

# *The Land Stewardship*



LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

*31 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together*

## *Letter*

Volume 31

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Number 4, 2013



Are you ready to transition your farm to the next generation? (see pages 12-24).



- Nitrogen Pollution, People & Livestock—*
- The Big Land Grab's Impact on Beginning Farmers—*
- Time to Sign-up for the 2014 CSA Directory—*
- The Missing Farm Bill—*
- Grants for Farmers, Sustainable Ag—*
- The Next Steps for People-Centered Healthcare—*
- Making Cover Crops Cool—*
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The *Land Stewardship Letter* is published by the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization. The mission of the Land Stewardship Project is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture and to develop sustainable communities. Members of the Land Stewardship Project receive this publication as a benefit. Annual membership dues are \$35.

All inquiries pertaining to the content of the *Land Stewardship Letter* should be addressed to the editor, Brian DeVore, 821 East 35th Street, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407-2102; phone: 612-722-6377; e-mail: bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.

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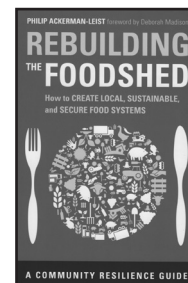


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# Report from the Field

## Taking on the Big Land Grab

*Continued Land Consolidation is Neither Positive nor Inevitable; That's Why LSP is Confronting this Trend with Research, Education & Action*

By Sarah Claassen

This fall, 19 Land Stewardship Project members traveled to county courthouses across Minnesota and dug through real estate transaction records to help compile data on the state of land consolidation in rural areas. These researchers represent an important first step in a major new LSP campaign to organize for better land access for farmers in the Upper Midwest.

This winter, we will be combing through this data to develop a special report on how concentrating ownership of acres in fewer and fewer hands is preventing beginning farmers from attaining affordable, secure land tenure. This report will also address how government policies are contributing to the unprecedented land consolidation we are now experiencing.

The timing is critical. Due to farmers' dedication, coupled with strong education and support networks like LSP's Farm Beginnings training program, there is a resurgence of stewardship family farms in the upper Midwest. But poor access to land (see "*The State of Land Tenure in the U.S.*" sidebar), broken farm policy and corporate control continues to prevent family farms from succeeding.

Current land consolidation trends are troubling—LSP believes more people on the land—not fewer—are central to building a sustainable and just farm and food system. We need literally millions of new, diverse farms out on the landscape, and they need to succeed. That means land must be accessible and held by many more farmers so that they can develop good soils and care of the land, establish markets and businesses, build relationships and more.

That's why this fall LSP launched this initiative to dismantle barriers that keep beginning farmers off of the land. The task is daunting. Federally subsidized crop insurance and commodity payments as they exist today create enormous barriers for beginning and family farmers. They create an unequal playing field for beginning farmers, allowing huge corporate farms to accumulate more land while pushing prices to levels that family farmers can't compete with.

Reforming these policies will require

tens of thousands of people organized and demanding change. Fortunately, LSP brings to this effort over 30 years of experience fighting factory farms, establishing groundbreaking farmer-led education and developing working-lands conservation policy. This new land access campaign will require a powerful base of beginning farmer leaders, strong partnerships and strategic steps over many years.

Over the next several months, LSP will raise public awareness and concern about the extent of the consolidation of land ownership and control. We will paint a clear picture of the wasteful and inequitable federal policy that drives that concentration and its effects on beginning farmers, the land and rural communities.

And over the next several years, LSP will build effective organizing to reform these policies so that family farmers have a fairer chance of accessing land. LSP's Farm Beginnings Program and our Policy and Organizing Program will collaborate on this work, bringing together the power of grassroots organizing and farmer-led education and relationship building.

Your leadership is critical to this work and there are numerous opportunities to get involved this winter and spring. LSP organizers are seeking people, especially but not limited to beginning farmers, who are interested in:

- building relationships and calling for change in local communities;
- contributing graphic design, editing, or writing skills to the final land consolidation report;
- shaping a media strategy and being spokespeople for this campaign;
- and much more.

