

The Land Stewardship

35 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Letter

Volume 35

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Number 3, 2017



How integrating cover crops, perennial pastures and livestock can help us tackle two of the biggest environmental problems we face—and benefit farmers (page 12).

— *The Myth of Conservation Compliance* —

— *Join the Mexico Delegation in 2018* —

— *Sign-up Your CSA Farm* —

— *A Community at Risk* —

— *Prairie After the Plow* —

— *Bringing Life Back to the Land* —



Vol. 35—Number 3, 2017

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Joe Morse: 1943-2017

A Champion of the People & the Land

By Doug Nopar

The Land Stewardship Project is mourning the passing of Joe Morse on Sept. 28 at the age of 74. He was a long-time LSP leader and champion of social justice. We valued Joe greatly, fully appreciating the chance to work with him on our efforts to challenge excessive corporate power and expose corruption of the powerful.

His assistance in strategizing and organizing was crucial to LSP's efforts to pass strong restrictions on factory farms in Winona County, and, just in the past year, an outright ban on frac sand mining.

Joe's life was dedicated to making his community and country a more just place through non-violent action and organizing. This meant working to end domestic violence and calling on men to be leaders in addressing this issue, fighting for voting rights and racial justice even at a time when people were being killed for doing just that, and standing up for family farms and the land against corporate power. Joe's life example challenges us all to think bigger and do more. He was always ready and excited for the next organizing meeting and the next action to hold those in power accountable. He did this hard work with joy and enthusiasm that helped bring in many, many others.

Our movement benefitted tremendously from his spirit of courage and we miss him. Since becoming an LSP member in 1998, every time Joe walked into a meeting room or LSP committee strategy session, he brought with him decades of organizing experience. That experience tremendously benefitted LSP and our work for family farms, the land and water, and rural community life. By my count, Morse quite likely attended more than 200 LSP organizing meetings and events in the past 20 years. We don't know anyone



Joe Morse grew up on an orchard in southeastern Minnesota's Driftless Area and never forgot the importance of stewarding the land. Here he is shown speaking in favor of a frac sand mining ban in Winona County during the fall of 2016. (Photo by Kaitlyn O'Connor)

• • •
"While we all strive to lead full, productive, satisfying, meaningful lives with a broader social consequence, a few do so with unexpected richness and success as to merit interpretation for those left behind. This is the case for Joe Morse."

— LSP member John Campbell, writing in an essay called, "Joe Morse: Civil Rights Activist, Progressive Organizer and Authentic Radical"

• • •

who loved organizing more; he always had enthusiasm and energy for struggle.

Bobby King, director of LSP's Policy and Organizing Program, told the *Winona Daily News*: "Joe's life was dedicated to social justice and the non-violent struggle to make our country more just for all. It wasn't what he did when he had extra time — it was the principle around which he organized his life, and it was an inspiring challenge to me and many others."

Farm Kid Roots

Joe grew up on his family's apple orchard overlooking the Mississippi River in Dakota, Minn. He forever considered himself a farm kid at heart, and he helped manage the family orchard when he returned to Minnesota in 1983 after two decades away, during which he had done civil rights work in the South, organized against the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant in the Northeast, and co-founded the nation's first group of men opposing domestic violence.

Rural community organizing is full of unique challenges. What I most valued about Joe was that, beginning with his first civil rights work in rural Mississippi—1964 Freedom Summer—and continuing with more than 50 years of local organizing efforts across 25-plus organizations, he had seen it all. He was fearless, knew what to expect from the opposition, was highly strategic, and always organized with great integrity. On countless occasions, I sought out Joe's perspective and experience. His advice was always right on target.

And he wasn't one of those that just liked to tell you what to do and sit back and watch you do it. He'd willingly do anything that was asked of him: telephone-banking, give a membership pitch at a public meeting, line up a meeting with a county commissioner. And he would be the first to write a letter-to-the-editor when he'd spot a local injustice.

Joe Morse will be missed, but his legacy of fighting for what's right will live on in our community and on the land. ☐

Land Stewardship Project organizer Doug Nopar is based in LSP's southeastern Minnesota office in Lewiston. He can be contacted at 507-523-3377 or dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org.

Myth Buster Box

An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

→ Myth: Conservation Compliance is Saving Soil

→ Fact:

Tax dollars are channeled to farmers via various federal programs. One of the expectations that comes with such support is that the public shouldn't be subsidizing practices that are harmful to the land. That's why, since the 1985 Food Security Act was passed, farmers wishing to be eligible for programs administered by the Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) must be "conservation compliant."

Specifically, conservation compliance requires approved conservation systems be used on highly erodible land; it also bans agricultural production on converted wetlands. Just about any participation in federal agriculture programs is covered, including farm storage loans and conservation program payments. The 2014 Farm Bill added farmers who wish to receive premium subsidies through the federal crop insurance program to the list of those that must be conservation compliant.

The way conservation compliance is supposed to work is that prior to receiving USDA benefits, farmers self-certify that they are utilizing an approved conservation plan. The NRCS randomly selects a small percentage of relevant farms for follow-up in-depth reviews, including field visits.

Unfortunately, conservation compliance has long had the reputation for providing little actual control of land abuse. Those suspicions were verified in 2016 when the USDA's Office of Inspector General conducted an audit that found the program is being poorly run. Of particular concern to the audit's investigators was the way gully erosion was handled by the NRCS. How the agency handles this problem is important, given that it produces at least 40 percent of all agricultural erosion in this country. There are two types of gully erosion: ephemeral and classical. An ephemeral gully is a shallow channel cut by concentrated runoff. In general, these channels can be smoothed over with farm machinery. A classical gully is a deeper ditch that can't be crossed with farm equipment, and therefore can be more permanent in nature.

But the audit found that NRCS national guidelines only addressed ephemeral gully erosion, creating a situation where a farm could be compliant even though significant classical gully erosion existed on the land. In fact, the auditors found just that when they visited specific farms as part of the investigation.

But perhaps an even more troubling issue with conservation compliance is that the annual reviews fall far short of providing an accurate snapshot of who is in compliance. For example, in 2015, the Farm Service Agency provided the NRCS around 1.3 million records of farms that were enrolled in USDA programs and were eligible for conservation compliance reviews. A list of operations that would undergo in-depth reviews was supposed to be drawn from that data. However, the audit found numerous duplications and other errors. Once those were corrected, it turned out the number of tracts subject to review was cut in half to 600,000. Even worse, no farms from 10 states, including Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Missouri, were included in the conservation compliance review process. Historically, these states are some of the top participants in USDA programs. In Minnesota alone, over 89,000 farms that fell under conservation compliance provisions were never subject to being picked for a review. Despite opportunities to correct the situation, neither the NRCS nor the Farm Service Agency took steps to do that, the audit determined.

The auditors expressed particular concern that the 2015 compliance review was such a mess. Remember, the 2014 Farm Bill instituted the requirement that premium subsidies for crop insurance be subject to conservation compliance provisions. As a series of Land Stewardship Project white papers make clear, federally subsidized crop insurance can take the risk out of farming land too steep, wet or otherwise environmentally vulnerable to produce a profitable yield. Making sure crop insurance program participants are utilizing good conservation is key to protecting water and wildlife habitat.

An inadequate conservation compliance program is costly in ways that go beyond the environment. The USDA makes payments subject to conservation compliance requirements somewhere north of \$14 billion per year. USDA participants in the 10 states left off the

2015 list received over \$4 billion in Farm Service Agency and NRCS payments for fiscal year 2014. Surveys show farmers are willing to put in place good conservation in return for public support. But a government program that at best, sends mixed signals as to what is considered good conservation, and at worst, allows public dollars to be spent with little or no accountability, is an economic and environmental disaster.

The good news is that the Office of Inspector General audit may be having some concrete impacts on how conservation compliance is implemented. All six of the audit's recommendations for fixing the initiative were accepted by the agencies involved. The fixes ranged from making sure all states are included when determining who is reviewed, to clarifying the levels of treatments required to address all types of gully erosion.

As a direct result of the audit, in late September the NRCS in Iowa announced that farmers can't just disk over ephemeral gullies if they wish to be conservation compliant—more proactive practices like no-till and grassed waterways would be required to handle such problems. Another soil-friendly practice, cover cropping, was also mentioned as a way to deal with gullies. That's a particularly positive step, since such a method doesn't just prevent the kind of unsightly erosion that scars the landscape after harvest. As LSP's new *Soil Health, Water & Climate Change* pocket guide illustrates, it can actually build the kind of long-term soil health that benefits farms and the landscape in a way that goes beyond a plan that just looks good on paper.

More Information

- The USDA's Office of Inspector General audit, "USDA Monitoring of Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Violations," is at www.usda.gov/oig/web-docs/50601-0005-31.pdf.
- LSP's series of white papers on crop insurance, "How a Safety Net Became a Farm Policy Disaster," is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/cropinsurance.
- More information on LSP's new *Soil Health, Water & Climate Change* pocket guide is on page 12.



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LSP News

Avery, Sanders Marcus Join Staff

Eric Avery and **Clara Sanders Marcus** have joined the staff of the Land Stewardship Project.

Avery has a bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas and a master's from Towson University. He has extensive experience working in various communities using creativity as a way to highlight issues of social justice and making "invisible systems visible."



Eric Avery

Through an AmeriCorps position, Avery worked as a theatre outreach coordinator. He also worked as artistic director for the Social Action Project in Baltimore, Md., and as an education associate for Public Art Saint Paul.

At LSP, Avery is an organizer within the Community Based Food Systems Program. Specifically, he is working on addressing societal inequities through urban agriculture in LSP's partnership with Hope Community in South Minneapolis (see page 18). He can be contacted at eavery@landstewardship-project.org.



Clara Sanders Marcus

Sanders Marcus has a bachelor's degree in intercultural studies and piano performance from Houghton College and a master's of divinity from Duke Divinity School, as well as a master's in social work

from the University of North Carolina. She has worked as a faith and food project coordinator, a music director and as an intern at a community farm, among things. Sanders Marcus has also been a frequent LSP volunteer.

At LSP, Sanders Marcus is based in the organization's Minneapolis office and assists the Individual Giving and Membership Program with managing LSP's database of members and supporters. She also serves as the assistant administrator of LSP's website. Sanders Marcus can be contacted at cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377. □

New LSP Board Members

Dr. Aleta Borrud, **Andrew Ehrmann** and **Laura Frerichs** have joined the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors.

Borrud is a retired physician from Rochester, Minn., and serves on LSP's Healthcare Organizing Committee, which is working to create a system under which affordable, quality healthcare is available to everyone (see page 11). At LSP meetings and other events, Borrud frequently testifies about the need for good healthcare in rural areas.

Ehrmann and his wife Betsy Allister operate Spring Wind Farm, a produce operation outside Northfield, Minn. Ehrmann recently participated in an LSP-Witness



Dr. Aleta Borrud



Andrew Ehrmann



Laura Frerichs

for Peace exchange trip to Mexico (see page 6), and in August Spring Wind hosted U. S. Rep. Keith Ellison for an LSP federal farm policy meeting (see page 11).

Frerichs and her husband Adam Cullip operate Loon Organics, a produce farm near Hutchinson, Minn. Loon Organics regularly hosts field days for LSP's Farm Beginnings course, and Frerichs recently participated in an LSP citizen meeting with U. S. Representative Collin Peterson. □

LSP in the News

The work of the Land Stewardship Project and our members has received media coverage in recent months. Here's a sampling:

- "First-of-its-kind law aims to help young farmers find their footing in Minnesota," *Star Tribune*, 7/1/17, www.startribune.com.
- "Ag Group Says Conservation Funding Should Be Top Farm Bill Priority," *WNAX Radio*, 7/7/17, www.wnax.com.
- "Farmers take close look during field day," *Agri News*, 7/18/17, www.agrinews.com.
- "As foodies seek local, Midwest farmers go global," 7/25/17, *Minnesota Public Radio*, www.mprnews.org.
- "Ideas for Farm Bill a hot topic at Farmfest," *Marshall Independent*, 8/4/17, www.marshallindependent.com.
- "Want to be a farmer? Try Farm Beginnings," *The Southern Illinoisan*, 9/12/17, www.thesouthern.com.
- "Goodhue County feedlot opponents say owner violates air standards: Neighbors oppose 4,700-hog outfit; owners dispute group's data," *Star Tribune*, 9/15/17, www.startribune.com.
- "'A life of service': Joe Morse, stalwart for the oppressed and the environment, has died at 74," *Winona Daily News*, 10/4/17, www.winonadailynews.com.
- "Minnesota frac sand company seeks eased environmental restrictions for Fillmore County mine," *La Crosse Tribune*, 10/18/17, www.lacrossetribune.com.
- "The tough challenge of transitioning land from retiring farmers to the next generation," *Deep Roots Radio*, 10/21/17, www.bronxtobarn.com.
- "Farmers sequestering carbon for better soil health," *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, 10/23/17, www.postbulletin.com. □



LAND
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LSP News

LSP Delegates Headed to Mexico in 2018

The Land Stewardship Project is inviting members to participate in an LSP-Witness for Peace delegation to Mexico February 4-13. This will be the second LSP-Witness for Peace trip to the region (see the No. 3, 2016, issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for a report on the 2016 trip).

Mexico has been the target of major foreign investment and transnational corporations since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect in 1994, and more recently since constitutional reforms in that country were passed in 2014. This has had a devastating effect on the Mexican countryside. As the LSP delegation witnessed firsthand in March 2016, small farmers' holdings are targeted for purchase for industrial agriculture use or tourist development, support for small farms is almost non-existent, communal lands are up for sale, and mega-projects have proliferated, polluting the land and off-shoring the profits. Many people have no option but to migrate to the U.S. In addition, many of the human rights violations in Mexico are committed against community members fighting to protect their land and their way of life. U.S.

foreign policy plays a big role in this story through trade agreements, militarization and the lack of insistence on human rights improvements.

LSP members participating in the 2018 delegation to Mexico will investigate firsthand the effects of NAFTA over the past 22 years, particularly on Mexican small farmers and communities. Trip participants will stay in a community with high rates of out-migration and learn about the effects on family, community life and farming. They will also meet with Mexican farmers working on reforestation efforts, protection of native crops and promotion of local markets and food consumption. This is an opportunity to

Give it a Listen

On **episode 184** of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, participants in the 2016 LSP-Witness for Peace trip to Mexico talk about how farmers and other rural residents in that country are using their connections to the land to fight the corporate takeover of agriculture: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/883.



Participants in the 2016 LSP-Witness for Peace trip to Mexico met with farmers like Román Kruz, who is using innovative production and marketing efforts to preserve his community as it confronts the onslaught of multinational corporations. (Photo by Eric Nelson)

compare the impacts of large-scale farming in Mexico and the U.S. while strengthening a global grassroots movement for sustainability, food sovereignty, migrant rights and land rights.

Details will be determined soon. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* and our *LIVE-WIRE* e-letter for updates. For more information or to register for the delegation, contact LSP's Nick Olson at nicko@landstewardshipproject.org or 320-269-1057. □

Get Current With LSP's *LIVE WIRE*

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

Ear to the Ground Podcast

The Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast features nearly 200 episodes focused on everything from beginning farmer issues and soil health, to policy and local food systems. Check them out at www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast. □

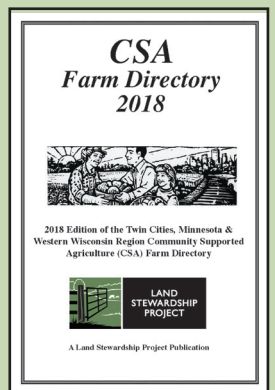
CSA Farmers: Time to Sign-up for the Directory

If you are a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmer operating in Minnesota or western Wisconsin, the Land Stewardship Project invites you to be listed in the 2018 edition of LSP's *Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory*.

