wild strawberries and raspberries. The asking price is \$498,000. Contact: Steve and Karen Clindaniel, 920-473-2055, doorcty40forsale@gmail.com.

◆ Mark Schnobrich has for rent 6 acres of farmland near **Hutchinson in central Minnesota**. The land consists of pasture and it has not been sprayed for 18 years. It is currently under grass hay and some fencing is still up (it would need to be refurbished). No house is available. The price is very negotiable. Contact: Mark Schnobrich, 320-587-3760, arborcon@hutchtel.net.

◆ Tom Simonsen has for rent/lease a 3.5-acre certified organic blueberry field in the **Twin Cities, Minn., region**. This is a well established business. Information on growing blueberries and running this business will be shared with the renter. Contact: Tom Simonsen, 612-978-2585, tsimonsen@metrowiderealestate.com.

◆ Barb and Dave Heilman have for rent 190 acres of farmland in **northeastern Wisconsin's Door County (near Egg Harbor)**. The land consists of 125 tillable acres and 50 forest acres. The land is level. No house is available. Contact: Barb and Dave Heilman, 920-901-7439, lensguy1@hotmail.com.

◆ Realtor Marc Cutter has for sale 29 acres of farmland in **northwestern Wisconsin (between Luck and Cushing)**. There is 11 open/tillable acres, a fenced garden area, and lots of mature hardwoods (with sugar bush). There is a greenhouse attached to the three-bedroom home, which was built in 1985. There is a two-car garage and a 24 x 24 workshop. The asking price is \$280,000. Contact: Marc Cutter, 715-491-9381, marcutter@edinarealty.com.

◆ Cecilia Kurtz has for sale 30 acres of farmland in **western Minnesota's Renville County**. There are woods, a pond, and a cattail slough. Half of a 36 x 62 Morton shed

is well insulated with an additional small heated room that can be used as an office, or refrigerated for produce storage. There are three additional buildings, along with a three-bedroom home with an updated septic system and central air conditioning. Many improvements have been made since 2011. The land is buffered from surrounding farmland that is sprayed, making organic production possible. The asking price is \$228,000, but the owner is willing to negotiate. Contact: Cecilia Kurtz, 320-826-2324.

◆ Lois Brink has for sale 80 acres of certified organic farmland in **southeastern Minnesota (near Spring Grove and Houston)**. The land consists of 40 tillable acres and 40 forest acres, and a creek runs through the middle of the property. Contact: Lois Brink, 612-251-5650, lbrink6587@gmail.com.

◆ Tom Simonsen has for sale a 20-acre commercial fruit farm near **Minnesota's Twin Cities**. The land is expected to be certified organic in 2019 and includes a large pole barn with four box stalls, a riding arena, and approximately 5 acres of fenced pasture. There is also a 1998 4,500-square-foot rambler and a picnic shelter. There is a well for irrigation. Contact: Tom Simonsen, 612-978-2585, tsimonsen@metrowiderealestate.com.

◆ Tom Yucus has for rent 480 acres of certified organic farmland in **north-central Illinois's Lee County**. There are 380 tillable acres, 150 acres of which are irrigated. The land has been certified organic for 10 years and there is a deep well and six grain bins; no house is available. Contact: Tom Yucus, 815-343-6641, thomasyucus@gmail.com.

## LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop Planned for Winter 2020

Are you a farmer or a landowner starting to think about who will be farming your land in the future? The Land Stewardship Project is offering a **Farm Transition Planning Workshop** series this winter in southeastern Minnesota. Hear from professionals regarding financial, tax, and legal implications of farm transitions. Meet local farmers who will tell their stories and share their farm transition experiences. The workshop will be held on Saturdays—Feb. 1, Feb. 22, and March 14— from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The series will be held in Red Wing, Minn., and the cost is \$200 per family.

Past participants have said:

→ "I saved myself thousands of dollars by coming to this workshop."

→ "We need to consider our values at the same time; as it is not all about the money. The workshop made us really think about the legacy we want to leave behind."

→ "Although we had done some farm transition work prior to this workshop, we still have much to learn. Many farm families are in our same situation, and we were able to learn from the other participants in the program. Each family had a different approach to transition, and hearing these was very helpful. Every story and experience added something to our knowledge."

→ "Farm transition is about life transition. In the longer view, it is our lives that come and go—the farm stays. We pour body and soul into the farm while we are here. It feeds us and many other people and we work to leave the land better than we found it. We will leave it one day; we know that for sure. We hope to see someone else love it as much as we do. Living to see this happen in some form is, to me, the central issue of farm transition."

### Sign-up Today

For more information and to register for LSP's Farm Transition Planning Workshop, contact LSP's Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

# Public-Private Prairie Partnership

*A BioBlitz Highlights the Role Livestock Farmers Can Play in Habitat Improvement*

By Brian DeVore

It's the kind of overcast day in June that leaves one wondering if the sun decided to take an extended summer holiday. But as heavy thunderstorms threaten this part of Big Stone County in western Minnesota, some 130-people break



**Insect identification was part of the 2019 BioBlitz. Volunteers found significantly more insects in a prairie reconstructed from cropland when compared to a neighboring habitat parcel dominated by smooth brome grass. (LSP Photo)**

up into teams and fan out onto various parcels of prairie habitat, looking to illuminate bright signs of a healthy landscape. Soon after starting out across a native prairie that's never been plowed, a birding group hears the characteristic *witchity-witchity-witchity-witch* call of a common yellow-throat warbler, and the avian tally begins: yellow-headed and red-winged blackbirds, eastern kingbirds, pelicans, a bobolink, a willow flycatcher, tree swallows, song sparrows, a horned lark doing its "skylarking" routine (hovering high in the air while calling out), and a mallard conducting a fly over.

The aquatic species team, decked out in chest waders, is tabulating signs of life in a pair of small prairie pothole lakes: Iowa darters, crawfish, fathead minnows, and zooplankton. A diversity of plants, as yet another team walking in a different part of the grassland discovers, is also present: purple coneflower, thimble weed, pasque flower, and wood sorrel. An insect census in a prairie reclaimed from a former crop field reveals damsel flies, jumping spiders,

mayflies, dragonflies, and a miner bee hauling around plump saddle bags full of bright yellow pollen.

The teams, which are made up of a mix of trained naturalists, local residents, and prairie enthusiasts from across Minnesota, dutifully record their findings, helping the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources monitor important prairie resources. Taken together, the results of this "BioBlitz" provide an overall picture of how successful natural resource agencies have been at not only preserving untouched prairie, but reconstructing natural grassland habitat. These "nature walks" are key for another important reason—the prairies are being managed with grazing in cooperation with local farmers, and regular monitoring helps determine the impacts of blending wild habitat with domesticated livestock.