Your thoughts, experiences, and suggestions of people to talk to are always welcome. Please contact me at 612-722-6377 or sarahc@landstewardshipproject.org to learn more and to get involved. □

*Sarah Claassen is a Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings organizer. See page 12 for information on the Farm Transitions Toolkit, a new Land Stewardship Project-Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture resource for farmers and other landowners looking to transition farmland onto the next generation.*

## The State of Land Tenure in the U.S.

The FarmLASTS Project is a national research, education and extension project funded by the USDA National Research Initiative. In 2010, FarmLASTS produced a special report on farmland access, succession, tenure and stewardship. Here are a few of the highlights:

- ◆ 2/3 of the nation's farm asset wealth is held in real estate.
- ◆ 4% of farmland owners own nearly half the land.
- ◆ In 2002, 34% of farmland owners in Iowa were investors, double the proportion in 1989.
- ◆ Over 40% of U.S. farmland is rented.
- ◆ Of all farm landlords in the U.S., over 60% are over the age of 60 and 40% are over 70.
- ◆ Short-term leases and the uncertainty associated with them tend to discourage investments by tenants in farmland conservation measures.
- ◆ Government agricultural subsidy payments inflate the cost of farmland; much of that money accrues to landlords in the form of higher rent.
- ◆ Over the next two decades, 70% of the nation's farms and ranchland will change hands.
- ◆ 2/3 of retiring farmers have not identified successors.
- ◆ 90% of farm owners neither had an exit strategy nor knew how to develop one.
- ◆ Only 3% of farmland buyers are new farmers.
- ◆ Women may own up to 3/4 of the farmland transferred during the next two decades.

The full report is at [www.uvm.edu/farmlasts](http://www.uvm.edu/farmlasts).



## The Keys to a Nitrogen Pollution Solution: People, Livestock, Land

By Jim VanDerPol

In October, I told the Minnesota House Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Finance Committee that we had begun to listen to our farm, an assertion lawmakers heard with some surprise. The occasion was testimony around the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's presentation of its "Nitrogen in Minnesota Surface Waters" report (<http://bit.ly/14XzOZD>), which showed among other things that 73 percent of the nitrogen escaping into the state's rivers is coming from cropland. My statement was a plea, really, the expression of a hope that Minnesota's farmers would begin farming again.

When the last of the commodity hog market melted away in the fall of 1998 and we essentially lost the income support for this farm, we did several things: we resolved never to produce hogs for the conventional markets again, we slammed the brakes down hard on outside input purchases and we took off-farm jobs for a few years to survive.

As the initial shock wore off, we began to look around and notice what happened easily on the farm, what grew well and didn't need much help, and what required large investments of inputs and was not dependable in production. We very nearly ceased with corn production for a few years, planting more small grains instead. Because we saw how much the farm wanted to grow grass in some of our lower and wetter areas we started establishing permanent pastures mostly by building fence and getting some animals out there to graze. The process continues today; we have about 30 percent of our 320 acres in permanent grass, harvested by planned grazing of cattle and sows.

Soon after making changes, we noted that the runoff and ponding so typical of the farm in a heavy rainfall wasn't happening anymore in the pasture. Unless the rainfall was six inches or more within 24 hours, the water just didn't move much. We wondered about our cropping acres and spent hours walking around in chore boots at the end of thunderstorms and in the spring to see what the water was doing. Seeing still too many ponds, which are caused by water running off the land too fast and overloading the tile drainage outlet to the river, we thought

about change.

We needed hay to supply winter feed for the dairy replacement heifers we had started raising for other farmers. We planted an alfalfa grass mix on a few of our acres, and that planting has grown to the point where today it is a major part of our rotation. Besides supplying feed to the cattle in winter, it provides a forage supplement for the sow herd.

Today, our core crop rotation is three years of hay, followed by corn, then grain and then corn again. This is varied some,

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*Society has gone as far as it can with specialization and simplification, which is impoverishing us and the land. We must think again, and think carefully.*

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since every field cannot be treated in the same way, and because we must continue to experiment. We are now doing much thinking about and experimenting with grazeable cover crops, especially after the small grain is harvested. Cattle are expected to maintain themselves in late fall for a month or more each year on grazed crop residues. What they leave is baled and brought to the yard for bedding the hogs.