An online version of the *CSA Farm Directory* will be available by Feb. 1 at www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/findingjustfood/csa.

The deadline for submitting listings is Monday, Jan. 8. The listing fee is \$15 for LSP members and \$20 for non-members. There is a 250-word limit for listings.

For information on having your farm listed, contact the Land Stewardship Project's Brian DeVore at bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.



Lisa Coons: 1967-2017 Lou Anne Kling: 1939-2017

Over a two-day period earlier this year, the Land Stewardship Project lost two passionate advocates for our land and rural communities: **Lisa Coons** and **Lou Anne Kling**. Both were former members of LSP's board of directors, and had worked tirelessly for family farms and stewardship of the environment.

Lisa Coons

Lisa Coons passed away May 16 as a result of a heart condition brought on by cancer treatments she had received earlier. She was 50, and is survived by her spouse Patti Ruskey and daughter Eleanor.

Coons was born in East St. Louis, Ill., and received a master's degree in Women's Studies from Mankato State University. She and Ruskey founded the Coffee Hag, a well-known gathering spot in Mankato. For several years, Coons co-directed the Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry, an initiative started by the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) in 1996. The Center



Lisa Coons

promotes and fosters awareness and ways of living that recognize and support the interconnection and interdependence of all life. In embracing people of all spiritual paths, the Center strives toward Earth justice and sustainability through education, spirituality, sustainable agriculture, rural ministry and political advocacy. One of the purposes of the Center is to model environmental stewardship on the SSND land itself through ecological awareness, ecosystem restoration, support of local food production and environmentally sensitive maintenance practices.

Coons helped the Center expand its garden and outreach to the community, among other things. LSP often worked closely with Coons and the Center, with several of the organization's members participating in its annual Earth Conference. Coons joined LSP's board of directors in 2014. Even in failing health, she remained an out-



Lou Anne Kling

spoken advocate for LGBT and other social justice issues.

Lou Anne Kling

It's been estimated that Lou Anne Kling, who passed away May 17 at the age of 77, saved hundreds, perhaps thousands, of family farms during her almost four decades of activism and public service. When the farm economy collapsed in the 1980s, Kling learned that the Farmers Home Administration wasn't informing farmers of their legal options to say in business. On July 4, 1980, she and her husband Wayne Kling plowed down an acre of grain on their Granite Falls, Minn., farm to protest low farm prices. The action drew widespread media attention, and soon Kling and groups like Groundswell were helping to organize foreclosure protests and visiting farmers to inform them of their rights. The 1980s were tense times, and Kling talked at least one desperate farmer out of committing suicide.

Kling and veteran farm activist Anne Kanten helped launch the Minnesota Farm Advocates program, which provides one-on-one assistance for farmers who face crisis situations caused by natural disasters or financial problems. This initiative, which is

now part of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, continues to serve as a model for many advocate programs across the country. At one point during the 1980s farm crisis, Kling and others asked the musician Willie Nelson to fund a farm law center that could provide free legal support to farmers. The result was the Minnesota-based Farmers' Legal Action Group, which was founded using funding from Farm Aid's first concert in 1985.

Kling eventually served as director of the Minnesota Farmers Home Administration, and in the 1990s went to Washington, D. C., where she served as deputy administrator of the USDA's farm loan programs. She later developed a USDA Farm Service Agency outreach program focused on minority farmers and ranchers.

Kling joined LSP's board in 2005, and later served as a "transitions coach" for families LSP was working with who were transferring their farms to the next generation. Kling is featured in *Homeplace Under Fire* (www.homeplaceunderfire.org), a Farm Aid documentary released earlier this year. The next issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter* will feature an interview with Kling that was conducted shortly before her passing. □

BioBlitz 2017



Scientists, naturalists and volunteers gathered in and around Glacial Lakes State Park in western Minnesota on June 24 for a "BioBlitz," an intense period of recording as many living plant and animal species as possible during a designated time period. This year's BioBlitz was the third one held in the region in the past five years, and was sponsored by the Land Stewardship Project, the Chippewa River Watershed Project and Clean Up the River Environment. The groups have been holding these events as a way to learn more about the diversity of plant and animal species present in local wildlife refuges, nature preserves and farm fields, and what impact various farming and other land management practices are having on the ecosystem.

For more information on LSP's work in the region, see page 16. (Photo by Rebecca Wasserman-Olin)

Fighting Factory Farms

Putting a Community at Risk

Citizens Document Toxic Gas Emissions from Minnesota Factory Farms

By Katie Doody

Land Stewardship Project members and supporters in southeastern Minnesota's Zumbrota Township are continuing to fight to stop a 4,700-hog factory farm being proposed in their community. The factory farm is being proposed by the Kohlhofer family, who already own seven factory farms and operate Kohlhofer Insurance Agency in the Twin Cities suburb of Lakeville. The campaign to protect Zumbrota Township's air, water and family farms

has engaged township residents, as well as LSP members statewide.

This summer, local farmers and rural residents monitored hydrogen sulfide emissions outside of the Kohlhofers' six existing factory farms in Goodhue County. Hydrogen sulfide is a poisonous gas with proven negative health impacts, and is regulated by the state. Citizens set out to find if hydrogen sulfide levels exceeded health risk values set by the Minnesota Department of Health—in other words, levels the Department considers dangerous to humans. The citizens were also trying to determine if the operations

were producing emissions that exceeded the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's less stringent ambient air quality standards.

The results of the 35 days of monitoring were troubling. On Sept. 14, LSP released a report, "A Community at Risk: A Report on Citizens' Hydrogen Sulfide Monitoring at Kohlhofer Factory Farms in Goodhue County, Minn.," that showed high levels of hydrogen sulfide

at the property boundary of Kohlhofer operations. In fact, monitoring showed that two of the Kohlhofers' facilities may be violating the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's state ambient air quality standards. And four of the Kohlhofer facilities are likely exceeding the Health Department's health risk values. The full report is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1003.

On Sept. 14, citizens gathered in Lakeville to call for immediate action. They called on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to immediately begin continuous air quality monitoring at the Kohlhofers' existing factory farms to investigate the extent of hydrogen sulfide exceedances. Meanwhile, to protect public health, the Kohlhofers should withdraw their Zumbrota Township proposal, said the citizens.

LSP members later delivered a copy of the hydrogen sulfide monitoring report to the offices of Jeff Kohlhofer, vice-president of Kohlhofer Insurance Agency and co-owner of the proposed factory farm.

In February, LSP members filed an appeal against the Goodhue County Board's decision to rubber-stamp the Kohlhofers' factory farm permit. On Sept. 21, the Minnesota Court of Appeals heard oral arguments for the case. Citizens worked with an attorney to make the case that the county board acted unfairly in permitting a project that clearly violates the Goodhue County Zoning Ordinance. The court has until late December to issue a ruling. □

LSP organizer Katie Doody can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or kdoody@landstewardshipproject.org. More on LSP's **Stopping Factory Farms** work is at www.landstewardshipproject.org.



After a press conference presenting the results of hydrogen sulfide testing of factory farms owned by the Kohlhofer family, citizens delivered the report to the Kohlhofer Insurance Agency in Lakeville. (Photo by Josh Journey-Heinz)

'Our community's health is at risk.'

EDITOR'S NOTE: At a press conference in Lakeville, Minn., announcing the results of hydrogen sulfide monitoring of factory farms (see article above), Land Stewardship Project member and farmer Dale Post gave this statement:

"My name is Dale Post. I'm a farmer from Zumbrota Township. My family has lived in Zumbrota Township for seven generations, and I'm fighting to keep our home safe and healthy, not just for myself, but for generations to come. My great-grandparents immigrated from Germany in 1883, looking for a better life, which they found, and which we've enjoyed up until now. We're in danger of losing it because of factory farms.

"My neighbors and I have spent our free time this summer monitoring for hydrogen sulfide at the property boundary of existing Kohlhofer factory farms in Goodhue County. We've gotten up early, stayed up late, and taken time off work. What we found is deeply concerning. The Kohlhofers claim to be model operators, but that's not the case.

"We know that the Kohlhofers' proposal for a 4,700-hog factory farm in our township will not be safe for our community. You've heard about the health impacts of hydrogen sulfide. These are especially concerning to my family.

"My granddaughter, who lives in Zumbrota Township, suffers from a rare genetic

disorder called CDKL5. She relies on fresh, clean air, and proximity to a factory hog farm, with high levels of hydrogen sulfide, would greatly complicate her condition. Her genetic footprint in this township goes back 134 years. Why should she be the one who has to leave?

"Our township is a place where family farms can thrive. We have clean air and clean water. We will not let the Kohlhofers put our farms, our families or our community in jeopardy. We're calling for the Kohlhofers to withdraw their Zumbrota Township proposal. Our community's health is at risk."

'Our Minnesota Future'

Building Governing Power to Advance LSP's Values

By Jonathan Maurer-Jones

When you think about your community and Minnesota as a whole, what issues stand out as most needing to be addressed? When you allow yourself to step back and dream big, what do you hope for?

At a time marked by extreme division, animosity and the feeling that nothing is getting done on the major problems we need to face together, it is not easy to think big. Our political environment is more polarized than ever. We have leaders fanning the flames of resentment and division to score political points. White supremacists and Nazis feel empowered to march in the streets, increasing the fear many Americans feel, especially people of color and immigrants.

Policy solutions seem distant. For example, instead of tackling the real problems with healthcare affordability and access, there have been repeated proposals that would throw tens of millions of Americans off insurance and make healthcare worse, instead of better (*see page 11*).

And of course, we are up against a corporate system that has consolidated money and power at the expense of people. We can see this in agriculture: while farm prices are down, seed prices have hardly budged, and corporations like Cargill are posting record profits. Since the 1990s, 600 seed companies have been whittled down to just six corporations that control more than 60 percent of the global seed market. Now these giants — which sell not only seeds but chemicals — plan to merge into three mega-companies, with Bayer attempting to buy Monsanto, Dow and DuPont agreeing to merge, and China National Chemical Corporation purchasing Syngenta.

But at this time, maybe more than ever, we need to stand up for our values, think bigger and do something different from what we have always done. We need a bold vision and the power to achieve it.

Building the Power to Govern

With that in mind, we want to introduce "Our Minnesota Future." It is a long-term strategy to build the power to govern in Minnesota, and the Land Stewardship Proj-

ect is taking it on in partnership with some of the strongest people's organizations in the state: faith groups, environmental groups, organizations that work in communities of color and immigrant communities, as well as labor unions and progressive organizations. For a list of participating organizations, see the sidebar at the end of this article.

The goal is to build governing power — the ability to set the agenda of state government and achieve the kind of major changes we need for people and communities around Minnesota. To be sure, LSP and the other organizations participating in "Our Minnesota Future" have won important changes over the years. But on their own, none of these organizations is able to achieve the kind of deep and lasting progress that we know we need. Our organizations are tied together by a sense that people need a stronger voice with decision-makers. Each organization is up against extreme corporate power, and we are all set back by the political culture that divides people based on race, immigration status and where people live.

We don't agree on everything. But we do agree that without a deeper alignment, more allies and a stronger unified voice, all of our groups are more easily drowned out by corporate interests. For LSP, "Our Minnesota Future" is also part of our commitment

Our Minnesota Future, see page 10...

Share Your Hopes

Write down what you **hope** for your community and state. On page 10 is a form for sharing ideas about **what issues** need to be addressed in your community. You can mail LSP your "Our Minnesota Future" comments via the envelope included in this *Land Stewardship Letter*.



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Vision for Rural Minnesota

What do you most **HOPE** for your community and the state?



Name: _____ Town: _____

Policy & Organizing

...Our Minnesota Future, from page 9

to racial justice, as race is too often used to divide people and hurt all of us. “Our Minnesota Future” is an effort to do politics differently — to make it more people-centered, avoid being pitted against each other and demonstrate what people can achieve if we work together.

A Bold Vision for Rural Minnesota

As a member of LSP, you have a good sense of what we stand for. We want more family farmers taking care of the land, building soil and protecting water. We fight to protect and build strong, vibrant communities across Minnesota with the resources and decision-making power to shape our own destinies. And we push for policies that put people, not corporate interests, first.

This is a values agenda, shaped from the ground up over 35 years. It is a vision driven by our members, who have poured their energy into LSP and found it useful to work through this organization toward the big changes they see are needed. As a result, LSP is grounded in a deep set of values and has a robust vision. Now, more than ever, we

need to build on this vision, shape it in light of the times we’re in, and find more powerful ways to work toward it.

Share Your Vision, Get Involved

Throughout this fall and winter, LSP is building a strong statement of our vision for rural Minnesota, grounded in the shared values we have worked on for years. In coming months, we will be putting this vision in front of people serving in or seeking to serve in public leadership roles in Minnesota, and asking how they will work with us to achieve it. We will share this with our allies in the “Our Minnesota Future” initiative to help shape that work and bring a strong rural voice to that effort.

We want to hear from you about what should be in this vision. What issues are most pressing in our communities? What do we hope for? You can jot down your thoughts on the forms we’ve included on pages 9 and 10 and send them to us via the envelope included with this *Land Stewardship Letter*. You can also e-mail your thoughts to me at jmaurer-jones@landstewardshipproject.org.

There are many ways you can get involved. Building a different, more powerful relationship with people in leadership roles will take many different voices and skills working together. What is your vision, and

what can you do to work toward a better future for all of Minnesota? ☐

LSP organizer Jonathan Maurer-Jones can be contacted at jmaurer-jones@landstewardshipproject.org or 218-213-4008.

‘Our Minnesota Future’ Partners

- ◆ Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL)
- ◆ Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)
- ◆ Communication Workers of America (CWA)
- ◆ Education Minnesota
- ◆ Inquilidxs Unidxs por Justicia (United Renters for Justice)
- ◆ ISAIAH
- ◆ Jewish Community Action (JCA)
- ◆ Land Stewardship Project
- ◆ Mesa Latina
- ◆ Minnesota 350
- ◆ Minnesota Nurses Association
- ◆ Navigate Minnesota
- ◆ Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (NOC)
- ◆ OutFront Minnesota
- ◆ Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
- ◆ Sierra Club
- ◆ TakeAction Minnesota

Share Your Ideas

What are **one or two issues** that need to be addressed in your community and state? On page 9 there is a form for sharing what you **hope** for your community. You can mail LSP your “Our Minnesota Future” comments via the envelope included in this *Land Stewardship Letter*.



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Vision for Rural Minnesota

What are the 1 or 2 **ISSUES** that most need to be addressed in your community? (Explain a little, and why it is so pressing.)

Name: _____ Town: _____

Federal Policy

Sending LSP's 'Our Farm Bill' Message to Congress

Congressional agriculture leaders are beginning to draft the 2018 Farm Bill. As a result, Land Stewardship Project members and staff have been taking several opportunities to get a message across to Senators and Representatives that we need federal agriculture policy that supports conservation and beginning farmers, while reforming programs such as crop insurance.

On Aug. 3, over 35 LSP members attended a Listening Session held by the U.S. House Agriculture Committee at Farmfest outside of Redwood Falls, Minn. Eight LSP members testified before the Agriculture Committee. Later in the summer and fall, LSP hosted U. S. Representatives Keith Ellison, Collin Peterson and Tim Walz on Minnesota farms.

LSP's paper, "Our Farm Bill: Re-imagining U.S. Farm Policy that puts People, Communities & the Land First," is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/repository/1/2045/our_farm_bill_2_4_17.pdf. You can sign LSP's petition calling for a Farm Bill that supports people and the land at www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmbillpetition1017.