### Puzzle Pieces

Over the past few years, the Land Stewardship Project has worked with other groups to put on BioBlitz events at various locations in western Minnesota. A BioBlitz is an intense period of biological surveying that attempts to record as many living species possible in a designated area. Groups of scientists, naturalists, and volunteers conduct the survey over a specific period of time, usually a day. Participants can catalog their findings on the citizen science website iNaturalist.org.

The focus of this year's event was the 3,000-acre prairie complex near Big Stone Lake, a long body of water that lies on the border between Minnesota and South Dakota. Besides LSP, sponsors of this year's event were Clean Up the River Environment, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Morris Wetland District, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The 2019 BioBlitz carried an important message for its

participants: to have prairie habitat in a place like western Minnesota requires more than supporting the specific acres contained within the borders of public lands—it also means paying attention to land management outside those boundaries. And in this case, that means farmland.

"One thing we want you to get out of this day is that it takes land and people working together to support habitat like that," said LSP organizer Robin Moore during a lunchtime panel discussion held during the BioBlitz. "That means not just managing public lands well, but caring about the farming community that surrounds those lands and everything from the state of our rural towns to whether farmers are able to be financially viable. It's about understanding how these pieces fit together."

And all those local pieces fitting together can have wide scale impacts, something that's particularly relevant in an area like Big Stone Lake, the source of the Minnesota River which, in turn, empties into the Mississippi 330 miles downstream.

"What is happening here on this farmland is affecting water quality all the way down to the Mississippi," added Moore.

### Please Do Disturb

J.B. Bright, a wildlife refuge specialist with the Fish and Wildlife Service, told BioBlitz participants he relies heavily on managed rotational grazing to help establish and maintain good grassland habitat. His district includes 250 waterfowl production areas, totaling roughly 54,000 acres. Bright annually works with over two dozen livestock farmers, who pay a fee to graze around 4,000 acres of refuge lands. He said some sort of periodic disturbance, either in the form of grazing or burning, is needed to keep grasslands from evolving into wooded

**BioBlitz, see page 23...**



**Amphibians such as leopard frogs are extremely sensitive to land use changes that modify aquatic and grassland habitat. (LSP Photo)**



habitat, much of which can be full of invasive species such as red cedar, buckthorn, and Siberian elm. Even some forms of grass can be an invasive. Smooth brome grass, for example, can take over a diverse grassland, creating a monocultural cover and crowding out the heterogeneous habitat grassland songbirds, waterfowl, and pollinators require.

Depending on the situation, grasslands require a major disturbance at least every five to 10 years, something bison and wildfires provided in days gone by. More recently, natural resource experts have purposely burned off grasslands to keep woody invasives at bay and recharge green growth. But managing a burn can be expensive and it requires optimal weather conditions.

Studies in numerous states show that rotational grazing can be as much as double plant diversity in an area—it not only prevents overgrazing but the cattle's manure and urine helps recharge the soil's biology.

Livestock grazing may be used to directly control invasive species as well as to prepare land for a planting of native prairie by disturbing the soil and setting back non-native species. Animals are also being used to thin out cattails and reed-canary grass around wetlands, providing the open areas many waterfowl prefer when keeping a lookout for predators.

But, Bright made clear, it is critical *how* the grazing is carried out. He works closely with farmers and ranchers to develop grazing plans and stocking rates that benefit the habitat, first and foremost.

"The timing and the stocking rate will all affect the plant community," he said. "We use a lot of rest between grazings and it's a very conservative approach compared to the intensity livestock producers might use on their own land."



**During the BioBlitz, aquatic insects and other indicators of water quality were monitored in small pothole lakes that are located in prairie habitat.** (LSP Photo)

## Cross-Border Benefits

Jim Nelson, who has been grazing on Fish and Wildlife Service land in the Big Stone Lake area since 1985, said that even though he can't graze as intensively on public lands as he can on his own acres, he benefits greatly from the arrangement production-wise. For example, when Bright needs Nelson's cattle on a unit to help control brome grass in the spring, it allows the farmer to rest his own pastures early in the year, giving them a good start to the season. That not only increases feed value, but makes for pastures that are more resilient, have healthier soil, and can produce their own habitat for wildlife.

"I find it to be kind of a win-win," said Nelson. "It's proved to me the value of rotational grazing, which is what I do on my own land now. It's just great to see the ecology and animals benefit."

Jeff and Mary Klages have been grazing their beef herd on public lands in the area for about a dozen years. Like Nelson, they find that utilizing the natural habitat as a source of forage gives their own pastures a needed rest during certain times of the year. Bright pointed out that he emphasizes to livestock producers that public grazing should be used as a source of supplemental forage, not as a tool for expanding herd size.

Mary Klages said grazing public lands produces benefits that go beyond a low-cost source of forage. She's a master naturalist, and has had the opportunity to see firsthand the ecological benefits of grazing on waterfowl production areas. One day she was checking a fence line and found small white lady's slippers growing; the rare orchid is a "special concern species" in Minnesota because of declining numbers. "I'm convinced it was a result of having the cattle out there," she said. Bright agreed.

Jeff Klages spotted a pair of burrowing owls on public land they were grazing, and Mary has observed ground nesting birds



**A panel during the BioBlitz featured a discussion about the role livestock farmers can play in maintaining healthy grassland habitat. "It's always about taking care of the land," said farmer Mary Klages.** (LSP Photo)

hatching eggs successfully in pastured areas.

And since they are able to increase the resiliency of their home pastures by giving them a rest, such ecological benefits reveal themselves on their own farm as well. Mary



**Grassland songbird populations have struggled as a result of loss of perennial habitat such as native prairie and pastures.** (LSP Photo)

Klages said that not only spreads the benefits of good land management across public and private boundaries, but sends an important message to the public that working agriculture can benefit wildlife, water, and the general environment.

"It's always about taking care of the land," she said. "You take care of it, it takes care of you." □

## Give it a Listen

**O**n episode 228 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Mary and Jeff Klages, J.B. Bright, and Robin Moore talk about how conservation grazing on public lands can generate economic and ecological benefits throughout a community: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1213](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1213).



# Flexibility, Forethought & Financial Fundamentals

*Not Buying Fertilizer isn't the Same as Not Adding Fertility to the Soil*

By Brian DeVore

Farm flexibility can take many forms—like when a quick ride on the four-wheeler peels back a view of a pasture that changes one's plans for the season. Southeastern Minnesota farmer Adam Bedtke recalled just such a moment during a Land Stewardship Project soil health field day held in mid-July. A few years ago, he and his wife Amanda had a pasture they were rotationally grazing. It was a good source of forage for their 50-cow certified organic dairy herd, but they decided it was time to plow it up and plant it to corn. One morning after finishing chores, Adam hooked up the plow, and, before breaking the sod, rode his four-wheeler out to open up the pasture wires.