Cropland treated this way is beginning to show the same results as pasture did earlier. Rainfall does not pond unless the amount of rain is very large. In addition, the soil does not dry out so quickly in late summer. During a hot, dry August, our corn does not show the drought stress often so evident in neighboring fields. When we do till, which is

not as often, the field equipment pulls easier.

Our corn yields the past four or five years have hovered around 130 to 160 bushels per acre, compared to 100 to 110 bushels in the 1990s. It should be noted that we are now certified organic, and have been since 2004. These higher yields, in contrast to those in the 1990s, are not supported by crop chemicals, or fertilizers, or GMO seed. Crops get rain, sun, soil and manure from the hog operation.

In conventional agriculture, global positioning systems steer the tractor. Monsanto solves the production problems with GMO seed and crop chemicals. Livestock operations are huge, centralized and separate from the "farms."

There are problems with the conventional system. Too much manure is a problem for the livestock centers—too little manure is a problem for the crop farms. There is too much work and not enough pay in the livestock factories. There is too much technology and not enough human care everywhere. The community deteriorates.

But now society has gone as far as it can with specialization and simplification, which is impoverishing us and the land. We must think again, and think carefully. We will not keep the nitrogen out of the river until we get more people on the land. These must be people with their minds engaged and their hearts open. Government can have a role here—it is difficult to see how any of this could happen unless it at least stops putting up barriers to adopting more diverse, sustainable farming methods.

Livestock, land and people must be brought back together and for the good of all three. There are no shortcuts. □

*Land Stewardship Project member Jim VanDerPol, along with his wife LeeAnn, son Josh and daughter-in-law Cindy, owns and operates Pastures A Plenty Farm near Kerkhoven, in western Minnesota. VanDerPol, a former LSP board member, is also the author of the 2012 book, Conversations With the Land.*

### What's on Your Mind?

Got an opinion? Comments? Criticisms?

The *Land Stewardship Letter* believes an open, fair discussion of issues we cover is one of the keys to creating a just, sustainable society. Letters and commentaries can be submitted to: Brian DeVore, 821 East 35th Street, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407; phone: 612-722-6377; fax: 612-722-6474; e-mail: [bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org).

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





# Myth Buster Box

## An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

### → **Myth:** We Will Need to Nearly Double Crop Production by 2050 to Feed 9 Billion People

→ **Fact:** By 2050, the world's population is expected to grow from 7 billion to 9 billion, which is a roughly 28 percent increase. A common narrative is that in coming years a greater proportion of the world's growing population will be wealthy enough to eat richer diets, which translates into more animal-based products, among other things. That has prompted promoters of high-input industrialized agriculture to put out estimates that in fact we will need to produce *twice* as much food on the land as we do today to fill all those stomachs.

And if you are a company like Monsanto or Cargill, that's good news, because it means more of the same: intensive production systems that demand high inputs of chemicals, GMO technology and energy.

However, research released in August by the Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota actually paints a different food supply and demand picture. The research, which was published in *Environmental Research Letters*, analyzed the productivity of 41 major crops, and found that worldwide, only 55 percent of crop calories directly nourish people. In the U.S., that figure is an astounding 34 percent.

What happens to the rest of it? The majority of it is fed to livestock, which in turn are used as human food. However, feeding beef cattle a high-energy corn-based diet in a feedlot, for example, is a highly inefficient way of utilizing plants. The U of M researchers say that 36 percent of the calories produced by the world's crops are being used for animal feed, and only 12 percent of

those feed calories eventually nourish people. In addition, between 2000 and 2010, the use of edible crops for biofuels such as ethanol increased fourfold. The facts are irrefutable: making grain into gas means less human (and animal) food in the world.

The good news is that if agriculture was to focus less on how many *bushels* of crops were raised per acre, and more on how many *people* could be fed off that same acre, we could actually be more productive than we are today in terms of calories generated. Theoretically, the typical Midwestern farm could triple the number of calories per acre that go directly to people, according to the U of M's paper. (Anyone familiar with a Community Supported Agriculture produce operation would not be surprised by this figure.) That would mean a shift away from the corn-bean-feedlot machine that has a seemingly insatiable demand for more bushels per acre.