Minnesota U. S. Representative Keith Ellison (left) visited the farm of LSP members Betsy Allister and Andrew Ehrmann in August to learn about their produce operation in Northfield, Minn. During a meeting at the farm, LSP members talked to Ellison about the need for policy that puts more farmers on the land while limiting corporate concentration. (Photo by Ben Anderson)

ry/1/2045/our_farm_bill_2_4_17.pdf. You can sign LSP's petition calling for a Farm Bill that supports people and the land at www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmbillpetition1017.

What do you want in the Farm Bill? Tell us by contacting Tom Nuessmeier at 507-995-3541 or tomn@landstewardshipproject.org; or Ben Anderson at 612-722-6377 or banderson@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Affordable Healthcare for All

Bad Policy Decisions Producing Bad Times for Healthcare

By Paul Sobocinski

During the past few months, there have been three major attempts on the part of the Trump Administration and Congress to replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), otherwise known as Obama Care. These proposals are a major and costly step backwards for Minnesotans. For example, according to a Minnesota Department of Human Services analysis, the Graham-Cassidy-Heller-Johnson proposal in the U.S. Senate would have cost the state \$1.9 billion in federal funds during its first three years of enactment.

Other policy proposals are also bad news for healthcare. In the tax bill moving forward in the U.S. Senate, under Capitol Hill budget rules as of mid-October, the current non-binding budget resolution in this year's measure calls for substantial cuts to Medicare and Medicaid.

Meanwhile, federal funding for MinnesotaCare's reinsurance initiative is under threat. Contrary to what was previously promised, the Trump Administration says it plans to reduce funding for MinnesotaCare by \$369 million. Reinsurance was passed by the 2017 Minnesota Legislature to provide \$540 million in funding for the state to buy

down insurance premiums for people who are in the individual market for healthcare. This would make premiums more affordable for people in the individual market.

MinnesotaCare covers Minnesotans whose income is between 133 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level. This program is for working lower income Minnesotans who have no other viable options for healthcare, including many farmers and rural people. The Land Stewardship Project, along with numerous other groups, including the Minnesota Farmers Union and the Minnesota National Farmers Organization, sent a letter to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services urging the agency not to penalize Minnesota's popular

MinnesotaCare program.

Now that federal funding for MinnesotaCare is in jeopardy, it's become clear how wrong the Minnesota Legislature was to eliminate nearly \$1 billion of funding in coming years for Minnesota's Health Care Access Fund reserve. This was set up 25 years ago as a dedicated fund that pays for MinnesotaCare and Medical Assistance. It is maintained by a small 2 percent tax on healthcare providers, which, unfortunately, is scheduled to end after 2019.

Co-op Insurance Option

The Minnesota Legislature passed a law that will allow farmers to join together in a cooperative fashion to receive group discounts on insurance. Farm families should check out this option, especially if they don't qualify for Medicaid, MinnesotaCare, or premium tax credits through MNsure.

There are informational meetings happening right now across Minnesota. For more information, contact me or check out the 40 Square Cooperative Solutions website at <https://40square.coop>. □

2018 Enrollment Opportunities

Minnesotans can qualify for financial help to pay for healthcare through MNsure, the state's insurance exchange. The current MNsure open enrollment period ends Jan. 14. Information is available at www.mnsure.org or by calling 1-855-366-7873.

An income chart on what you can qualify for is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/repository/1/2296/mnsure_income_2018.pdf.

LSP healthcare organizer Paul Sobocinski can be contacted at 507-342-2323 or sobopaul@landstewardshipproject.org.

New LSP Pocket Guide Outlines How Agriculture Can Help Clean Up Our Water & Head Off Climate Catastrophe

Integrating Cropping, Livestock & Grazing Key to 'Soil Smart' Farms

At a time of skyrocketing water pollution levels and increasing climate-related calamities, a new resource released this fall describes how farmers in Minnesota and the rest of the Midwest can play a key role in helping fix these serious environmental problems. The Land Stewardship Project's *Soil Health, Water & Climate Change: A Pocket Guide to What You Need to Know* provides an introduction to the latest innovations in science and farming related to building soil health, and how implementing such practices on a wide-scale basis can make agriculture a powerful force for creating a landscape that is good for our water and our climate.

The pocket guide includes mini-profiles of farmers in the region who are utilizing

• • •

The twin problems of polluted water and climate change share a common solution: the building of soil organic matter via farming practices that protect the landscape's surface and generate biological activity below.

• • •

cover cropping, managed rotational grazing of livestock, no-till and other methods to protect the landscape's surface while increasing biological activity below, thus creating a resilient, "soil smart" type of agriculture.

The key to these farmers' success is their ability to build a resource that can sequester an immense amount of carbon while increasing the land's ability to efficiently manage precipitation and runoff. It turns out the twin problems of polluted water and climate change share a common solution: the building of soil organic matter, which makes up just 5 percent of the soil profile but controls 90 percent of its functions. As the articles on pages 14-17 of this *Land Stewardship Letter* show, there are farmers proving you can build organic matter in a matter of years

Pocket Guide, see page 13...

Talking Smart Soil

The Land Stewardship Project has produced a series of podcasts featuring the voices of farmers, researchers and conservationists who are on the cutting edge of building soil health. Check them out at www.landstewardshipproject.org/talkingsmartsoil.

An excerpt from the pocket guide:

Soil Health by the Numbers

30%-75%

The amount of carbon soils have lost since tillage began.

25,000 Gallons...

The amount of water per acre 1 percent of organic matter can hold in the top six inches of soil.

90% ...

The percentage of soil functions organic matter controls, even though it makes up less than 5% of the soil profile.

3-10 Years...

How long it can take a farmer to raise organic matter levels using methods such as cover cropping.

200 Times...

The amount herbicide-related water toxicity was reduced when diversified crop rotations were utilized in one farm trial.

8%-10% ...

The annual percentage of greenhouse gas emissions reductions needed if we are to avoid climate catastrophe.

5%-15% ...

An estimate of the annual percentage of greenhouse gases farming has the potential to sequester by building soil organic matter.

using practical, financially viable methods.

Utilizing easy-to-understand graphics and summaries, this pocket guide shows how building soil organic matter can sequester massive amounts of greenhouse gases. Combined with energy conservation and alternative energy sources, making agricultural soils a net carbon sink could play a major role in helping prevent disastrous changes to the climate. In addition, healthy, biologically active soil has been shown to dramatically cut erosion levels, as well as the amount of

• • •
More carbon is in our soil than in the atmosphere and all plant life combined.
• • •

farmland fertilizer and other chemicals flowing into our rivers, streams and lakes.

For example:

→ Some farmers have doubled their soil organic matter in less than 10 years. Scientists long thought that such a change in organic matter could not be brought about in a typical lifetime.

→ The potential for soil to store carbon is tremendous. When soil organic matter levels were higher than they are today, the land held much more carbon; it could do so once

Soil Health, Water & Climate Change

A Pocket Guide to What You Need to Know



A Land Stewardship
Project Publication
October 2017

again, according to scientists. One estimate is that 5 percent to 15 percent of annual greenhouse gas emissions could be seques-

tered by building organic matter utilizing soil smart farming practices.

→ One soil-friendly farming method, cover cropping, has 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.

→ A three-year case study in the Upper Mississippi River Basin found that building soil health with cover cropping and no-till increased net farm income by up to \$110 per acre.

→ During the 2017 growing season alone, several farmers in the region reported that their efforts to build healthier soils paid off when their fields resisted severe erosion, flooding and runoff during torrential rains. □

Get Your Copy of the Pocket Guide

Soil Health, Water & Climate Change: A Pocket Guide to What You Need to Know is available as a pdf and online mobile app at www.landstewardshipproject.org/smartsoil.

Paper copies are available from the Land Stewardship Project's offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377).

Gauging Biological Activity by 'Soiling Your Undies'

Want a fun and graphic way to measure the amount of biological activity in your soil? For the past few years, farmers throughout North America have been "Soiling Their Undies" by burying pairs of cotton underwear in their fields and pastures and monitoring how much of the material breaks down as a result of soil biological activity. This is a humorous, but practical, way to gauge the soil health impacts of various farming practices, including cover cropping, managed rotational grazing and no-till.

The Land Stewardship Project has created "Soil Your Undies" kits that include two pairs of cotton underwear, two flags and instructions. You can order a kit online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/store/item/8, or buy them from LSP's southeastern Minnesota office in Lewiston for \$10. To purchase a kit using the latter option, contact Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or karenb@landstewardshipproject.org.

We would love to hear your stories and see pictures of your experiments with these kits. You can e-mail LSP's Shona Snater at ssnater@landstewardshipproject.org with your results.



During a recent LSP field day, southeastern Minnesota crop and livestock farmer Jon Luhman and LSP organizer Shona Snater showed how biological activity has started to break down the fabric in pairs of underwear buried in Luhman's fields. (LSP Photo)

Building Knowledge, Building Biology

Field Days Showcase the Benefits & Challenges of Generating Healthy Soil

“It’s easier to learn from your mistakes than your successes sometimes,” said crop producer Curt Tvedt on a sunny morning in July while standing in one of his fields with over 50 other farmers. His farm was one of three operations that was hosting a Land Stewardship Project Soil Builders’ Network field day in southeastern Minnesota. Participants got to see firsthand how building soil health with cover cropping and no-till can produce opportunities and benefits in widely varying circumstances. And, as Tvedt’s comment alluded to, farmers also got to see what can be learned from experiments that don’t always go as planned.

A Proving Ground

As an amateur cave explorer, Martin Larsen has a deep appreciation for just how vulnerable to contamination the water that flows beneath our feet is. In the part of southeastern Minnesota where he farms, agrichemicals that escape crop fields can quickly make their way through the Swiss cheese-like limestone formations that dominate the underground karst geology in that part of the state. That’s one reason that during the past few years Larsen has adopted cover cropping and no-till on the corn and soybeans he raises west of Rochester. By building soil health, he feels he’s able to manage water in a way that it doesn’t erode soil and send contaminants into surface water and groundwater.

During the Soil Builders’ Network field day, Larsen showed participants a blown-up photograph taken in one of his corn fields just after a two-inch rain saturated the area a few weeks before. Even though the field is on a significant slope, the photo showed little runoff had occurred. By increasing the soil’s organic matter and structure, Larsen has also built its ability to manage moisture more efficiently. He’s found that cover crops such as cereal rye are particularly good at breaking up the compaction which can lead to excessive runoff and erosion. Too often, farmers utilize deep tillage to deal with such an issue, a practice that exposes the soil to further damage.

“I was astounded there was so little runoff after that storm,” Larsen, who also works for the Olmsted County Soil and Water Conservation District, said. “Throwing steel at a compaction problem is seldom the answer.”



“I was astounded there was so little runoff after that storm,” said southeastern Minnesota farmer Martin Larsen, referring to a field where he has built up his soil’s biological structure and health. (LSP Photo)

Last fall, Larsen seeded a winter rye cover crop into a soybean field “on the cheap” using a seed spreader. The seeding rate wasn’t very high, but he still feels it had a positive impact. “Even a few plants per square foot is better than nothing at all,” he said. “My proof is the look of the runoff. I have real world proof.”

Although he’s convinced cover cropping can be done with make-do equipment, Larsen has been talking to his local co-op about buying a “high-boy”—one of those tall-wheeled agrichemical sprayers that can pass through corn late in the season—that is specially modified to spread cover crop seed.

Always Innovating

“That’s probably where I’m headed next,” said Tom Pyfferoen, a neighbor to Larsen whose operation was another stop on the field day. The crop and livestock farmer said he would like to try using a high-boy to seed cover crops into standing corn during the summer. That would give the cover crop a head start on germination before the corn is harvested. The farmer is no stranger

to innovation. He explained his use of soil-building techniques while standing in front of an impressively tricked-out Kinze planter, which was parked on the edge of a soybean field. The soybeans were poking up through a mat of dead rye, which had been planted in the field the previous fall. Between the growing soybeans and the cover crop mulch, virtually no bare soil was visible.

For the past few years, Pyfferoen has been experimenting with everything from no-till to planting soybeans straight into living, standing rye. He’s been happy with the results: his crop yields are up and he has much less compaction and runoff problems.

Like Larsen, he’s seeing water quality benefits as well. A University of Minnesota analysis of drainage water leaving his fields showed nitrogen levels were around six to seven parts per million, well below the Environmental Protection Agency’s standard for the amount of nitrogen that can be present in drinking water: 10 parts per million. Excessive fertilizer leaving farm fields is the number one source of nitrogen contamination in southern Minnesota, and cover crops like rye have been shown to tie the nutrient up and hold it in the soil, making it available to growing crops throughout the growing season.

Pyfferoen also plants pearl millet, crimson clover, radish and oats as cover crops, and as a result of the multiple benefits he’s seeing, the farmer recently seeded 700 acres of cover crops. “This ground is getting more and more mellow,” he said.

Going with the Flow

Despite success stories farmers like Martin Larsen and Tom Pyfferoen can share, there are reasons that soil-friendly farming methods like cover cropping haven’t become more prevalent in the Corn Belt — it’s estimated that less than 2 percent of Minnesota farmland is cover cropped annually, which is similar to the national average. Narrow planting windows caused by weather, lack of proper equipment and confusing regulations related to crop insurance coverage, coupled with an overall lack of experience with methods that aren’t part of the norm, all play roles in deterring soil health innovation. Farmers need to see firsthand the challenges posed by some of these practices before they can learn how to overcome them.

That’s why the last stop of the tour was so important. During the past few years, Curt Tvedt has had good success planting soybeans into standing rye. The rye built

Building, see page 15...

soil organic matter, increased water infiltration and suppressed weeds, which all helped produce good soybean yields.

But during this particular tour, Tvedt showed off soybeans that were barely poking through a mat of dead rye. The stand was thin and the plants were not consistent across the field. Tvedt theorized that he may have waited too long to terminate the rye and it overwhelmed the sprouting soybeans. One option may have been to actually roll down the rye before the soybeans were planted. He also wondered aloud if he had seeded the cover crop at too high a rate.

Farmers participating in the field day roamed the field, pulling up soybean plants to examine the roots and conducting water infiltration tests. They also asked questions and gave advice on seeding rates and termination strategies. At the end of the tour, Tvedt made it clear that one setback was not going to end his years-long strategy of building soil health. Over the decades, this farm has seen some serious erosion and runoff, and he doesn't want to return to the bad old days. Tvedt has already been able to raise soil organic matter levels, a significant sign that overall health is returning to the land.

"This ground is very fragile and I'm primarily concerned about building soil organic matter and water holding capacity," he said.

The soil universe is complex, and working with it requires being willing to observe, learn from one's mistakes, and adjust accordingly, added Tvedt.

"I had good luck the last two years with this system, but conditions change." □

Ingham & Archuleta Coming to SE MN

The Land Stewardship Project's Soil Builders' Network will be sponsoring a day of soil biology and microscope demonstrations with soil microbiologist **Dr. Elaine Ingham** in Rochester, Minn., on Feb. 10.

The highly energetic soil health guru **Ray Archuleta** will be in southeastern Minnesota March 27-29 for a series of workshops. The Archuleta events will be held in Lewiston, Austin, Kasson and Faribault, and are being co-sponsored by LSP, along with local soil and water conservation districts. To get a taste of Archuleta's entertaining and engaging presentation style, see Episode 154 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/618.

For more information on any of these events, contact LSP's Doug Nopar or Shona Snater at 507-523-3366.