"I looked down and I just had an 'aha' moment," Bedtke recalled. "It was so thick with grass that I almost had a moral dilemma plowing it."

He was especially concerned about breaking up the perennial cover given that part of the pasture slopes down dramatically, making it particularly prone to erosion—putting in an annual row crop would expose the soil to the kinds of rain events that can do significant damage in this portion of Wabasha County. The farmer ended up not plowing the pasture that year, instead deriving economic benefit from it via grazing.

"There's zero out-of-pocket dollars reinvested in this, and it just keeps growing," Bedtke said to the gathered farmers as they walked that pasture. "And there's zero erosion."

Bedtke wasn't just relying on casual observation to make that last assessment. Before heading out on the pasture walk, LSP staff members put on a slaking demonstration to compare how various land management practices affect soil's "aggregate stability"—its ability to stay intact when exposed to water. For the demonstration,

four glass tubes full of water were set up in the Bedtkes' cavernous machine shed. In each tube, a wire basket held a clump of soil. Each clump had been collected from one of four fields: conventional corn; organic corn the Bedtkes raise in rotation with perennials; a field that is managed by the farmers in a multi-year rotation that consists of annual

### The Economics of \$oil Health



**"As that slake test shows, it just holds the soil in place," said Adam Bedtke of his family's use of permanent pasture, cover crops, and diverse rotations to build soil health on their southeastern Minnesota dairy farm. (LSP Photo)**

crops and multi-species cover crops, which are all grazed; and the permanent pasture that is rotationally grazed and which Adam's last-minute four-wheeler tour deterred plowing of a few years ago.

As Adam explained their rotation system, the clump from the conventional cornfield disintegrated immediately, sending loose sediment plummeting to the bottom of its glass tube, a sign that the soil lacks the natural glues organic matter and a healthy root system can provide for good aggregate structure. The soil samples representing organic corn and a crop rotation integrated with grazing were holding together much

better. The clump dug up from the permanent pasture that's being rotationally grazed was rock solid—it was difficult to see *any* sediment floating in its water column. It turns out this soil had the macropore space needed to soak up the water and hold it without flying apart. Two hours later, after the field day, the pasture soil's glass tube was still crystal clear.

"As that slake test shows, it just holds the soil in place," said Adam, adding that such resiliency is important when dealing with the vagaries of weather, feed demands, and workload. "You have to be flexible, because every growing year is different, every harvest season is different. The more you can keep stuff growing out there, the better the plants are going to do, and ultimately, the soil."

Such flexibility can make it possible to respond to curve balls that are flung in the midst of a growing season as well. For example, the Bedtkes showed the tour participants a field that was planted to corn the past two years. Last fall, after it was harvested for corn silage, it got manured and was

seeded to winter rye using a no-till drill. This spring, they seeded a hay mix of alfalfa and clover into the rye, but Adam felt the

**Flexibility, see page 25...**

### Join the Soil Builders' Network

The Land Stewardship Project invites crop and livestock farmers to join the Soil Builders' Network to get regular updates on workshops, field days, and on-farm demonstrations, as well as soil health and cover crop research. For more information, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders) or call 507-523-3366.

### Soil Health Consultancy Service

LSP has recruited and retained a group of skilled southeastern Minnesota farmers devoted to soil health, and who are willing to share their experience. If you'd like to connect with one of these consultants, check out LSP's Soil Health Consultants web page at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders/soilhealthconsultants](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders/soilhealthconsultants) or call 507-523-3366.



cover was not as thick as he'd like, providing opportunities for weeds to take over the bare spots. So he re-filled the grain drill with a "succotash mix" of oats, barley, and wheat and did another seeding.

The last-minute pivot paid off. On this day in July, the rye was waist high, and a mix of the other species could be seen thriving closer to the ground. The rye was too mature to graze, but the Bedtkes feel they will get good forage from the other seedings. Plus, the rye will provide long-term benefits.

"This is an example of zero tillage costs—it's better than a fall chisel-plowed field," Adam said as he waded through the rye. "What rye they don't graze, that feeds the soil, keeps the mycorrhizal fungi going. If you're not buying fertilizer, you still have to give the soils the tools to help them fertilize themselves. And I don't have to cut a check out-of-pocket for that fertility."

The Bedtkes are committed to grazing every acre of their farm, and Amanda said

## LSP Grazing Helpline

The Land Stewardship Project has launched a toll-free helpline for farmers seeking support related to grazing livestock. Check it out at **1-888-664-7293 (1-888-MNGRAZE)**.

Have questions about how to improve your grazing practices? Give LSP's helpline a call. Leave your name, number, where you're from, and a brief description of your reason for calling—we'll be in touch. If we don't have an answer, we should be able to point you in the right direction.

You can also submit questions in writing at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/grazinghelpline](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/grazinghelpline).

such a system built on flexible use of land means they can cut costs related to animal housing and feed handling, for example. It also provides quality-of-life benefits for the couple and their four young children.

"Right now, feeding our cows is a what, five-minute project? It involves changing wires and dumping some corn in front of the

cows. We're not married to our total mix ration mixer every day, twice-a-day," Amanda said. "That saves time, so Adam's in the house more and we're with our kids more."

And a flexible approach to the land, animals, soil, and management can pay dividends for the wider community as well. One of the Bedtkes' pastures has a waterway that, when that field was planted to corn, was enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), an initiative that "retires" land to prevent erosion and reduce runoff. Now that the entire pasture, not just the waterway, has a thick ground cover in the form of rotationally grazed pasture, it doesn't need to be in a land retirement program any more.

"One of the things I like about grazing so well is you have something that you can let grow every year, you don't have a pile of expense in it, the government doesn't have to subsidize it, it's cleaning water, the dirt's not washing away, and you have a crop you're harvesting and getting revenue out of," said Adam. "It's just so simple that it blows my mind that it isn't everywhere." □



The mature winter rye that serves as a nurse crop for a succotash mix of grazing forages will mostly be left uneaten by the Bedtke cows, but it won't go to waste. "What rye they don't graze, that feeds the soil," said Adam. (LSP Photo)

### Video: The Slake Test Doesn't Lie

A new Soil Builders' Network video features dairy graziers Adam and Amanda Bedtke discussing how their ability to remain flexible and their focus on soil health have generated economic and quality-of-life benefits: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders/soilbuildervideos](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders/soilbuildervideos).

## Fact Sheet: Financial Advantages of Grazing

The Land Stewardship Project has developed a new financial analysis of utilizing rotational grazing to manage a cow-calf herd. The fact sheet compares the economic returns of rotational grazing to continuous grazing, as well as corn and soybean production. The advantages to increasing stocking densities through adjustments to grazing rotations and the use of cover crops in a grazing system are also analyzed. A free copy of "Financial Analysis of Cow-Calf Grazing: Why Shifting to Managed Rotational Grazing Can Make Sense for Your Profits & Improve Soil Health" is available at <https://bit.ly/2khvypo>, or by contacting LSP's George Boody at 612-722-6377, [gboody@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:gboody@landstewardshipproject.org). □



# Robbing the Farm or Enriching the Farm?

*A Farmer Digs Up Some Soil Health Wisdom From a Century Ago*

*“...once plants and animals were raised together on the same farms — which therefore neither produced unmanageable surpluses of manure, to be wasted and to pollute the water supply, nor depended on such quantities of commercial fertilizer. The genius of American farm experts is very well demonstrated here: they can take a solution and divide it neatly into two problems.”*

— **Wendell Berry,**  
*The Unsettling of America:  
Culture & Agriculture*

By Liana Nichols

Ross Cooper and his family raise canning and grain crops on their Century Farm near Spring Valley in southeastern Minnesota. Shortly after his son was born, Ross converted to no-till to cut down on the amount of time he was spending in the tractor. Recently, he has integrated cover crops into the farm. In addition to cropping, they graze cattle on perennial pastures and cover crops.

During my recent visit to Cooper's farm, he mentioned that he had found a pamphlet from the early 1900s in a drawer at his great uncle's house. *The Farmer's Red Book*, published by the Albert Dickinson Company, presents average annual prices and yields for wheat, oats, corn, hay, barley, and flax from 1898 to 1907.

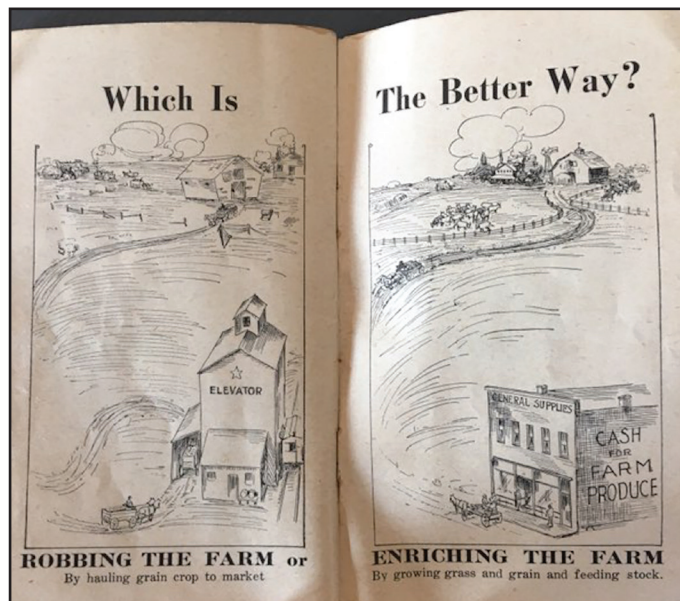
While that in itself offers up a fascinating peek into agriculture's past, what really caught Cooper's attention was a sketch, reproduced on this page, which asks, “Which Is The Better Way? ROBBING THE FARM By hauling grain crop to market or ENRICHING THE FARM By growing grass and grain and feeding stock.”

Although this booklet was printed in the early 1900s, Cooper finds this question just as relevant today as it was over 100 years ago. He links it back to the way his great aunt and uncle farmed—they kept 24 milk cows, 10 pasture-farrowed sows, 100 ewes to lamb and finish, plus chickens and a very large garden. They grew a rotation of corn, alfalfa, red clover, and wheat, which they

fed to their hogs and chickens. Everything they raised they fed to their own livestock, selling only milk and meat off the farm.

Closing the nutrient loop was so important to Cooper's great aunt and uncle that they even had the whole farm fenced with netting so they could turn their sheep out into the corn once it was mature enough. The sheep would eat the weeds and leaves off the corn, but leave most of the ears of corn since they were out of reach.

“When they harvested the corn, they found the lambs,” Cooper says, adding that he would like to try this, but he's not quite ready to take on another species of livestock.



**A Farmer's Red Book pamphlet from over a century ago asks a question that is as relevant today as it was then.**

The way Cooper sees it, “If you can take your own crop and put it through your own livestock, you're not just selling commodities, but adding value back to your land.”

That added value, in the form of healthier soils, is a driving force behind Cooper's efforts to reintegrate livestock into his farming system, including on crop ground. Crops and livestock complement each other, not just ecologically, but also financially, and Cooper is looking for ways to earn multiple income streams from each acre of land. Once canning crops are harvested, he seeds multi-species cover crops for the cattle to

graze. This adds carbon back to the soil and improves soil tilth.

The farmer converted to no-till 20 years ago, and it worked. But a dozen or so years ago, he saw a plateauing of benefits from no-till and began dabbling with cover-cropping. Recently, Cooper has been planting soybeans into standing rye that is sometimes three-, four-, or five-feet-tall, which, he says, “Works phenomenally.” This year he made baleage with the rye, planted soybeans right away, and then sprayed the rye re-sprouts. It's the best field of soybeans he's got.

With commodity prices so low, the farmer has seeded 20 acres of tillable land to alfalfa and grass. He plans to hay that land until the alfalfa thins out, and then will interseed clovers, fence it off, and bring the cattle on to graze. If that works, he may expand this to another 18 acres of his great uncle's land, maybe even teaching the calves to “creep graze” (allowing calves access to additional pasture through a gap in the fence large enough for them to pass through, but too small for cows) during mid-summer to

provide them forage when the cows' milk production drops.

Referring back to the question of enriching the farm or robbing the farm, he says, “It's one of those things that just is timeless. They say history repeats itself, so there you go.”

Cooper notes other examples of history repeating itself on the landscape around him. While hemp may be on the brink of a larger resurgence across the nation, remnants of hemp from the WW II era pop up in pastures and windbreaks. And reassuringly, photos of the farm from the early 1970s show that much of the land Cooper is putting back into grass was pasture 40-some years ago.