Tom Pyfferoen has found cover cropping and no-till are not only reducing runoff, but are also increasing his yields of cash crops. "This ground is getting more and more mellow," he said. (LSP Photo)

Join the Soil Builders' Network

If you are a crop or livestock farmer in southeastern Minnesota, the Land Stewardship Project invites you to join the Soil Builders' Network to receive regular updates on workshops, field days and on-farm demonstrations related to the latest in soil health and cover cropping.

The Soil Builders' Network was launched earlier this year to establish an extensive network of farmers interested in building back their soil using innovative crop and livestock systems. To join the free network, sign up at www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/lspsoilbuilders, or contact LSP's Shona Snater at 507-523-3366 or ssnater@landstewardshipproject.org.



Curt Tvedt (left, kneeling) and LSP organizer Doug Nopar conduct a water infiltration test on one of Tvedt's cover-cropped fields. "This ground is very fragile and I'm primarily concerned about building soil organic matter and water holding capacity," said the farmer. (LSP Photo)

Prairie After the Plow

Striking an Agricultural-Environmental Balance in a Restored Grassland

First, a few statistics that should be troubling to anyone who cares about keeping more perennial cover on the landscape. The *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reports that between 2006 and 2011, 1.3 million acres of grasslands were converted to crops in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska. Such conversion rates haven't been seen since the 1920s and 1930s, and anyone familiar with the Dust Bowl era knows what resulted from that. The World Wildlife Fund's examination of USDA statistics has determined that from 2015 to 2016, 2.5 million grassland acres were converted to crop production in the Great Plains, that area that encompasses states like North and South Dakota, as well as Kansas and Nebraska. In 2014, the Great Plains lost more grassland to tillage than the Brazilian Amazon lost to deforestation.

Across the Grain Belt, the reason for this conversion is clear-cut: markets and government policy make it much more lucrative to grow corn or soybeans than grass. Based on this equation, even non-native grasslands—i.e. hay and domesticated pastures—are losing out to the plow at a record pace.

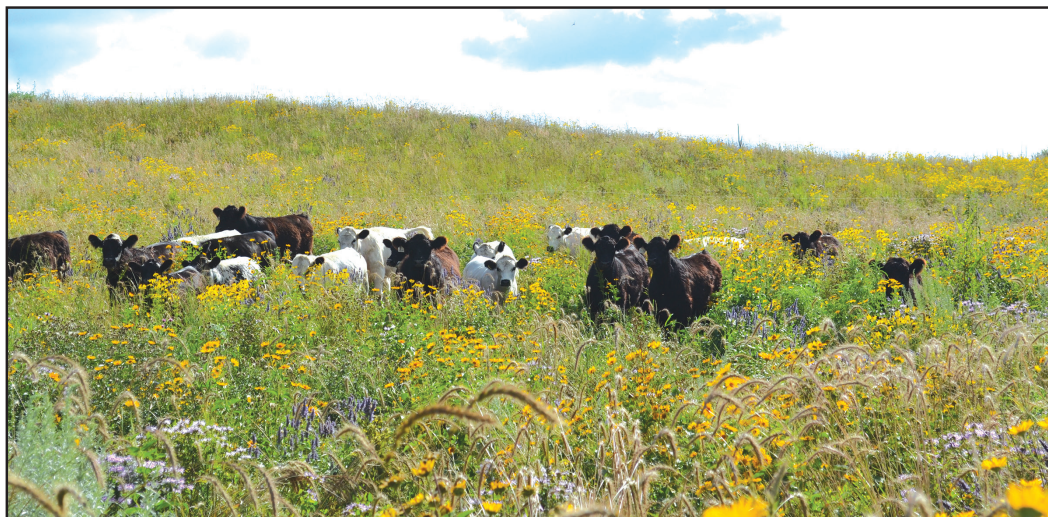
And with all that grassland—native and non-native—goes the ecosystem services deep-rooted perennial grasses and forbs provide: reduced erosion, carbon sequestration, water filtration and wildlife habitat.

Now, for a story about how one farm family reclaimed a few of those grassland acres and is finding a way to make prairie an economically viable, long-term part of their business enterprise.

Post-tillage Blues

"Nature is fairly chaotic, and you can replicate that chaos," said J. B. Bright one day in early August as he stood chest high

in a 20-acre field of restored native prairie in west-central Minnesota. About 50 yards away a group of beef cattle were standing on the side of a steep slope, browsing on a fairly chaotic looking 60-species mix of grasses and forbs. Besides Bright, who is a refuge manager for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a couple dozen farmers and other natural resource professionals were watching the cattle as well. The restored prairie is owned by Shane and Jessica Blair, who raise 40 cow-calf pairs and some 300 ewes near the town of Starbuck. The group



Jessica and Shane Blair's beef cattle graze a restored prairie consisting of some 60 different species of grasses and forbs. "Plant diversity is a real key—whether it's for wildlife or livestock feed," says the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's J. B. Bright. (LSP Photo)

was there as part of a field day coordinated by the Land Stewardship Project's Chippewa 10% Project (*see sidebar on page 17*), the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Pope County Soil and Water Conservation District.

On display was the restored prairie the cattle were grazing. When the Blairs bought

these 20 acres five years ago, the erosion was of catastrophic proportions. Prior to their purchase, the land had been planted to corn and soybeans for three or four years. Before that, it had been in unbroken, native prairie. West-central Minnesota is full of fields where row crops can be raised sustainably. This particular piece of the landscape is not one of those fields. For one thing, it has hilly terrain that's a left-over from when the last glaciers receded from this area, leaving behind hummocks of rocks, gravel and a light, sandy soil. Shane Blair estimated that some of the hillocks on this land are on a slope of as much as 30 percent. He recalls that when the previous owner ran a pesticide sprayer up some of the slopes, subsequent rains would send runoff racing down the tire tracks made by the equipment. The Blairs' farmstead is just up the road from these 20 acres, so they are quite familiar with how light, drought-prone and erosive the soil is.

"If you were to till that land, in three days that top four inches would be dried out, just

bone dry and blown away," said Shane, who utilizes no-till on his crop acres to preserve moisture and soil.

Bright described an intense rainstorm a few years ago that washed soil off that 20 acres of row-cropped land. The mix of water and sediment flowed through a culvert under a road and onto a waterfowl production area managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"There was about a foot or so of topsoil that covered a quarter- to a half-acre on the bottom there," he recalled.

"And they're not going to give that soil back to us," Shane joked.

So, one of the first things the Blairs did

Cover Crops? Grazing? Rotations? Give the Calculator a Try

The Chippewa 10% Project has developed the Cropping Systems Calculator, a tool for estimating the costs and benefits of adopting various cropping and grazing systems, including those involving cover crops. It's at www.landstewardshipproject.org/chippewa10croppingsystemscalculator. Give it a test drive—we welcome feedback.

Prairie, see page 17...

after buying the land was to formulate a plan for getting those highly erosive acres back into perennial cover. Working with Bright and staff from other natural resource agencies, they designed a prairie mix of some 60 native prairie species.

A lot of thought went into just what species to include in the mix, given the differing goals the various parties were bringing to the table. The natural resource agencies wanted to see a planting that would not only protect the soil and water, but would provide diverse habitat for wildlife, including grassland songbirds and pollinators. Restoring the prairie on private land helps significantly increase the region-wide presence of natural habitat—besides the waterfowl production area, the Blairs are also neighbors to Glacial Lakes State Park, which is home to prime prairie habitat in an area known as the Leaf Hills, a band of glacial hills unlike any other in the state. The plot the Blairs purchased was originally part of a 70-acre field. Another farmer in the area bought the remaining 50 and has also restored it to prairie.

The Blairs received financial help from government agencies to establish the prairie, but unlike the nature preserve and state park land nearby, their land has to pay its own way economically in the long term. That's why they wanted a seed mix which included species that would be good for their cattle and sheep to graze.

"You know, if it was up to me, we would make everything grazeable," said Shane.

As it happened, the mix that was agreed upon included a selection of what livestock find palatable, as well as species that may not be as sought after by cattle and sheep, but provide excellent wildlife and pollinator habitat. The mix also couldn't contain prairie species that can be poisonous to livestock, like prairie larkspur.

In 2015, the Blairs planted an oat cover crop to prepare the soil and then no-till drilled the prairie mix. Using cost-share funding from the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, they were able to set up a fencing and watering system that allows them to rotationally graze the plot. Thanks to some timely rains and a heavy seeding rate, the land responded impressively with a diverse stand of everything from black-eyed Susan and yellow coneflower to wild rye. The slopes were soon once again flowering from spring into fall. After allowing the restoration to get established for a few years, the Blairs started seriously grazing it this past summer.

Multiple Plants = Multiple Benefits

During the August field day, both the natural resources experts and the farmers were happy with the results. Bees and other pollinators were working over the flowering plants and the cattle herd was head-high in forage. Bright pointed out the heterogeneity of the planting—that means there was a great variance in species, as well as the heights of the plants—both important elements for good wildlife habitat. Bright also liked that the Blairs utilize a rotational grazing system that keeps the livestock in a paddock for varying lengths of time, depending on growing conditions and time of year. Such variance in grazing contributes to the heterogeneity.

"When you have a greater variety of structural height and density, you're going to be meeting the needs of a wider variety of birds," the wildlife manager said.

But diversity isn't just good for butterflies and bobolinks. The Blairs liked



Shane Blair (second from left) describes the fencing system he and his wife Jessica have set up to allow them to graze the restored prairie. (LSP Photo)

docks, and each species has its own forage preferences.

Shane said there seems to be another advantage to all that diversity: the native species provide the animals with the stomach biome they need to fight off parasites, worms and other critters that can cause ailments. The Blairs are applying the lessons of diversity the prairie is teaching them to other aspects of their operation. For example, they are using cover crop mixes that contain as many as 10 species of plants to create annual grazing spots for their livestock while building soil health.

And that's a reminder that the benefits of diversity don't just work on the surface level. Jeff Duchene, a grazing specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, pointed out that when a grassland grows up, "it also grows down." In other words, diversity above ground also produces a varied mix of roots in the soil's basement. Studies have shown that such deep, complex root systems help develop the kind of soil biology that's resilient and more self-reliant in building fertility.

Said Duchene of the Blairs' restored prairie, "I think in my mind this is about the best outcome that could result after it was broken by the plow." □

Give it a Listen

On episode 197 of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Shane Blair and J. B. Bright talk about utilizing a prairie restoration as a source of cattle forage: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

that the plot contained many native species that thrive during the hottest parts of the summer; domesticated pastures are usually dominated by non-native cool season grasses that go into a slump in high summer, reducing forage availability considerably. Having a variety of plants is also important to their particular operation, since the Blairs are grazing cattle and sheep in the same pad-

The Chippewa 10% Project

The Land Stewardship Project, along with various partners, is working through the Chippewa 10% Project to get more continuous living cover established in west-central Minnesota's Chippewa River watershed. The initiative is working on the ground to promote managed rotational grazing of grasslands and cover crops, as well as other methods that improve water quality and soil health while producing profits for farmers. For more information on the Chippewa 10% Project, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/chippewa10project, or contact the Land Stewardship Project's Robin Moore at 320-269-2105, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org.

Putting Down Deep Roots

A 'Farm Fellow' Reflects on Raising Food in the City

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series profiling people involved in the Hope Community-Land Stewardship Project collaborative food project in the Phillips Community of South Minneapolis. For more on this collaborative, see the sidebar in the right-hand column.

By Alisa Hoven

On a recent day in early summer, at a 5,000-square-foot community garden at the corner of Franklin Avenue East and Portland Avenue South, I'm standing at the crossroads of two major streets. This location is between two major geographical locations as well—one human made, the other a major natural presence. Downtown Minneapolis is just a mile north of this intersection, and the Mississippi River's current flows a few blocks east.

This is also an area of deep history, much of it troubling. We recognize that the land we live and grow on is Dakota land. It was stolen from the indigenous people of this land and we stand on it as a result of settler colonialism, genocide and forced removal. There has been generations of erasure and displacement of these people, and it still continues to this day. As we stand on this ground, we recognize the journey the people and this land have taken and how that path comes with great pain and loss, as well as deep healing.

Such journeys continue today. Many of the people living in this community are here because they were forced to flee civil war, while others were seeking economic opportunities.

The cultures and stories of the people that come through this garden, called the Garden at the Rose, are centered around finding a home here, after a long, hard and difficult journey of leaving another home. The migration of their choices and sacrifices are transformed—this is alluding to the way that the garden can help these people heal and begin to set roots in new ways. Folks are learning about ways to connect with each other across cultures, they are

finding their footing and committing to place in new ways.

Today, as we open our eyes and see this land, we see city and school buses adding to the traffic as it continues onwards. The balconies flow with flowers growing down towards the sidewalk. Children are curious and eager. Colorful hijabs and loaded up bicycles and full grocery bags and packed basketball courts fill-in the background. There is always a hustle and bustle amidst the calm quiet of the gardens. And we are here. We are youth, leaders and neighbors of Ventura Village, in South Minneapolis. Together, on this land, we grow fresh food and care for our gardens together, and are learning what it means to heal our relationships to each other and the land.

On this particular summer day, I was with Nimo Mohamed, a "Farm Fellow" with Hope Community. Farm Fellows commit



Nimo Mohamed in the Garden at the Rose. (LSP Photo)

LSP, Hope Community & Food Justice

Since 2009, the Land Stewardship Project has been working with the Hope Community through an initiative called "Food, Land and Community." It's an attempt to build community power and capacity to shape a strong neighborhood-scale system that ensures reliable, affordable and equitable access to healthy food. The foundation of this work rests in listening to the community and cultivating their solutions for change. In 2015, Hope and LSP put together a "listening report" called *Feed the Roots*, which is a guiding document and testimonial to the work, now and in the future. The report can be found at www.hope-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/HOPE-Feed_The_Roots_Finaldigital.pdf.

For more information, contact LSP's Maryam Abdinur at mabdinur@landstewardshipproject.org, or Eric Avery at eavery@landstewardshipproject.org. Details are also available at www.facebook.com/hopegardens2017.

to a season of learning garden skills in our Garden at the Rose. They work with staff to deepen their connection to the garden and their leadership skills with community members. They help with outreach; the invitation to families and neighbors, to get involved, to learn more, to try a tomato sample or sit with us around the table. They play an integral role in holding space for a newly emerging public space and a curious neighborhood. I wanted to learn more about Nimo's experiences with this garden, which was launched the summer before. What has she learned and what is on the horizon for her, for this garden, for this community?

Home Soil

"I never had the experience, but I always used to wonder what it would be like to have your own garden—instead of other people doing it for you. In this neighborhood, we have members of the Somali community and immigrants from all over the world. In this place, we can be reunited as one community," Nimo told me. "Somali people used to have farms back home, but not here. Here is our home, too—it's our country too, we can do it here. I want to inspire Somali youth to be strong leaders."

As a young Somali woman who was raised in Minnesota, she has found her place, found home.

"You can be yourself here. I have my

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religion, my culture, I have myself. I don't have to leave any of that," said Nimo.

In order for any seed to germinate and grow and create life, we need healthy soil. The same goes for ourselves—we need a home. Finding and making a home is critical in creating the rich atmosphere and environment we need to grow.

"People in the community know things, they share how their families grew food; it is amazing. People need to see their own people here, it's important," Nimo said. "Before people from Africa came to the United States, they had connections to their land, like we do here; we have connections to this

community in Minnesota and in Africa—we stay in one place and put a seed in the ground."