He is hoping that re-diversifying the operation will allow

him to pass the farm down to his son, just as his great uncle and dad were able to do for him. Ross tells his son, who is “usually knee-deep in cattle,” that although he's spent the past 30 years tearing fence out, they'll be putting it back in for the next 30. Looking forward, the Coopers hope to get cattle back on land that “hasn't seen a cow pie in 100 years.” □

*Liana Nichols is a Land Stewardship Project Bridge to Soil Health organizer. She can be reached at 507-523-3366 or at [lnichols@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lnichols@landstewardshipproject.org).*



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Land Stewardship Project member and poet Suzanne Swanson is a founding member of the Laurel Poetry Collective. For more on Swanson, see the volunteer profile on page 30.

## What The Storm Lake Times is Not

Big

Polite

Owned by familiar names, overt or covert

Solvent enough to put its name on a stadium

Not literally family

Pretending clean water is optional

Sorry to be Iowan

Steve King's version of Iowan

Lily-livered

Going to stop publishing birthdays and  
bridal showers

— Suzanne Swanson

**Note:** Art Cullen, of *The Storm Lake Times*, won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing for his series of commentaries on the role large agricultural interests play in polluting Iowa's water. Cullen's 2018 book, *Storm Lake: A Chronicle of Change, Resilience, and Hope from a Heartland Newspaper*, was reviewed in the No. 1, 2019, edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

## Get Current With

**LIVE  WIRE**

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* e-letter to get monthly updates from the Land Stewardship Project sent straight to your inbox. Details are at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup). □

## Everybody

I like how they call them lagoons, the pits of manure, a doublespeak that may spoil forever — for those of us lucky enough to leave the middle of the country for its watery edges, who want to dip our Midwest bodies in salt, float a little toward rebirth — spoil that blue word. No, don't like. Yes, I am using my upper Midwest eye roll phrases. The smell of money, the saying goes. And, yes, my dad used to say that, and my uncles, when I wrinkled my nose on their teeny-tiny places, producers of waste that would have been a drop in the 9 million gallon bucket proposed in Fillmore County. I've left the farms now, left the little towns that churched and schooled them. I might not ever in my life have to try to hold my breath long enough to not take in this new stink, shut my old eyes against its sting. And I can buy my sausage from hog farmers who pasture their animals, let their sows farrow in straw, barns open to sun, to air. But even if I never ate another pork chop, pristine or not, that shit matters. These lagoons grow. They grow. Twice a year, almost overflowing, they must be pumped over cropland, over crops that grow on karst, dissolving limestone threaded by sinkholes, fissures — paths to groundwater. I may not be the kindest person in my state, land of 10,000 lakes, but I fold my hands and pray for clean water. For myself. For everybody. Everybody in Fillmore County drinks water.

— Suzanne Swanson

## Landscape I

beyond the chicken coop, the fields unfurl, threaded  
by tractor trails, crossed by fences of barbed wire, crossable

with the help of extra hands. a cousin pulls apart strands two  
and three — or lifts up high the bottom wire — and you narrow

your body, pull your skirt and jacket close, thrust yourself through  
in whichever way works this time: headfirst, goosetep, slither. now,

the pasture. the black-and-white conversation of the herd comes closer.  
your words are simple, few. expect, always, damage: scratch,

puncture, ripped stocking or sleeve, smears of dirt, manure. none  
of that worries you. this flat land is yours.

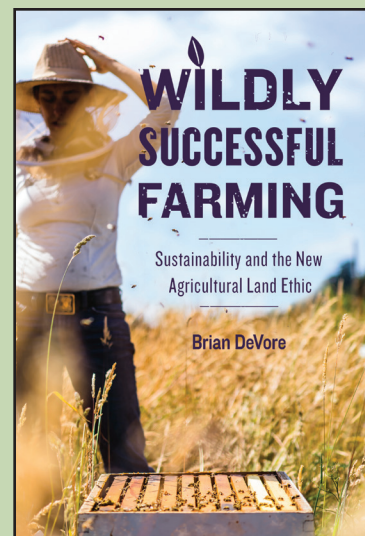
— Suzanne Swanson

## Wildly Successful Farming Book Available

**W**ildly Successful Farming: Sustainability and the New Agricultural Land Ethic, written by Land Stewardship Letter editor Brian DeVore, tells the stories of farmers across the Midwest who are balancing viable food production with environmental sustainability and a "passion for all things wild."

They are using innovative techniques and strategies to develop their "wildly successful" farms as working ecosystems. Several Land Stewardship Project farmer-members are featured in *Wildly Successful Farming*.

To order a copy of *Wildly Successful Farming*, see [www.uwpress.wisc.edu](http://www.uwpress.wisc.edu) or call 1-800-621-2736. Copies can also be ordered through local independent book stores.





## The Uninhabitable Earth Life After Warming

By David Wallace-Wells  
2019; 288 pages  
Crown Publishing Group  
www.crownpublishing.com

*Reviewed by Ben Helvick Anderson*

It can be easy to blame “climate deniers” as the central obstruction to action on the crisis unfolding around us. Even with the momentous shifts of weather consistently leading to growing seasons so soggy that farmers can’t even get their crops in, many still refuse to connect the dots.

David Wallace-Wells’s book, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*, heads in another direction with his central thesis: few of us who believe in climate change are terrified enough of how horrible our future will be and do not adequately understand how little our action thus far has done to avert such a crisis. Wallace-Wells, who is a deputy editor at *New York* magazine, takes on the task of translating the dry scientific research most of us hastily dismiss or cannot understand into an elegantly painted picture of our immediate future. What this picture looks like is encapsulated in the first lines of the book: “It is worse, much worse, than you think.”

Reading *The Uninhabitable Earth* is like staring at a beautiful painting of an execution. You are both compelled by the artistry to look, yet repulsed by what you see. The gorgeous and compelling flow of Wallace-Wells’s prose draws you into a relentless march of terror as he explains the best and worst-case scenarios of heat death, natural disasters, wildfire, dying oceans, unbreathable air, political conflict, and economic collapse that will occur in the next 100 years. Even in the best-case situations, whole regions of our world will be uninhabitable because of heat, producing a projected 200 million climate refugees by 2050. When we move from a 1.5 degrees Celsius increase to a 2 degrees increase in global temperature, 150 million more people will die from air pollution, the equivalent of 25 Holocausts. The unprecedented extreme weather events occurring now are not a “new normal,” but the beginning of a spiraling out-of-control system that will pummel us with an increasing amount of fire, water, and wind, devastating economies, agriculture, and ways of life in many areas of the world.

These are just a few of the grim forecasts scientists make about our future and *The Uninhabitable Earth* has page-after-page of them. Reading it all is a difficult journey, but Wallace-Wells’s gripping style and lively energy prevent the weary reader from giving up. He also balances the gruesomely detailed portrait of our future with one fact: more than half of the carbon emitted into the atmosphere by humans in all of history has been released in the past 30 years. We, present-day humans, have moved our planet from stable to unstable, and therefore, every change we make right now reduces the impact of the catastrophe before us. We are now on a path towards over 4 degrees Celsius of warming by 2100 (utter calamity) and our best-case scenario for changing course at this point will still result in 2 degrees warming (unthinkable devastation, but more of us survive). Scientists tell us we only have another 30 years to decide where we land between those two paths.