From my conversation with Nimo, I now realize the journey we are on is not just tending to the seed and the soil. It is making deep connections with each other, amidst our differences, and nurturing what it is that we must grow—a new way of relating with each other and the land; one that is not driven by extraction and destruction and removal, but one that is guided by abundance and resilience and intention. While we learn each other's stories, we are feeding ourselves: lettuce, greens, raspberries, eggplant, basil, parsley, kale, Swiss chard, cabbage, cilantro, radishes, strawberries, snap peas, corn, beans, squash, tomatoes and peppers.

And there is enough for all of us.

Finding home takes time, it may even take our whole lives, but the length of our journey can also match the depth of the roots we set in the ground.

We are here.

As Nimo put it: "Something beautiful comes up from this, no matter how long it takes, the end is worth it, something beautiful comes out." □

Alisa Hoven, a program coordinator with the Food, Land and Community Project at Hope Community, is at ahoven@hope-community.org or 612-435-1683.

Ecological Agrarians

Life on the Land

An Island of Biodiversity Reaches Beyond the Fence Line

EDITOR'S NOTE: The *Land Stewardship Letter* is running an occasional series of articles on "ecological agrarians"—farmers who are integrating the principles of ecology into their agricultural operations. To read the first and second installments in this series, see the No. 1 and No. 2, 2017, editions of the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

By Brian DeVore

"Corn, corn, corn, corn, corn, beans," is how Brooke Knisley summarizes the general landscape of her neighborhood while taking a break from picking beans (not the soy kind) on Alternative Roots Farm one evening in late summer. She isn't exaggerating: while driving to she and her husband John's produce farm and orchard in southern Minnesota, one negotiates a curve in the road where seven-foot tall corn crowds in so closely it feels like driving through one of those car-sized holes bored through giant redwoods during a less enlightened time. It provides a sense of monocultural myopia.

But the Knisleys' four-acre island of biodiversity, which includes a strip of restored tallgrass prairie that separates their garden and orchard from all those acres of corn and soybeans, challenges the brain to take in all the sights, sounds and smells—it's like plunging from a desert island into the waters of a tropical ocean reef exploding with life. First the sights of the prairie: wild bergamot, grayhead coneflower, golden alexander,

blazing star, anise, black-eyed susan, goldenrod, and, perhaps the most intriguingly named one of them all: rattlesnake master.

"I was hoping so much to get this one to grow," says John, as he grabs the bristly edges of the rattlesnake master's leaves. "It's the only native yucca plant to Minnesota. It's cool."

With equal excitement, he points out a cup plant, a tropical-looking sunflower-like aster with leaves that, indeed, form cups. Water collects in these natural bowls, which goldfinches often drink from. A red admiral butterfly flutters by as the Knisleys examine the plant.

Then the sounds: the air is an electric cacophony of bees (12 different species by the Knisleys' count), wasps and innumerable other insects, as they drone from flower-to-flower, completing the sexual dance so key to flora and fauna. As the summer evening wears on, the undulating thrum of cicadas cranks up.

And finally, the smell: bees are emphatically working over the purple flowers of a mint called anise hyssop. Crushing the flower produces an overwhelming, but

pleasant, aroma of licorice.

At first glance, this 30-foot buffer of fragrant, electric, hurly-burliness serves as a kind of demilitarized zone between the Knisleys' plot of garden/fruit trees and a strapping stand of their neighbor's corn. But as a short hike amongst the forbs and grasses that make up this prairie shows, it is more than that—it is a significant link between Alternative Root's farm and the natural environment. And the food produced in the midst of this natural habitat, in turn, is a link between the land and the consumers who purchase the vegetables, fruit and pork produced on this land.

"Yeah, it's fun to see it come to life," says John, referring to the prairie *and* the micro-farm itself.

Getting Out of the Armchair

Finding a way to bring the land back to life was the Knisleys' goal back in 2011 when they moved to the area after getting degrees in environmental-related fields and working for conservation agencies. Brooke and John actually took the same environmental economics class while they were both at Bemidji State University, in northern Minnesota.

John got a degree in environmental policy and planning, which he saw as a natural follow-up to his upbringing: he grew up in New Ulm, just 12 miles from Alternative Roots Farm, and spent his youth hunting, fishing, trapping and ginseng gathering, as well as splitting wood for a wood stove.

Brooke grew up in Eden Prairie. She majored in environmental studies at Bemidji State and focused on ecological restoration and invasive species management. She

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eventually got her degree at the University of California-Santa Cruz.

Both Brooke and John worked for conservation agencies in the Bemidji area after college. Brooke was with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service for a time, and John was on staff with a local Soil and Water Conservation District office. Those jobs, among other things, involved working with farmers to help them adopt basic conservation measures like wildlife plantings and grassed waterways for erosion control. Through these jobs, the couple garnered insights into what measures and government incentives are available for such practices; it also sparked an interest to get out on the land and practice some of this stewardship themselves.

"The entire time you're trying to incentivize people to do better on the land," says John of this government agency work. "We were kind of armchair conservationists, and wanted to put it into practice on our own. What would be better than to do it ourselves, and really practicing what we're preaching and kind of living it?"

But was there a way to combine their backgrounds in environmental education and outreach with on-the-ground ecological restoration? While living in Bemidji, the Knisleys belonged to a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm, and were impressed by the connection the owner/operators of the enterprise had with the eaters who purchased shares in the farm. What if they could use such a connection to raise food in a way that was in sync with nature, and also link the wider community with the land?

In 2011, the Knisleys moved back to the New Ulm area when a job became available for John in a county planning and zoning office, doing environmental education and outreach, among other things. It was a great opportunity, but the reality of moving from Minnesota's lake country to what amounted to an agri-industrial landscape soon set in.

"It became *really* evident when we first came down here that like, wow, we live in

the breadbasket of the United States, but no one raises anything you can eat," recalls John. "It's kind of crazy."

In fact, finding a farmstead suitable for raising vegetables on was difficult—everything was being sold off in large allotments hundreds or even thousands of acres in size. In many cases the houses and outbuildings had been bulldozed to make room for more row crops. In fact, the first two farmsteads the couples looked at have since been plowed under. They eventually bought four acres near the small community of Madelia—the parcel had originally been part of a 160-acre farm. It consisted of a house and a few outbuildings and was basically a blank slate, which was what the couple was looking for.

They soon set about establishing a large garden and planting fruit trees, as well as converting an old chicken house into a

developing a healthy ecosystem.

Perhaps the fastest growing part of the farm business is the fruit enterprise, which consists of 50 varieties—mostly apples, but also plums, apricots, pears and raspberries. They raise the apples on their own place, as well as a small orchard they manage near New Ulm—it had been neglected for a decade, but the owner is allowing the Knisleys to manage it as long as they do it organically. They market the fruit through the CSA, as well as at a pair of food co-ops, and have some 350 apple trees on their home place that are set to begin producing in the next few years. The couple recently purchased an acre of land adjacent to the farm; they hope to plant fruit trees on it and use a Quonset hut that's on the property to process fruit.

After growing quickly the first few years, the couple, who are in their mid-30s, decided to level out their size and customer



The Knisleys are using a prairie planting to buffer their organic garden plots from chemical-intensive corn and soybean fields, as well as to inject a "wildness" into their farm. (LSP Photo)

produce packing shed. During the winter of 2011-2012, they took the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course.

Today, the Knisleys are raising certified organic vegetables on half-an-acre for a small CSA enterprise and a local farmers' market. Through the CSA and other share agreements with customers, the farm serves about 50 families. The Knisleys have erected a passive solar deep winter greenhouse on the farm so they can offer a winter version of the CSA.

The farm also markets a little over a dozen pasture-raised hogs a year directly to consumers. The pigs, which graze between fruit trees and at the edges of the garden plots, create the kind of closed-loop nutrient cycle the Knisleys believe is integral to

base, giving them a chance to concentrate on managing the land as an ecosystem. The farm may not provide enough income to sustain both John and Brooke, but they are proud of the fact that they don't subsidize it with outside income—it's self-sustaining.

"We're at a place where we really feel this is a good mix and amount for us," says Brooke. "I think there's such a push to just keep growing and growing and growing, and it was just real nice to find that place of balance and focus on getting better, not bigger."

The farmers could expand their market by selling to the Twin Cities region, for example, but serving their local community is important to the Knisleys. "It's our local

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community members that are supporting us and what we're doing and we need to have reciprocity and do the same for them and provide them with access to good food," says John.

Differentiating the Dinosaur

And that means access to a feeling that by supporting Alternative Roots Farm, they are also supporting a more sustainable way of treating the land. After a while, "dinosaur kale is dinosaur kale," as John puts it. But they hear from customers, some of them natural resource professionals, about how they like what they are doing with establishing and maintaining natural habitat in and around their food-producing acres.

Differentiating Alternative Roots kale or apples from other produce available at the farmers' market or grocery store means telling a story about how that food is the product of ecosystem integration. "So they know when they get that apple, it's not just an apple that came from a tree. The pigs were there, and they're helping control all the pests and all that. It's all part of a system," says John.

As he says this, he's checking on the various pig pastures bordering the edges of the farm. In one, hogs are browsing a wide variety of forages: crimson clover, white clover, red clover and alfalfa. Hogs, with their propensity to root, can be hard on a pasture. But what is striking is that the Knisley pastures which had pigs in them just a few weeks before are almost completely recovered. Lush green grass blankets the ground between rows of fruit trees—pigs had been rotationally grazed there just that spring.

Through their newsletter and website, the Knisleys extend environmental education to their customers. Off the farm, John is able to use his relationship with the land at his job in the county's planning and zoning office. He does everything from coordinate recycling and inspect septic systems, to administer the Wetlands Conservation Act and do education programs for school children. He's also excited to be serving on a local soil health team, which consists of a couple dozen area row crop farmers who are trying out soil friendly practices such as cover cropping and minimum tillage.

Such education goes both ways: the Knisleys enjoy working with researchers so they can learn more about the impacts of their practices and ways of monitoring them. The University of Minnesota Plant Pathology Department is doing a native mycorrhizal fungi trial at the farm. Their deep winter greenhouse is also part of a state research

initiative on season extension. "Good nerdy fun," says Brooke with a laugh.

At one point, she and John show off a research initiative that the untrained eye could easily miss. Tucked away under the eaves of various outbuildings are a dozen or so rectangular blocks of wood with various-sized holes drilled into them. A close inspection shows some of the holes have bits of vegetation dangling from them. Residing inside are grass cutting wasps, mason bees and leaf cutter bees. This is part of a project Alternative Roots is doing with the U of M Bee Lab, which is in the thick of trying to figure out ways of keeping pollinators from disappearing completely in farm country.

It's a perfect research project for a farming operation that not only relies on pollinators for its economic livelihood, but sees their presence as key indicators of ecosystem health. All that the Knisleys do, from figuring out their gardening rotation and selecting what fruit varieties to plant, to seeding prairie and moving pig pastures, is filtered through the lens of how to make the farm a healthy ecosystem. Such a big picture view can be overwhelming at times without a solid pivot point to work from, one that is so basic and foundational that anything done to support it provides wide ranging benefits through the entire farm ecosystem. When that indicator is doing well, it's a sign the rest of the system is healthy. For the Knisleys, that pivot point is pollinators.

That means keeping flowering plants on the land as long as possible throughout the year. Alternative Roots grows a wide variety of flowering shrubs and the Knisleys planted 50 different kinds of forbs when doing the

prairie restoration. Sometimes, it's the small things that count: like leaving a compost pile unturned so bumblebees can nest safely, or making sure there is some sort of plant cover between rows of fruit trees.

Other invertebrates also offer indications that the land has come to life. Just a couple of years into their use of rotations, composting and habitat establishment on ground that had formerly grown chemical-intensive row crops, they noticed what Brooke calls an "explosion" of beneficial insects.

Forging Links

One thing Farm Beginnings participants do is develop a vision for their farm and set long-term goals. The Knisleys may have wavered a bit on the details of just what kind of farming they are going to do, but seeing the land come back to life above and below ground provides proof that a key component of their original vision remains intact.

"The farm as ecosystem—we've never really seen any other way than to do it that way," says Brooke definitively. "It's always been our goal to make it as diverse as possible and nurture those different parts—pasture and crop rotation and little pockets of wildlife—wherever we can."

But, she adds, all of that means little if they can't connect that ecosystem with people beyond this island of biodiversity.

"That's why we chose CSA—we want that direct connection with our customers and for them to know how their food is raised, but also for them to know how it impacts our ecosystem." □



"The farm as ecosystem—we've never really seen any other way than to do it that way," says Brooke Knisley. (LSP Photo)

Odd Acres of Opportunity

Sometimes a Farm Transition is Done at a Distance

On a brilliantly bright October afternoon, Chris Mosel makes his way over a clear-running brook and through a stand of basswood, oak and maple on his central Minnesota farm. As he approaches the edge of the woodlot, he steps over a strand of temporarily erected electric fencing that separates the trees from an open pasture. Below the pasture, the brook runs between the barnyard and the back of the farm. A larger waterway called Spunk Creek snakes through another part of the 138-acre property, which is just four miles from the Mississippi River. This patchwork quilt landscape makes for a nice place to take an autumn hike, but moving large cropping equipment from field-to-field would be another matter altogether.

"I like the farm, it's very pretty, but it is kind of an awkward farm," says Chris with a laugh. "It's good land, but it's either erodible or in tiny little patches and this is a big part of what I spend my time on—stringing fences on overgrown pastures."

But he acknowledges that the odd-acre lay-out of the property is what has made this land accessible to a beginning farmer such as himself. "People who are serious about corn and soybean farming don't want this."

Make no mistake, Chris, 34, is serious about farming. It's just that the farming he wants to do—organic, grass-based milk and beef production—doesn't require hundreds of acres of well-drained, tabletop-flat fields, the kind he was used to seeing where he grew up 100 miles south of here. And that's a good thing, since Chris concedes when he offered a price on this farm four years ago, there was little competition from other bidders, who were probably looking for wide open fields and didn't want to deal with lots of running surface water.

But farmland affordability comes at a price. Trying to launch a livestock operation so far from his family's home farm means going without the benefits—handy sharing of machinery and labor, as well as moral support—of being closer to home.

"I still don't regret getting lower priced land, but the distance is difficult. One of the

things I will say the older generation was right about is that if you can, start up farming close to friends or family, some sort of support structure," admits Chris.

In a sense, the young farmer's budding enterprise is still benefiting from the resources a typical family farm transition can provide. Sometimes pure economics don't allow for the kind of passing of the baton that keeps the beginning entrepreneur closer to home, but that doesn't mean some of the sustainable ideas of the older generation can't be passed on over the miles just the same.



Darrel Mosel: "I realized that every farmer within a five-mile radius of me is someone my age, and almost none of them have kids who are going to take over." (Photo by Sylvia Nopar Thomas)

Reversing the Brain Drain

Chris's father, Darrel Mosel, began farming near Gaylord, Minn., in 1981 soon after getting a degree in economics from Augsburg College. He and his wife Diane raise crops and livestock on around 900 acres in Sibley County. This flat, fertile land makes it prime row-cropping country, and the Mosel operation stands out a bit as a result of the presence of livestock, pasture, small grains and hay ground in the midst of a duo-culture

of corn and soybeans. In fact, even though this hasn't been serious dairy country for quite some time, the Mosels have a 75-cow milking herd. Darrel always felt strongly that dairying, with its regular milk checks and reliance on multiple feed sources, offered the best opportunity to make it as a diverse, family farm on a moderate scale. He also believes that farming should be done in a way that protects natural resources. The Minnesota River, which suffers from serious contamination issues as a result of agricultural runoff, is just 20 miles from the Mosel place. That's why Darrel has always worked to rotate crops and build healthy soil, while maintaining perennial buffers along waterways. The presence of livestock provides an economic and agronomic reason to have more cover on the land and roots in the ground all year long.

Darrel, 62, is beginning to wind down his farming career. Specifically, he's considering getting out of the milking part of the business, which is labor intensive. The timing could be good, with Chris interested in farming. Darrel realizes that his son's interest in production agriculture is somewhat unusual, considering that many of his contemporaries are seeing their children leave the land.

"I sat down at one time with the county plat map and I realized that every farmer within a five-mile radius of me is someone my age, and almost none of them have kids who are going to take over," recalls Darrel.

For a time, it looked like Chris was going to be a part of the rural brain drain that sends so many farm kids out of the community, never to return. When he was growing up on the Sibley County farm, he was an avid reader, and gleaned information from books and magazines on a wide range of subjects, from geography to environmental science.

"Chris could probably tell you about every lake, river and tributary in North America," says Darrel.

So it wasn't a big surprise that after high school Chris got a degree in resource economics and international relations from Cornell University in New York, and toyed with the idea of going on to get a law degree. However, he realized he hated working in an office, and the dream of farming drew him back to Minnesota.

But it wasn't just any kind of farming Chris was interested in. One of the things he had read a lot about over the years was organic agriculture. It appealed to him both from an environmental point of view, as

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well as because organic price premiums can produce the kinds of profits that allow a moderate-sized family farm to do well economically.

Organic dairying, in particular, appeals to Chris because he likes working with livestock and milking produces a regular paycheck. At an early age he had been impressed by how pioneers in the use of managed rotational grazing were able to produce milk and beef profitably on land that wasn't considered particularly good for raising row crops on.

"When you read, you get ideas," Chris says with a laugh.

In fact, while in high school, Chris talked his dad into transitioning 120 acres of crop ground to organic production. The older farmer wasn't thrilled with the extra labor and weeds that came with the transition, but once the chemical-free fields began producing decent yields, he was convinced herbicides and petroleum-based fertilizers weren't always needed to raise a good crop.

Chris was never quite able to talk Darrel into transitioning the cowherd to organic, but these days the older farmer is convinced that for a beginning farmer, the organic market, with its premium prices, may be the only avenue to get into dairy farming and succeed in the long term while maintaining a diversified cropping system that's good for the soil and water.

"The margins in conventional farming are just too thin for the average family-sized operation," says Darrel, who has another son, Michael, interested in farming. He half-jokes about the possibility of having two college-graduate children interested in returning to the land: "I wouldn't mind if one of them decided to be a neuroscientist or something."

In 2011, Chris came back to Minnesota and began working for a landscaping company in the Twin Cities. He also farmed part-time on land owned by Diane's family in Stearns County; for years, her parents had milked 30 cows on that farm. Stearns Coun-

ty has a hilly landscape broken up by small stands of timber, creeks and rivers. This rugged geography makes it more amenable to dairying—out of Minnesota's 87 counties, it's number one in milk production—than large-scale cropping. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, the average Stearns County farm is 200 acres; in Sibley County, the average farm is over 360 acres.

Its ruggedness makes Stearns County land less expensive than what's found in



"I think with grazing, you have quite an advantage in that you can go for land considered marginal by others," says Chris Mosel. (LSP Photo)

places further south. Back when Chris was looking for land, per-acre prices were as much as double in Sibley County.

Four years ago, he found the 138-acre parcel a few miles from his grandparents' place, and it had just what he was looking for: a mix of pasture and crop fields, along with a tie-stall milking parlor with three silos for feed storage. No livestock had been on the farm in two decades and the fencing and other facilities needed some work, but the price was right.

Chris is now in the process of purchasing the farm on a contract for deed, an arrangement where the seller finances the sale of

LSP Farm Transitions Workshop this Winter

The Land Stewardship Project will be holding a workshop series this winter on transitioning farms to the next generation. The series will take place on three Saturdays—Jan. 20, Feb. 10 and March 3—in Northfield, Minn. Participants must sign-up for all three sessions.

For details, contact LSP's Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

Give it a Listen

On episode 198 of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Chris Mosel talks about preparing a farm for the next generation: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast.

the property and the buyer agrees to pay the purchase price in monthly installments. The buyer takes possession of the property im-

mediately, while the seller retains the legal title until the contract is paid off.

The young farmer admits a contract for deed tends to draw out the process of him taking complete ownership of all the property. However, the arrangement means during the past few years Chris has been able to work the farm; he sells crops he produces there and grazes a few cattle, which he channels into the conventional beef market. Even more importantly,

he has been able to steadily build up the infrastructure needed to make this operation a working dairy enterprise again.

Road Worrier

About a year ago, Chris quit the landscaping job and began substitute teaching, which gives him more flexibility to spend time on the farm. His home base is Saint Paul, which makes for a lot of time on the road, especially when he travels to Sibley County to help out with farming there or to borrow equipment.

"Either way I go, it's a distance," he says. "The moment I leave, I worry: did it rain on my hay, are the cows out?"

That's why Chris has been thinking more lately about taking the next big step and making farming his sole source of income. That would mean milking fulltime, and selling his dairy production on the organic market. As Chris sees it, the biggest piece of preparation is to make sure the milking herd has a consistent source of organic feed.

"Once milking is my sole source of income and I'm feeding up all my crop, those cows have got to make money," he says.

So he's been busy transitioning crop

Farm Transitions, see page 24...

...Farm Transitions, from page 23

ground to organic production. While giving a tour of the farm on that October afternoon, Chris walks over to an impressive stand of corn, which is just a few days away from being harvested. "That's a beautiful field of corn, you can't even tell it's organic," he says, grabbing an ear to count kernels. "That will help me win my argument with dad that organic can yield."

Chris is also growing alfalfa, soybeans, field peas and sorghum. Right now, these

crops are mostly sold off the farm, helping him make the payments on the contract for deed. What he's most excited about is the recent addition of a fencing system that will make it possible for a cowherd to get much of its nutrition by rotationally grazing the various pastures on the farm. Such a system will allow him to get economic value out of all those awkward, marginal corners while keeping them covered in soil- and water-friendly perennial grasses.

"This is brand new," Chris says while walking along a line of permanent fencing that will keep livestock away from the brook. Mosel got cost-share money through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program to put in fencing, as well as a watering system. The money was available because Chris is considered a beginning farmer who is financially disadvantaged, and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service wants to protect water quality in a vulnerable watershed.

Chris walks toward the back of the farm where a herd of 30 Holsteins are grazing.

The farmer hopes these animals, as well as some from the home farm, can serve as the core of his milking herd. But he's still considering whether to build his own organic herd, or purchase one outright. Both strategies have their advantages and disadvantages. Buying an organic herd is expensive, but building a homegrown bunch of cows can take a couple of years. And right now, Chris isn't sure just how soon he will be stepping into being a fulltime organic milk producer. Either way, he figures a 60-cow milking herd is optimal—it's what the parlor can handle efficiently and it would provide a good

enough income to keep him financially viable. It might even earn enough to make it so Chris could hire help and get away from the farm

"Once milking is my sole source of income and I'm feeding up all my crop, those cows have got to make money."

— Chris Mosel

from time-to-time. Seeing how much his father is tied to the barn as a result of the milking herd is one part of the home farm Chris does not want to emulate.

"To never leave the farm ever, isn't quite the lifestyle I had in mind for myself," he quips.

After checking on the pastures and crop fields, the young farmer heads back to the well-kept barn that houses the parlor. He talks about the steps he will need to take to obtain equipment like a pipeline system and milkers, as well as a barn cleaner. Some of that equipment may become available when his dad closes shop on his dairying enterprise. It will have to travel 100 miles, but Chris can put it to good use.

Both father and son talk about the ideal situation: just as Darrel is wrapping up a three-decades-plus dairying career, Chris will be launching his own. That new operation may be many miles away in a different landscape using non-conventional methods, but it will be based on a common core belief: integrating livestock, crops and pasture



Chris Mosel is transitioning his farm's crop and pasture acres to chemical-free production so that his cowherd will have a consistent source of organic feed once he starts milking. (LSP Photo)

on a moderate scale can pay off economically and environmentally. Chris feels that in a way, having such an attitude gives him a bit of a competitive advantage over farmers whose business model is based on access to hundreds, or thousands, of acres of prime land that provides plenty of room for a 48-row planter to turn around in.

"High land prices are why I ended up 100 miles from my family's home base, and that makes things tough," he says. "But if you're serious about grazing, you can go for the erodible land, you can farm around wooded areas and water. Now it's about just taking the leap and making sure it's profitable." □

Passing On the Farm? Check out the *Farm Transitions Toolkit*

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

economies and sustainable land stewardship.

The *Toolkit* contains resources, links to services and practical calculation tables to help landowners establish a commonsense plan. It also features user-friendly resources on the economic, legal, governmental, agronomic, ecological and even social issues that must be considered in order to ensure a successful farm transition. It is rounded out

with profiles of farmers who are in various stages of transitioning their enterprises to the next generation. An online version of the *Toolkit* is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmtransitiontools/farmtransitiontoolkit; paper versions can be purchased by calling 800-909-6472.

A New Tool for Accessing Ag Assets

Minnesota's Beginning Farmer Tax Credit Launches in January

By Karen Stettler

There is a limit to what a top-notch beginning farmer education can provide. For example, although graduates of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course are receiving training that's been lauded by the USDA as a national model, they, like many beginning farmers, are running into major barriers when it comes to gaining access to land and other assets.

That is why for over a decade LSP has championed some form of tax incentive for selling or renting assets to beginning farmers. The 2017 session of the Minnesota Legislature was no different, with LSP farmer-members like Nolan Lenzen meeting with lawmakers and testifying in favor of such an incentive.

Lenzen, who has a dairy farm in central Minnesota and is a graduate of the Farm Beginnings course, told members of the House Agriculture Policy Committee earlier this year that it was a major struggle getting access to farmland a decade ago.

"It felt tough to find land 10 years ago, so I can't imagine what new farmers are facing today," he said. "This legislation would have helped me secure land more easily because of the incentive for the landowner."

LSP's efforts paid off in May when, as a result of the leadership of Rep. Nels Pierson (R-Rochester), the Beginning Farmer Incentive Tax Credit was passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Mark Dayton. This law provides an incentive to sell or rent land or other agricultural assets — tractor, combine, seeder etc. — to a beginning farmer. The state tax credit will become available for the first time in January 2018. While similar to beginning farmer tax credits that are available in Iowa and Nebraska, Minnesota is the first state to provide such an incentive for the sale of farmland.

The initiative's budget in 2018 is \$5 million; that increases to \$6 million per year

from 2019 through 2023. It's first come, first served, so it's important that both land-owners and beginning farmers wishing to participate begin to prepare now. Here we've



Dairy farmer and Farm Beginnings graduate Nolan Lenzen says when he was looking for land a decade ago, he would have benefited greatly from a program like the Beginning Farmer Incentive Tax Credit. (LSP Photo)

included a few basics to be aware of.

How Much is the Tax Credit?

The Beginning Farmer Incentive Tax Credit, which is being administered by the Rural Finance Authority, can be applied to land or other assets, including livestock, facilities, buildings and machinery (equipment dealers do not qualify for the credit). The credit available to the asset owner is:

- 5 percent of the sale price or fair market value — whichever is less — of the agricultural asset, up to a maximum of \$32,000.
- 10 percent of the gross rental income in each of the first, second and third years of the rental agreement, up to a maximum of \$7,000 per year.
- 15 percent of the cash equivalent of the gross rental income in each of the first, second and third years of a share rent agreement, up to a maximum of \$10,000 per year.
- Cash rent or share rent agreements can qualify for the tax credit.

Who Qualifies?

To qualify for these credits, the "beginning farmer" must be someone who is:

- A Minnesota resident who is seeking entry, or has entered into farming within the past 10 years.
- A farmer who will provide the majority of the labor and management of the farm that is located in Minnesota.

- Can provide positive projected earnings statements.
- Not directly related to the owner of the agricultural asset.
- Has a net worth that does not exceed \$800,000.

Financial Management Program Enrollment

One important requirement for beginning farmers hoping to benefit from this tax credit is that they be enrolled in a financial management program approved by the Rural Finance Authority. For example, the Minnesota Farm Business Management Program currently qualifies, and LSP expects the Farm Beginnings course to be added to the approved list in the future.

The Rural Finance Authority can help beginning farmers find an eligible financial management program in their area. In addition, beginning farmers can receive a

tax credit — up to a maximum of \$1,500 per year for three years — that applies to the cost of participating in a financial management program. □

LSP organizer Karen Stettler works on farm transition issues. She can be contacted at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

Tax Credit Meetings

The Land Stewardship Project will be holding workshops on the Beginning Farmer Incentive Tax Credit Nov. 28 in Winona, Minn., and Jan. 11 in Northfield, Minn. Both workshops run from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. For details, contact LSP's Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

Details on the Tax Credit

For more information on the Tax Credit, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/beginningfarmertaxcredit, or contact Stettler.

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

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

Seeking Farmland

◆ Sam Karns is seeking to rent 1-2 acres of tillable farmland *within 25 miles of Duluth in northeastern Minnesota*. He would like to raise vegetables and pigs, and the ideal farm would have pasture, soil suitable for vegetables and the option for a longer-term lease. Land that has not been sprayed for at least three years would also be ideal. No house is needed. Contact: Sam Karns, 612-817-1910, sam.karns@gmail.com.

◆ Jatty Zondo is seeking to purchase 2-5 tillable acres of farmland in *Minnesota, South Dakota or North Dakota*. The land must have water or a well. No house is required. Contact: Jatty Zondo, 207-502-9666, victoriazondo@outlook.com.

◆ Evan Petrack is seeking to purchase 12 acres of farmland in *Wisconsin*. Land with 7 tillable acres and 5 forested acres is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Evan Petrack, 724-831-8566, Evanpetrack@gmail.com.

◆ John Kosowski and Sarah Claassen are seeking to purchase 20+ acres of tillable farmland in *western Wisconsin*. Land with 10+ tillable acres and 10+ forested acres is preferred. No house is required. Contact: John Kosowski or Sarah Claassen, 612-978-6370, seven.story.orchard@gmail.com.

◆ Dan Loeven is seeking to rent 100 acres of farmland in *Wisconsin, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa or Illinois*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that includes 60 pastured acres, 20 tillable acres and 20 forested acres is preferred. Outbuildings such as a barn, sheds and root cellar, along with fencing and water, are also preferred. No house is required. Contact: Dan Loeven, 917-620-6811, Loevendc@gmail.com.

◆ Zachary Paige is seeking to purchase 80 acres of farmland in *northwestern Minnesota (within 20 miles of Detroit Lakes, Mahanomen or White Earth)*. Land with 5-20 pastured acres, 10+ tillable acres and 30 forested acres is preferred. A barn is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Zach Paige, zacharypaige@gmail.com.

◆ Collin Christian is seeking to pur-

chase 5-50 acres of farmland in *Iowa*. Land with 2-10 acres of pasture, 5-10 tillable acres and 20 forested acres is preferred. Land that is certified organic is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Collin Christian, 407-451-5682.

◆ Jordan Bretzman is seeking to rent 50+ acres of pasture in *southwestern Minnesota (Jackson or Cottonwood County) or northwestern Iowa (Dickinson County)*. No house is required. Contact: Jordan Bretzman, 507-840-1661, jordan.bretzman@live.mnwest.edu.