The second half of Wallace-Wells’s book moves into the philosophical, exploring how current storytelling, technology, and capitalism all fall short of contending with the speed, scale, and scope of the problem. No level of ethical consumption or new technology on the horizon will magically prevent ruin. The only answer is massive and abrupt political action on a global scale.

The author does not tell us how we get to such political action. He does not pretend to be a policy analyst or movement organizer. He is a journalist who is pulling together a full picture of all the facts we already know and cutting away any excuses we have for not looking at the brutal truth.

It is for us to decide what to do. Wallace-Wells is one of many prophets of our age who have tried to shock us into action on climate change. What is new is that we may be starting to listen. Just in the past year, polls point to a massive swing in public opinion about the causes of climate change. Depending on what survey you believe, 50 percent to 71 percent of Americans believe in human-generated climate change.

The swing in public opinion has created a political moment for meaningful action. Despite paralysis on a global and federal level, the state of New York passed historic decarbonization goals, and Oregon came close to joining California in a “cap-and-trade” program for carbon. Enormous legislative proposals like the Green New Deal have emerged, and it will not be long before we

start passing them.

As someone who has worked for an organization dedicated to promoting regenerative agriculture and a more sustainable food system, it’s sobering to accept the fact that in Oregon, farm groups, along with the logging industry, are credited with defeating that state’s cap-and-trade bill. Despite the mounting scientific evidence that agriculture can play a major role in sequestering carbon, it is yet to be taken seriously as a political solution. Unfortunately, many in the environmental community see agriculture as an enemy of meaningful action on climate.

Wallace-Wells’s book serves as a tool in the organizing process towards change. His message is that we must dramatize a crisis to create a political moment and galvanize action. He has written a comprehensive drama of the nightmare crisis of our future.

It is up to us as Land Stewardship Project members to insert ourselves into the political space that this drama creates. Our climate and our politics are changing,

and our farm policy could change with it.

We could double down on more consolidated technologically-enhanced production, genetically modifying new “climate-adapted” crops as our planet becomes more food insecure and struggles mightily to keep up with a treadmill that is accelerating. Or, we could start to support farmers and farming systems that rely on regenerating the land’s own ability to sequester carbon and build long-term resiliency. The first strategy will surely come with unintended (and intended) consequences, the second is based on solutions that are rooted in a sustainable relationship between people and the land.

Which road we travel is important, given that the extent of action we take during this political moment will determine the direction of agriculture and our planet for the next 100 years. The question Wallace-Wells raises is, are we afraid enough of the horrific consequences of what will happen if we do not act? Another good question is, can we use that fear to fuel long-term solutions? □

*Ben Helvick Anderson recently served as the associate director of the Land Stewardship Project’s Policy and Organizing Program. In that position he worked on, among other issues, federal farm policy.*

## The Uninhabitable Earth *Life After Warming* David Wallace-Wells





# The Relentless Business of Treaties

## How Indigenous Land Became U.S. Property

By Martin Case  
2018; 224 pages  
Minnesota Historical Society Press  
[www.mnhs.org/mnhspress](http://www.mnhs.org/mnhspress)

Reviewed by Ken Meter

If there were one single book that everyone who dwells on, or visits, the North American continent should read, this is the one. To tread consciously, you need to know just how this land was stolen from indigenous tribes. Marty Case's book, *The Relentless Business of Treaties: How Indigenous Land Became U.S. Property*, will tell you.

Case's book is concise, easy to digest, and written with extraordinary good will, given the topic. He is quick to point out this is not actually a book about the 375 treaties that were written between 1778 and 1871. His true subject is the U.S. property system. "The treaties were in effect moments when the natural world became private property in the United States," Case writes.

Interlaced families — now celebrated in Midwestern town, county, street, and lake names — conspired over generations to sever the tribes' connections to the natural world. White society embraced the rank immorality of exploitative businesses, even while espousing freedom and democracy. One sees in this book the origins of the conspiracies we face today. Such theft, apparently, is more the American legacy than the freedom, compassion, and ingenuity the U.S. embodies at its best. It is the core dynamic hidden by the persistent myth of the independent pioneer family.

It took an independent researcher — Case studied these treaties for a dozen years — who is married to a Native American artist to comb through each of the treaties that were signed, and learn that in most cases the signers conscripted their sons, nephews, cousins, business partners, and debtors to sign as "independent" signatories. By the way, having signed these documents, these same whites managed to take ownership of the very land that had been ceded, so they could sell it to others at speculative prices. Often these families overlapped in running

the clusters of enterprises — trading posts, transportation, banking, real estate, surveying — that made the business of the frontier empire run. And this was from the get-go. Case notes that 26 treaties were signed in the early years of the Republic, from 1815 to 1820. Over 400 signatures appeared on those treaties, but half of those signatures were penned by only 15 men.

In some cases, land that had been allocated to Native tribes "forever" was quickly sold (illegally) to occupying settlers, who would then constitute a population base large enough to justify yet another treaty to cede this "protected" land.

Yet the most shocking insight provided to me by this book was how the white power structure subtly shifted its conception of tribal nationhood. Native American tribes were viewed as "sovereign nations" by whites while treaties were signed because, under U.S. law at the time, only a sovereign nation could cede land to the United States through treaty. Having grabbed the land, however, whites shifted to denigrating the independence of these nations. In a remarkable 1831 Supreme Court ruling, Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that Native peoples had a natural right to *occupy* the land on this

• • •  
**Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that Native peoples had a natural right to occupy the land on this continent because they had lived here before Europeans arrived, but only whites could hold dominion (rule) over the land because only whites had discovered it.**  
• • •

continent because they had lived here before Europeans arrived, but only whites could hold dominion (rule) over the land because only whites had discovered it.

It was fundamentally important to the U.S. incursion to demarcate property lines, because once land had been surveyed and platted into parcels, it could be owned. Thus, it was no longer held in common by a sovereign people. What once was nature was now considered property. Tribes that had once shared use of the natural world they depended upon now were forced to place property as a priority over kinship, just to enforce the few protections they had. European settlers who had lived with considerable trust near tribal villages, often intermarrying, were pressured to take sides as well.

Case also details how dependent European settlers became on the tribes they

scorned. The fur trade depended upon Native labor and the collective functioning of tribes to deliver pelts to trading posts. Settlers who farmed, of course, also depended on Native expertise at planting crops and managing forests. And the new nation, racked with financial obligations incurred by waging the Revolutionary War, only became debt-free in 1837 — by selling lands confiscated under the Indian Removal Act.