◆ Sarah and Robert Coates are seeking to purchase 10-60 acres of tillable farmland in *Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota or Illinois*. Land with a barn, shed, chicken coop, house, electricity and water is preferred. Land with pasture, trees and streams is also preferred. They would like to purchase on land contract or similar terms. Contact: Sarah Coates, 618-553-3028, sarahcoates7072@gmail.com.

◆ Bob and Hillary Leuer are seeking to purchase farmland in *Minnesota* and/or work with a farmer who wants to transition their operation to the next generation. They grew up around livestock and have animal science degrees, as well as 10+ years of experience working in agriculture. They would prefer to farm in Wright, McLeod, Carver, Scott, Rice, Dakota or Goodhue County. They will consider various transition options. Contact: Bob and Hillary Leuer, FarmingMinnesota@gmail.com.

◆ Jacob Olsgaard is seeking to purchase 7-30 acres of tillable farmland in *northeastern Iowa*. Contact: Jacob Olsgaard, 701-238-9759, j.olsgaard9@gmail.com.

◆ Chad and Holly Berge are seeking to purchase 40+ tillable acres of farmland in *northwestern Wisconsin's Dunn County or far western Chippewa County*. They are currently practicing rotational grazing with their cattle and they would be interested in a farm-transition-to-the-next-generation type of situation. Land with 20 acres pasture, a house and a barn or shed is preferred. Enough pasture to keep approximately 30 head of beef cattle during the winter is preferred. A minimum of 10 acres with home is preferred. Contact: Chad or Holly Berge, 715-308-1670, bergesbeef@hotmail.com.

◆ Kevin and Christine Ballman are seeking to purchase 40-160+ acres of farmland in *southeastern Minnesota or southwestern Wisconsin*. Land with fenced pasture, outbuildings, a house, productive soils and a conservation plan is preferred. Contact: Kevin Ballman, 651-385-0321.

◆ Nicole Ostreim is seeking to rent 1-2 acres of tillable farmland in the *Twin Cities, Minn., area*. Land that is certified organic and that has access to water is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Nicole Ostreim, nicole.ostreim@gmail.com.

◆ Dean Smith is seeking to purchase 1-2 acres of farmland in *Walworth or Kenosha County in southeastern Wisconsin*. Smith has a hydroponic growing operation and land with a good well and that has a greenhouse is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Dean Smith, 630-699-4348, dean@sashasfarmfresh.com.

◆ Susanne Storck is seeking to rent under 10 acres of farmland in *northwestern Wisconsin (Prairie Farm area)*. Land with fenced pasture, a barn, shed, greenhouse and hoop house (or space to erect such structures) is preferred. Contact: Susan Storck, felicityfarmcsa@gmail.com.

◆ Holly Moore is seeking to rent 1-5 acres of farmland in the *Twin Cities, Minn., region (Hennepin, Anoka or Carver County)*. Land that is certified organic and that has a water source, fencing, a tool shed and a drying shed is preferred. Contact: Holly Moore, 612-810-0018, hollycmoore@hotmail.com.

◆ Anthony Ratkovich is seeking to rent 1-40 acres of tillable farmland in *Hennepin County in the Twin Cities region of Minnesota*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a small storage shed or barn, as well as a house, is preferred. Any greenhouse structure or materials for construction would also be a plus. Contact: Anthony Ratkovich, 612-325-0155; or Lawren, 218-341-7430.

◆ Matthew Culling is seeking to rent 4 acres of farmland in *Minnesota*; no house is required. Contact: Matthew Culling, 512-820-0329.

Clearinghouse, see page 27...

◆ Paul is seeking to purchase 60-180 acres of tillable farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin*. He would prefer land with no foreseeable development potential. No house or outbuildings are required; one building site would be good, but is not required. He can pay cash. Contact: Paul, 608-588-6365, cropground@att.net.

Farmland Available

◆ Kate Stout has for sale a 25-acre vegetable operation in *western Wisconsin's Barron County (near Prairie Farm)*. The land has not been sprayed for over 25 years and could be certified organic. There are approximately 12 acres of open, flat and almost rock-free sandy loam soil. The farm operation includes an older heated greenhouse with new LP heater, three hoop houses, packing shed space attached to a barn with walk-in cooler, harvest tubs and a sink, etc. There is a barn with trolly barn cleaner and large manure shed that could also be used for machinery storage. Vegetable equipment includes water wheel transplanter, plastic mulch layer, potato harvester, John Deere flail mower, IH 80 pull-behind combine, Allis Chalmers 170 tractor (55 HP), tractor rototiller. Other buildings include an older granary, tractor shed with three bays and room for combine, and tool shed. There is an updated farmhouse with two small bedrooms and an apartment upstairs that could be used as living space. There is an additional semi-attached 10 x 10 with loft living quarters for three seasons with electricity. There is a new well with capacity to run at least 600 feet of aluminum pipe with sprinklers (included in price). Depending on purchaser, Stout could offer a land contract to help new farmers with extensive experience get started. The asking price is \$230,000 without equipment; \$250,000 with equipment. Contact: Kate Stout, 510-725-2298, kate.stout59@yahoo.com.

◆ Greg Price has for rent 225 tillable acres of certified organic farmland in *northern Minnesota's Becker County (near Osage)*. The land has two center-pivot irrigators and previous crops included potatoes, edible beans, soybeans, wheat, field peas, oats, alfalfa and corn. A house is available. The asking price is \$200 per acre. Contact: Greg Price, 218-573-3178, 48plyhemi@gmail.com.

◆ Jeff S. has for sale 37 acres of farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin's Vernon County (near Hillsboro)*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it consists

of 15 pastured acres, 14 tillable acres and 8 forested acres. There is a barn, two-car detached garage, one-car detached garage, toolshed and a house. There is a natural spring-fed pond and a natural spring-fed stream; the land is in the heart of an Amish community. The asking price is \$255,000 to \$270,000. Contact: Jeff S., 608-475-3906, usercode8888@gmail.com.

◆ Knelly Dettinger has for sale 18.34 acres of farmland in *western Wisconsin (near Mondovi in Pepin County)*. There are 5 pastured acres, 2 tillable acres and 5 forested acres. The land has not been sprayed for several years. There is a 2013-built house and a newer pole barn, as well as storage for livestock and machinery, and a workshop. The asking price is \$199,900. Contact: Knelly Dettinger, 507-272-0526, knelly@truliving.co.

◆ Ken Raspotnik has for rent 300 acres of farmland in *northwestern Wisconsin's Bayfield County (near Ashland)*. There is 110 acres of pastureland, 170 acres tillable and 20 acres forested. The pasture is fenced for rotational grazing with gravel lanes and water tanks. The land is currently raising 40-head Devon cattle with 30 horses, which can be taken over for management. A log cabin is available. Contact: Ken Raspotnik, 715-682-9240, Ken@raspotnikfarm.com.

◆ The Webbs have for sale a 30-acre specialty crop operation in *west-central Minnesota's Otter Tail County*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and there are 10 tillable acres and 15 pastured acres. There is a house and outbuildings include a 36 x 45 packing shed (built in 2010) with an 8-foot overhang. The packing shed has an 8 x 16 walk-in cooler, 3-compartment stainless steel sink, 3-door freezer and 4-door cooler, in-floor heat, toilet and sink with holding tank. There is a 36 x 45 pole barn (also built in 2010), with corral; some of the pasture is fenced. There is also a 30 x 96 high tunnel, 30 x 100 greenhouse that has a 250,000 btu hot water heater, one 54" exhaust fan and two intake electric shutters (all thermostatic controlled). The property includes 16 apple trees, Nanking cherries and choke cherries, as well as landscaping around the house. The asking price is \$199,500. Contact: the Webb family, 218-847-5642, dianewebb1763@gmail.com.

◆ Jake Grass has for sale 70 acres of farmland in *eastern Minnesota's Pine County (near Pine City)*. Sixty-nine acres are tillable, and it has not been sprayed for 12 years. There is a 50 x 100 pole shed, with an 18 x 54 insulated shop area, as well as a house. The pasture has 5-wire high tensile fencing with 11 paddocks. There are apple trees and high bush cranberries, and the farm is on a dead-end road. The asking price is \$335,000. Contact: Jake Grass, 651-249-6583, Grassenterprises@

hotmail.com.

◆ Judith Driscoll has for sale a 10-acre farm in *western Wisconsin (near Balsam Lake)*. There are 8 acres tillable, which haven't been sprayed in 15 years. The land includes 3/4 acres fenced goat/sheep pasture with an electrified wire along the top. Mature trees include sugar maple and black walnut. There are apple and apricot trees, as well as blueberry and raspberry bushes. There is a wooden pole barn set up for goats, a tractor and hay storage. A second metal pole barn can house tractors or a car. There is a two-bedroom house, and a chicken tractor. Electric fencing and livestock supplies are negotiable. Driscoll would like to sell to a beginning farmer. She is willing to work with Farm Service Agency or other financing. The asking price is \$140,000. Contact: Judith Driscoll, judithdriscoll@gmail.com, 612-961-2199.

◆ Taran has for sale 40 acres of farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin's Vernon County (near Hillsboro)*. There is a mix of forested and tillable acres; the tillable land is fallow and eligible for organic certification. The land has not been sprayed for several years. There is a fully renovated farm house and a two-story heated garage with guest quarters upstairs. The asking price is \$257,000. Contact: Taran, tshep756@hotmail.com.

◆ Christie Nicklay has for rent 84.3 tillable acres of farmland in *southeastern Minnesota's Houston County (near Caledonia)*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and all fields have full sun. It was farmed organically for 25 years (1992-2017), and was in CRP from 1985 to 1992. The rental rate is \$200-\$250; a 5-year minimum contract. Contact: Christie Nicklay, 507-450-0496, cmnicklay@gmail.com.

Seeking Farmer

◆ Sarah Wexler-Mann is seeking a farmer to join her operation in *southeastern Minnesota's Houston County*, beginning in March. The farm produces vegetables, flowers and hops. More information on the farm is at www.sweet16farm.com. She is currently farming 2 acres, with room to expand. The land has not been sprayed for several years. Wexler-Mann is expanding her gardens in 2018 and is seeking full-time or part-time help. Farm experience is appreciated, but a passion for farming also helps. Responsibilities include everything from greenhouse work to field prep/plants, as well as high tunnel management, harvesting, bouquet design and helping out at annual farm events. Contact: Sarah Wexler-Mann, 507-864-2260, sarahjoy@sweet16farm.com.



Conservation on the Northern Plains New Perspectives

Edited by Anthony J. Amato

2017; 215 pages

The Center for Western Studies

www.augie.edu/center-for-western-studies

Reviewed by Jason Abraham

Like the Northern Plains themselves, *Conservation on the Northern Plains* is vast, complex and reflective of how use and attitudes shape North America's grasslands. This collection of 11 conservation-oriented essays, which is edited by Anthony Amato, is produced mainly by historians, but the writing is extremely timely.

The subject matter is rich, varied and often replete with well-chosen illustrations of the differences of public opinion toward conservation. While writings on specific, often landscape-scale issues are mainstays, the collection also addresses the history of ecology and provides a number of thoughtful discussions on how conservation is viewed today and how that has changed in recent decades.

The book begins with a foreword by award-winning Minneapolis *Star Tribune* outdoor columnist Dennis Anderson, who discusses his own growth from a youthful tag-along duck hunter on the potholes of North Dakota to a thoughtful leader who continues to remind us of the importance of wild places. He asks if indifference to wild places and wild creatures is born of nature, nurture or both, and whether that can be changed. His eventual answers to both questions, editor Amato writes in his preface, "affirm the currency and value of each of the chapters in the book."

In the opening piece, "The Tallgrass Prairie: Raymond Lindeman, a Minnesota Bog Lake, and the Birth of Ecosystems Ecology," William Hoffman uses the life and work of Lindeman as the springboard for a deep dive into the science behind ecology, exploring everything from energy transfer in natural systems to modern genomics. Lindeman, who died at age 27 of a rare form of hepatitis, did much of his work at the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve, and is consid-

ered a pioneering ecosystems ecologist.

While the science behind Lindeman's ideas is a large part of the story, there are still enough biographical details to provide insights into how passionate he was about ecology. The author describes the close-to-the-bone life led by Lindeman and his wife, Eleanor, who became an algal specialist. "His \$600 annual stipend as a teaching assistant was enough so that he and Eleanor could just get by," Hoffman writes. "They lived in a trailer a few minutes' walk from a basement room in the zoology building where they did their research using the analytical instruments available."

Some stories portray attitudes toward conservation through the eyes of those who make their living from the land. These essays do not avoid controversy. As Amato says, they "spare few and little." Such is the

case in Stephen Eliason's contribution, "Elk Killers, Liberal Politics, and Tourist Magnets: Outfitter Perceptions of Wolves in Montana," which explores anti-wolf attitudes from a 2005 survey of hunting outfitters. With few exceptions, outfitters preferred fewer wolves because they prey on elk, which are the basis of the outfitters' business.

"I wish they'd let them come back on their own," one survey respondent wrote. "Now I wish they'd turn management of them to the state so they could be managed more as wildlife than HOLY animals."

Still, interspersed with anti-wolf sentiments were the comments of outfitters who not only understood the intrinsic value of the predators, but were profiting from it. "I love the wolves and would help promote them at all opportunities," wrote one. "[It is] very wonderful to see wolves — it's one reason people come here." Concluding the piece, Eliason explains that the purpose of the survey was to reflect local opinion and increase understanding of the complexities around conflict over access and allocation of natural resources.

"Cattle Ranching in South Dakota: Three Variations on a Theme," describes a rancher who is coming to terms with different attitudes toward ranching, eating meat and the tradeoff between thin profits and doing what's best for the land.

Rounding out the more controversial pieces is Lisa Payne Ossian's "Too much' and 'too little': Land, Food, and Farms in Rural Iowa after 1933." In this essay, Ossian

provides an unvarnished look at the politics and money behind decades of social and environmental decline in rural Iowa.

One of the most hopeful chapters is Peter Carrels' "A Grassroots Movement for Grass and Roots," which discusses farmers who opt for a more eco-friendly approach to agriculture. After a broad introduction that describes why some farmers reject the status quo, Carrels profiles three conservationists who farm where Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota meet. Each describes the events that led them to approach farming differently, the methods they use today and how the shift has changed their businesses and their lives.

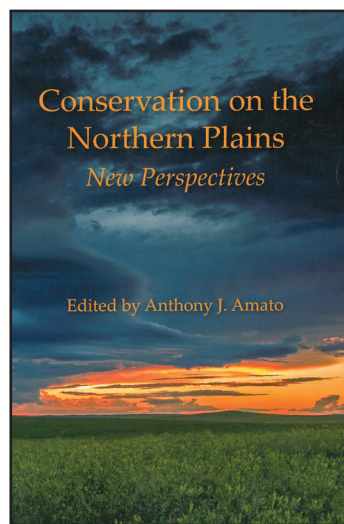
Perhaps the most thoughtful pieces come from the collection's editor, Anthony Amato, an associate professor of social science at Southwest Minnesota State University, and

his father, the historian Joseph Amato. Their essays demonstrate the power of conservation to create not just conflict, but also to give strength and guidance—even deal defeat. In "Saving Up on the Prairie: The Honeybee, the Pheasant, Lake Politics, and Ethanol," the younger Amato discusses how conservation shapes reality as it rests between "maximum efficiency in use of natural resources and concern for the environment's non-human elements." He deftly uses the honeybee, the pheasant and the politics of restoration to reveal how use and past action shape today's grasslands. The elder Amato's

"Conservation on the Northern Plains: From Farm Field to Biosphere," shows how conflicting sentiments around conservation at various times in history shape what we think of as conservation today.