Once the furs were exhausted, traders turned financial credit into a weapon, inflicting deepening cycles of debt squarely on the shoulders of Native peoples. Traders could profit off the interest payments, but debts could never really be squared away, since there was always some new expense. Some tribes ultimately opted to cede land they had been guaranteed in order to remove their debts.

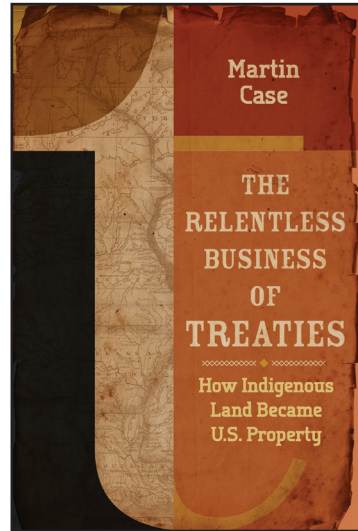
Case continues to show how the land theft was legitimized and reinforced by an interlacing network of social institutions: land speculation, trading, industry, legal boundaries, bureaucracies, and myth making. In each case, you will see patterns that still flourish today. The

U.S., Case notes, "was the first nation to be founded on the idea (only recently developed at the time) that private property could be equated with personal liberty."

In our era, as the cause of restorative justice is emerging, Case's book is a potent reminder of how many parties are aggrieved, and how complex the wounds are. I was heartened to learn, in the last issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, that the Land Stewardship Project has now placed a higher priority on returning land to tribes in our region. I am in awe of the courage the Minnesota Historical Society Press took in publishing this important work. Yet there is so much more to be done.

Please, as you contemplate your next step on U.S. soil, read this book. As you do, you will learn how well crafted a book can be, and the healing value of naming names. □

*Land Stewardship Project member Ken Meter is one of the most experienced food system analysts in the U.S., working with community partners in 141 regions and 40 states, two Canadian provinces, and four Native American tribes. Details on his work are at [www.crcworks.org/crossroads](http://www.crcworks.org/crossroads).*





## Volunteer Profile

### Helping LSP Build a Foundation for Change

By Clara Sanders Marcus

When the doorbell rings at the Land Stewardship Project's Minneapolis office on Wednesday at 9:30 a.m., we all know who it is. Suzanne Swanson has been volunteering every week for the past three years, and today, just like every Wednesday, she comes upstairs, gets her coffee—with a dollop of half-and-half—and asks what we need today.

Suzanne is on first name terms with LSP's database, a pro at assembling large mailings, great at calling LSP members on the telephone, and never above a half-hour of good solid paper shredding. While the strangest volunteer task she has ever done is slicing onions for the cookout, it's not her favorite task.

"I like signing renewal reminders," says Suzanne, who is a sustaining member of LSP. "It makes me feel connected to all the other LSP members who are working for a better food and farming system."

Suzanne has family roots on farms in northwestern Minnesota, but she grew up in Pipestone in the southwestern part of the state. Although she lived in town, she stayed connected with farm country throughout her childhood. And with a father who worked as a soil conservationist, the land and its well-being have always been part of her life.

After coming to the Twin Cities to attend the University of Minnesota, she stayed and

got her doctorate in counseling and psychology. When she started having her own children, Suzanne knew she wanted to work with mothers.

"In my high-powered academic work experience," says Suzanne, "when I decided to have a baby, many people just reacted with 'why?'" Her own experience with the vast changes that new mothers experience pushed Suzanne toward private practice work around issues of postpartum depression,

pregnancy/child loss, and trauma.

Suzanne founded Pregnancy and Postpartum Support Minnesota and is passionate about encouraging new mothers and those who support mothers to connect with the resources they need.

Suzanne has three children and two grandchildren, so sometimes she misses a week or two of volunteering when she visits family. She is also a poet and is a founding member of the Laurel Poetry Collective—you can read a few of her

poems on page 27 of this *Land Stewardship Letter*.

How did Suzanne get started volunteering at LSP? Her partner had been an LSP member for a while and Suzanne would frequently look through the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

"After the 2016 presidential election, I had just retired the previous year, and I felt like I had to start getting involved with work that was meaningful to me," she says.

"I am so glad to support a grassroots organization that uses local control and organizing to build vibrant rural communities,"



Suzanne Swanson

## Volunteer for LSP

Volunteers are key to the Land Stewardship Project's work. If you would like to volunteer in one of our offices, for an event, or at a meeting, contact:

### • Montevideo, Minnesota

Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105  
tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org

### • Lewiston, Minnesota

Karen Benson, 507-523-3366  
karenb@landstewardshipproject.org

### • Minneapolis, Minnesota

Clara Sanders Marcus,  
612-722-6377  
cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org

Suzanne adds. "Healthy soil, clean water, and good food matter for me because they matter for everyone."

For Suzanne, three of the most important issues to her when it comes to LSP's work are climate change, racial justice, and healthcare.

"I am so glad that LSP stands up for quality healthcare and realizes that healthy farmers are key to healthy farms and therefore healthy communities," she says. It's a connection to the broader efforts of the Land Stewardship Project to bridge the perceived split between rural and urban. "We are all eating that food," Suzanne adds.

She is also grateful for the way that LSP integrates the arts, like the quotes and original artwork on the thank-you cards. While working in the open office space, it's inspiring to learn about different projects going on and to feel connected to other LSP members, she says.

"One of the most important things about the Land Stewardship Project," says Suzanne, "is that LSP starts with values, building a strong foundation for effective change."

Any last words of wisdom for prospective volunteers who are waiting to take the plunge?

"Give it a try! There is always something you can do. You can have good conversations while stuffing envelopes, and it's a very welcoming and friendly atmosphere."

Thank you, Suzanne, and thanks to all our LSP volunteers for the often-unseen work you do to make the change we seek in our communities.

If you would like to volunteer, see the sidebar at the top of this page. □

Clara Sanders Marcus is an LSP membership associate.

## In Memory & in Honor...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gifts made to honor and remember loved ones and friends:

### In Memory of Norman Torbenson

◆ The Torbenson Family

### In Memory of Buddy Weller

◆ Martin & Loretta Jaus

### In Honor of Ardath Luikens

◆ Karen & Waldon Blasing, Zinpro Corporation & Arlys Redden

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



## Support LSP in Your Workplace

The Land Stewardship Project is a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, which is a coalition of environmental organizations in Minnesota that offers 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 to give through the Minnesota Environmental Fund, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For details, contact LSP's Amelia Shoptaugh at [amelias@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:amelias@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-722-6377.



## Building LSP's Base Through Member-to-Member Recruitment

By Maddie Hyde

The Land Stewardship Project recently focused on growing an initiative called the "Member-to-Member Drive." This latest member-driven recruitment effort took place from April through June, with 18 LSP members doing in-person and digital outreach.

The group of members doing in-person outreach began with a kick-off initiative where they received training on why LSP is a membership organization, how to use storytelling to convey why LSP is important to them, and how to make an effective membership ask.

This group of members then reached out to their community to share their stories, held visits with people in their network and asked them to join in this work by becoming a member of LSP.

### Going Digital

Members have participated in member-driven recruitment drives in the past, but this year for the first time in-person asks were combined with utilizing the digital space. During the digital member drive, members came together in the last two weeks of our fiscal year to begin a "digital blast" across social media and e-mail to tell their community why they care about and are involved in LSP's work.

By concertedly putting up social media content and e-mailing about being a member of LSP and what it means to them, members

boosted LSP's work, showed the strength of our member base, shared their stories, and invited people from their community to join as members.

It worked: during the in-person and digital drives combined, members recruited 40 new Land Stewardship Project members.



**A strong membership base allows the Land Stewardship Project to respond quickly and effectively to issues like preventing factory farms from harming rural communities. (LSP Photo)**

### Members Are LSP's Power

Growing LSP's membership is foundational — the source of our creativity and power is our membership base of over 4,400 farmers, as well as rural and urban people, who are committed to family farms, stewardship, justice, and democracy.

Members are integral to every piece of LSP's work — from serving on steering committees that guide our programs, to organizing their communities around stewardship farming issues, to leading field days and soil health workshops.

LSP members provide creativity, ideas,

and networks. Members also contribute financial support that provides a reliable and unrestricted funding source. This funding allows LSP to be flexible and responsive. Too often, nonprofit organizations are dependent on the ebb and flow of grant funding sources. Membership makes LSP stronger, more resilient, and better able to take action when and where it's needed.

### Growing Membership

The power of our current membership is strong, but growing our base of members even more is essential to creating the transformational change we are seeking in our food and farming system.

People get asked to join LSP in a lot of different ways. But often the most powerful way is when they are asked by someone they personally know. This is why members themselves are best suited to grow LSP's base. The Member-to-Member drive is just one of LSP's member-led recruitment initiatives. This drive showed the beginning of what's possible when LSP members come together, clear in their values and organized to invite more people into this work.

Are you a Land Stewardship Project member interested in being involved in growing our membership base, or would like to be a part of a Member-to-Member drive in your area? Contact me at 612-400-6358 or [mhyde@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mhyde@landstewardshipproject.org). □

*Maddie Hyde is LSP's membership and base building organizer.*



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## STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **OCT. 17-19—Women in Sustainable Agriculture Conference**, St. Paul, Minn. Contact: MOSES, [www.mosesorganic.org/events/wisa-conference](http://www.mosesorganic.org/events/wisa-conference), 715-778-5775

→ **OCT. 22—Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Pasture Walk**, Haugen farm, Canton, Minn. Contact: Bonnie Haugen, 507-421-7170, [bonnie@dga-national.org](mailto:bonnie@dga-national.org)

→ **OCT. 22-24—National Farm Viability Conference**, Red Wing, Minn. Contact: [www.farmviabilityconference.com](http://www.farmviabilityconference.com), [info@farmviabilityconference.com](mailto:info@farmviabilityconference.com)

→ **OCT. 26—2019-2020 LSP Farm Beginnings classes begin**, Menomonie, Wis. (see page 18)

→ **OCT. 26—LSP's George Boody presents on "Farming for Soil Health, Clean Water & Climate Resilience,"** 7 p.m.-8:30 p.m., Farm Table Foundation, Amery, Wis. Contact: [www.farmtablefoundation.org](http://www.farmtablefoundation.org), 715-268-4500

→ **OCT. 26—LSP Grazing Group Pasture Walk**, Hunter farm, Wabasha, Minn.

Contact: Liana Nichols, LSP, [lnichols@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lnichols@landstewardshipproject.org), 507-523-3366

→ **NOV. 19-20—Green Lands Blue Waters Continuous Living Cover Conference**, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: [www.greenlandsbluewaters.org](http://www.greenlandsbluewaters.org), 612-625-3709

→ **JAN. 9—Minnesota Organic Conference**, Saint Cloud, Minn. Contact: Cassie Dahl, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 651-201-6134, [cassie.dahl@state.mn.us](mailto:cassie.dahl@state.mn.us)

→ **JAN. 16-17—Northern Growers & Marketers Conference**, Saint Cloud, Minn. Contact: [www.mfvga.org](http://www.mfvga.org), 612-283-4002

→ **JAN. 16-18—Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference**, Ames, Iowa. Contact: PFI, [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org), 515-232-5661

→ **FEB. 1—LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Red Wing, Minn. (see page 21)

→ **FEB. 8—Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Annual Conference**, Saint Joseph, Minn. Contact: SFA, [www.sfa-mn.org](http://www.sfa-mn.org), 844-922-5573

→ **FEB. 11—2020 Minnesota Legislature Convenes**, Saint Paul, Minn. (see page 10)

→ **FEB. 22—LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Red Wing, Minn. (see page 21)

→ **FEB. 27-29—MOSES Organic Farming Conference**, La Crosse, Wis. Contact: [www.mosesorganic.org/conference](http://www.mosesorganic.org/conference), 715-778-5775

→ **MARCH—15<sup>th</sup> Annual LSP Family Farm Breakfast & Day at the Capitol** (details to be announced), Saint Paul, Minn. Contact: Amanda Koehler, LSP, [akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org), 612-722-6377

→ **MARCH 14—LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Red Wing, Minn. (see page 21)

## Membership Questions?

If you have questions about the status of your Land Stewardship Project membership, give us a call at 612-722-6377, or e-mail Clara Sanders Marcus at [cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org). To renew, mail in the envelope included with this *Land Stewardship Letter*, or see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate). □

## Go Public With Your LSP Support

There are now numerous fun ways you can show your support for the Land Stewardship Project. LSP has available for purchase t-shirts (\$20), caps (\$20), window decals (\$3), tote bags (\$15) and, marking the return of a classic, "Let's Stop Treating our Soil Like Dirt" bumper stickers (\$3).

All of these items can be ordered from our online store at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/store](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/store). Some items may also be available from our offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105), or Minneapolis (612-722-6377), as well as at Land Stewardship Project events and meetings.



T-shirt



Cap



Tote Bag



Bumper Sticker