Those of us who live in or near the Northern Plains understand that no collection of essays could fully capture the vastness of the landscape and the people, a fact the editor acknowledges. But *Conservation on the Northern Plains* does a noteworthy job of presenting a variety of voices that express the frank views of many. It's emphasis on history gives this volume a comprehensive view of the state of conservation and its practitioners in today's world. □

Jason Abraham is a Land Stewardship Project member who lives in West St. Paul with his wife and three daughters. Next spring, they plan to visit the eastern edge of the Northern Plains in hopes of seeing greater prairie chickens on their dancing grounds.



Locally Laid How We Built a Plucky, Industry-Changing Egg Farm — From Scratch

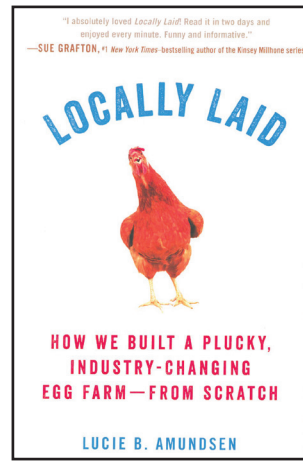
By Lucie B. Amundsen
2016; 320 pages
Avery Publishing
www.penguin.com

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

Lucie Amundsen's *Locally Laid* is an honest and often humorous account of how a Minnesota family transitioned from stable employment (with benefits) in the city to the unstable and uncertain life of fledgling pasture-based egg farmers. Make no mistake: this is no how-to book on free-range egg production, but an entertaining narrative about a family pursuing what they think is right. Egg farming that utilizes methods which allow chickens to be chickens is a way Amundsen's family can bring food to eaters who care how it's produced and its impact on the community. But the author is open about her early

misgivings as she learns of her husband Jason's bizarre scheme to transition from being a grant writer to a farmer that produces eggs using natural methods—something he knows nothing about. Amundsen, who has a master's of fine arts in writing, has a deft touch, and uses humor and honesty to describe just how stressful this was for their relationship: "Just a day after the restaurant 'farm-gument' with all its theatrical howls and hand gestures, I subsided into quiet, rational conversation. I gently walked Jason through the many, many reasons why we were not the people to undertake this egg venture."

Amundsen's reasons were many and made economic and practical sense. But in the end, this is a story of a family overlooking certain realities and pursuing a dream. As the author predicted, setting up such an operation was difficult. Amundsen describes the numerous barriers they had to overcome, including finances, acquiring chickens and identifying a steady customer base. It's also just plain hard, often stressful, work. "Jason



carried disappointment like feed buckets, his shoulders stooped under its weight," Amundsen writes of her husband in a passage that shows off her observational skills.

Thanks in part to its memorable name, the Locally Laid Egg Company eventually gained media notoriety, both regionally and nationally. But in her typically blunt manner, Amundsen makes it clear there is a difference between being a public relations success, and a successful, profitable farm.

She ends the book describing the opportunities, and challenges, involved with continuing to produce eggs using creative management and marketing. The author doesn't sugar coat it, but she has an ace-in-the-hole, one that was strengthened by the experience of working through the launching of an innovative business: her family.

Concludes Amundsen, "Thankfully, I'm not alone for any of it." □

Land Stewardship Project member Dale Hadler lives in southeastern Minnesota.

Beneath the Bedrock

By Julien Bradley
2017; 368 pages
Wise Ink Creative Publishing
<https://squareup.com/store/julien-bradley>

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

Beneath the Bedrock is a fictional account of personal relationships, rural life, Chicago lawyers, Texas oil men and frac sand.

The author Julien Bradley's central character is Ramona Brady Strong, the recent widow of a southeastern Minnesota landowner who was a frac sand opponent. She returns to her North Dakota home after the death of her father there only to find herself embroiled in a power struggle over the mineral rights to his land. Ironically, it turns out Ramona has inherited one of the richest untapped oil fields in the region.

A struggle ensues that involves Ramona, her father's business partners and a Texas based energy company represented by a manipulative Chicago attorney named John.

A running thread throughout the book is

the complex relationships between Ramona, John, her father's business partners and childhood friends Nate and Massey. In a sense, these relationships reflect the overall complexity of Ramona's life as the widow of a frac sand opponent who finds herself in possession of an oil-rich North Dakota farm. Such torn allegiances often overwhelm many families who are divided between environmental concerns and the economic lure of the fossil fuel industry.

Beneath the Bedrock contains stunning descriptions of the Driftless Area that Ramona travels through via Amtrak's famed Empire Builder on her journey from Minnesota to North Dakota. With the exception of Glacier National Park, Ramona considers the most scenic part of the journey to be southeastern Minnesota's Hiawatha River Valley.

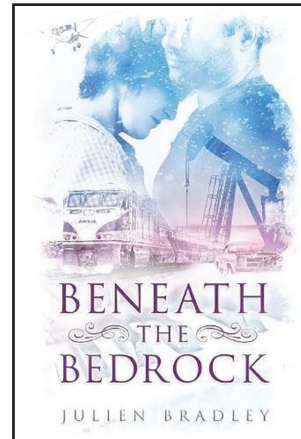
It is "abounding with splendor regardless of the season," reflects Ramona. "Even winter possessed its own quiet beauty along the bluffs, exposing hidden limestone caves shrouded with cascades of blue, green and

ghost white, while eagles soared between river and bluffs swooping down over open water to catch fish near Reads Landing."

Anyone who has spent time in this region will recognize such a scene. Those kinds of descriptions alone set this book apart.

Bradley also demonstrates an excellent understanding of the fossil fuel industry and the environmental and social concerns that come with it. She understands the impacts extreme energy extraction can have on communities, no matter where they are at in the process. Bradley worked as a nurse in North Dakota for a time and now makes her home in southeastern Minnesota. So she's seen firsthand the environmental, social and political impacts of frac sand mining in the Driftless Area, as well as what happens when that sand is used to extract fossil fuels in places like the Bakken Shale.

Although this book is classified as a "romance novel," that description unfairly limits its appeal. Anyone interested in the complexities of fossil fuels and hydraulic fracturing, as well as the impacts these activities have on rural communities, would find *Beneath the Bedrock* a good read. □





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Membership Update

2017 LSP Twin Cities Cookout



Locally produced food was the focus of the Land Stewardship Project's 16th annual Summer Cookout and Potluck, held July 27 in the yard next to LSP's Minneapolis office. The event also featured live music from the Brass Messengers, local beer, a silent auction and a pie raffle. We'd like to thank all of the volunteers who helped with registration, set-up and clean-up. LSP also greatly appreciates the generosity of the members and local business owners who donated items to the silent auction. (LSP Photo)

HEAL Meeting

In September, the steering council and staff of the Health, Environment, Agriculture and Labor (HEAL) Food Alliance met for its annual retreat at the Land Stewardship Project's offices in Minneapolis. HEAL's mission is to build collective power to create food and farm systems that are healthy for our families, accessible and affordable for all communities, and fair to the hard-working people who grow, distribute, prepare, and serve our food — while protecting the air, water and land.

Pictured are: (back row, left to right) Julian Mocine-McQueen, retreat facilitator; Mark Schultz, Land Stewardship Project; Ricardo Salvador, Union of Concerned Scientists; Anim Steel, Real Food Challenge; (front row, left to right) Dara Cooper, National Black Food and Justice Alliance; Jose Oliva, Food Chain Workers Alliance; Neshani Jani, HEAL communications director; Magaly Licolli, Northwest Arkansas Worker's Justice Center; Navina Khanna, HEAL director; Devika Ghai, Pesticide Action Network; Sara Leon Guerrero, HEAL operations manager; Erika Inwald, Domestic Fair Trade Association; Phillip Barker, farmer, Operation Spring Plant; and Jay Conui, HEAL political leadership coordinator. (LSP Photo)



Volunteer for LSP

A big "thank you" goes out to the volunteers who help the Land Stewardship Project in all aspects of our work. LSP literally could not fulfill its mission without the hard work of our volunteers. Volunteers help us do everything from stuff envelopes and make telephone calls to enter data and set up logistics for meetings. If you'd like to volunteer in one of our offices, contact:

• **Montevideo, Minnesota:**

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

• **Lewiston, Minnesota:**

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

• **Minneapolis, Minnesota:**

Amelia Shoptaugh, 612-722-6377,
amelia@landstewardshipproject.org

Membership Questions?

If you have questions about the status of your Land Stewardship Project membership, give our Individual Giving and Membership Program a call at 612-722-6377, or send an e-mail to megans@landstewardshipproject.org. ☐

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 Everett Koenig

◆ Linda Koenig

In Memory of Lou Anne Kling

◆ Virginia Homme
◆ Jim & Lee Ann VanDerPol
◆ Vicki & Keith Poier
◆ Wayne Kling

In Memory of Phyllis Pladsen

◆ Karen Bartig

In Memory of Arlo & Eileen Berentson

◆ Jay Fier

In Memory of Curt Sloan

◆ Helen Duritsa

In Memory of John & Peggy Leaverton

◆ Jessie & Steven Pinney

In honor of Dan & Teresa Young

◆ Jessie & Steven Pinney

In Honor of Peace United Methodist Church Reverends Cooper Wiggen & Cheryl Nymann

◆ Jessie & Steven Pinney

In Memory of Harvey Hultquist

◆ Iver & Jeanne Iverson

In Memory of Mary Radermacher

◆ Kay & Annette Fernholz

In Honor & Memory of Joe Morse

◆ Gretchen Cook
◆ Bonita Underbakke & Harvey Benson

In Honor of Gretchen Goodman

◆ Betsy Goodman

In Memory of David Tacke

◆ Pat & Denise Cody
◆ The staff of the Pohlada Family Foundation
◆ Leroy Dingle
◆ Joyce Driessen
◆ Sophia Ramirez
◆ Alec Johnson
◆ Margaret Richards & Mary Thrope-Mease
◆ Ann Moore
◆ Cindy & Tom Bowden
◆ Ryan Tacke
◆ J & R Dalzell
◆ Kathleen Wold
◆ Karen Swanson
◆ Stephen Stedman
◆ Amy Crawford
◆ Teresa Egge
◆ Michael Driessen
◆ Harvey Benson & Bonita Underbakke
◆ Linda Tacke
◆ Peter & Vicki Torkelson
◆ Jim & Shirley Gannon

◆ David & Sandy Webb
◆ William & Jan Hesse
◆ Gary & Sharon Smieja
◆ Joel & Barbara Mielke
◆ David & Denise Hughes
◆ Harvey & Rebecca Hudlow
◆ Betsy Holbrook
◆ Connie & Doug Peterson
◆ David & Julie Hanson
◆ Karen Klein
◆ Newton & Carol Hicks
◆ Suzanne & John Severson
◆ Robert Byers & Jeanne Ferrian
◆ Jeff Kamm & Nancy Martinson
◆ Jan & Bill Hanson
◆ Paula & Bill Tacke
◆ Susan Krueger
◆ Timothy & Molly Goodyear
◆ Jack & Dorene Peterson
◆ Patricia Wilder & Ryan Schroeder
◆ Renee Bergstrom
◆ Joan Heinen
◆ Ronald & Nancy Enger
◆ J. Michael & Denise Gannon
◆ Ric & Mary Jo Blanchard
◆ JoAnne Furey
◆ Patrick & Mary Ann King
◆ James McDonald
◆ Joseph & Janice Pauli
◆ Michael & Sheila Dalton

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

Support LSP in Your Workplace

The Land Stewardship Project is a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, which is a coalition of 20 environmental organizations in Minnesota that 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 or 612-722-6377. □



MINNESOTA
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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **NOV. 28—LSP Workshop on the Minnesota Beginning Farmer Incentive Tax Credit**, Winona, Minn. (*see page 25*)
→ **NOV. 28-29—Green Lands Blue Waters Conf.**, University of Wisconsin-Madison, www.cias.wisc.edu/glbw2017; Pam Porter, pporter@wisc.edu, 608-575-2055
→ **DEC. 7-8—Midwest CSA Conf.**, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. Contact: Sarah Lloyd, Wisconsin Farmers Union, 608-844-3758, www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com
→ **DEC. 13—Application Deadline for Minn. Sustainable Agriculture & Demonstration Grants**. Contact: Ann Kuzj, MDA, 651-201-6028, www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/demogrant.aspx
→ **JAN. 8—Deadline for farmers to submit listings to the 2018 LSP CSA Directory** (*see page 6*)
→ **JAN. 11—LSP Workshop on the Minnesota Beginning Farmer Incentive Tax Credit**, Northfield, Minn. (*see page 25*)
→ **JAN. 11-12—Minn. Organic Conf.**, St. Cloud. Contact: 651-201-6012, www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/conference.aspx
→ **JAN. 14—MNsure open enrollment deadline for 2018 health insurance plans in Minnesota** (*see page 11*)
→ **JAN. 18-19—Midwest Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conf.**, St. Cloud. Contact: www.mfvga.org; 763-434-0400
→ **JAN. 19—"Bringing Livestock Back" LSP-SFA Workshop**, Glenwood, Minn. Contact: Bryan Simon, LSP, 320-492-2526, bsimon@landstewardshipproject.org
→ **JAN. 20—LSP Generational Farm Transitions Workshop**, Northfield, Minn. (*see page 23*)
→ **JAN. 19-20—Practical Farmers of Iowa Conf.**, Ames, Iowa. Contact: www.practicalfarmers.org; 515-232-5661

→ **JAN. 25-27—Northern Plains Sustainable Ag Society Conf.**, Aberdeen, S. Dak. Contact: www.npsas.org; 701-883-4304
→ **JAN. 26-27—13th Emerging Farmers Conf.**, University of Minnesota-St. Paul. Contact: Emily Squyres, Minnesota Food Association, emily@mnfoodassociation.org, 651-433-3676; www.mnfoodassociation.org
→ **FEB. 10—LSP Generational Farm Transitions Workshop**, Northfield, Minn. (*see page 23*)
→ **FEB. 10—LSP soil biology & microscope demonstration with Dr. Elaine Ingham**, Rochester, Minn. (*see page 15*)
→ **FEB. 10—Sustainable Farming Association of Minn. Conf.**, St. Joseph. Contact: www.sfa-mn.org, 844-922-5573
→ **FEB. 20—2018 Minn. State Legislature convenes**. Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 612-722-6377, bking@landstewardshipproject.org
→ **FEB. 22-24—MOSES Organic**

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

Farming Conf., La Crosse, Wis. Contact: <https://mosesorganic.org>; 715-778-5775
→ **MARCH 3—LSP Generational Farm Transitions Workshop**, Northfield, Minn. (*see page 23*)
→ **MARCH 27—LSP soil health workshop featuring Ray Archuleta**, southeastern Minnesota. (*see page 15*)
→ **MARCH 28—LSP soil health workshop featuring Ray Archuleta**, southeastern Minnesota (*see page 15*)
→ **MARCH 29—LSP soil health workshop featuring Ray Archuleta** (*see page 15*)
→ **SEPT. 1—Application Deadline for 2018-2019 LSP Farm Beginnings Course**. Contact www.farmbeginnings.org; 507-523-3366

Make a Stewardship (Fashion) Statement

Just in time for our 35th anniversary year, the Land Stewardship Project has a new t-shirt available. LSP staff member Josh Journey-Heinz has designed a light, comfortable shirt that shows off the wearer's support of "keeping the land and people together."

The shirts are "avocado" green, and come in various sizes, with women's and men's cuts available. They are ring-spun 100 percent organic cotton and made in the United States.

The price is \$20, and the shirts are available from our offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377), as well as at LSP events and meetings. Shirts can also be ordered from our online store at www.landstewardshipproject.org/store.