The U of M researchers conclude that U.S. agriculture alone could feed an additional 1 billion people by shifting crop calories to direct human consumption. However, such a shift would require pretty much removing livestock from the farming picture—that means a revolutionary shift in diet for most Americans, and the loss of a key tool in developing sustainable nutrient cycles on diverse farms.

However, even relatively minor shifts away from factory farm meat production would make agriculture much more efficient at feeding actual people. Although the U of M study did not examine the contribution of grass-based livestock production to feeding people, one of the authors, Jonathan Foley, noted in a separate commentary published this fall that shifting toward pasture-based systems

and moving biofuel production away from utilizing food crops could go a long ways toward feeding more people with the same amount of crop production. Making each crop calorie more nutritious would also help, something that's often overlooked in the drive to just produce more of the same. In addition, cutting food waste could have a major impact as well—that alone eats up 30 percent to 40 percent of the world's calories today.

As Foley writes: "...people often confuse growing more crops with making more food available to the world. They're not the same thing.... And there is another way to deliver more food to the world besides simply growing more crops: Better use of the crops we already grow, making sure they create as much nutritious food as possible."

### → **More Information**

- A summary of the paper, "Redefining agricultural yields: from tonnes to people nourished per hectare" is available on the *Environmental Research Letters* website at [www.iopscience.iop.org](http://www.iopscience.iop.org).

- Jonathan Foley's commentary, "Changing the Global Food Narrative" is at [www.ensia.com](http://www.ensia.com).

### → **More Myth Busters**

To download copies of previous installments in LSP's *Myth Busters* series, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/libraryresources/mythbusters](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/libraryresources/mythbusters). For paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377.

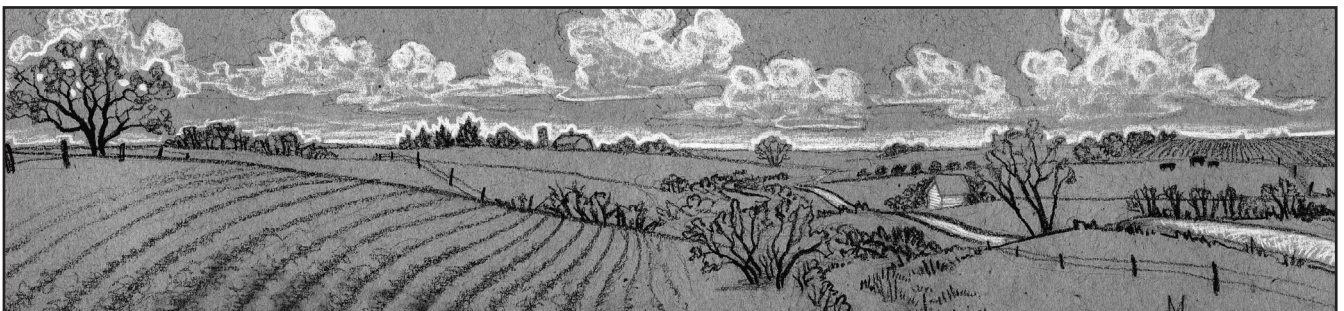


Illustration by Malena Arner Handeen



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## LSP News

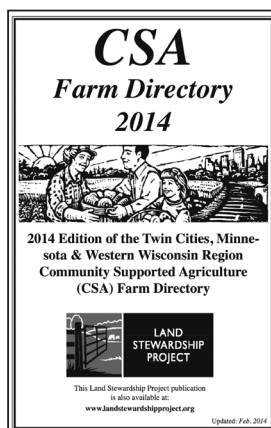
### Farmers: Time to Sign-up for LSP's 2014 CSA Directory

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 2014 edition of LSP's *Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory*.

The *Directory* will be published in February and is distributed to eaters throughout the region, as well as posted at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/findingjustfood/csa](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/findingjustfood/csa).

The deadline for submitting listings is Monday, Jan. 13. The listing fee is \$22 for LSP members and \$37 for non-members. There is a 250-word limit for listings.

For information on getting listed, contact LSP's Brian DeVore at [bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-722-6377. □



### Stewardship Farm Directory Available

The 2013-2014 edition of the *Stewardship Farm Directory* is now available. It lists over 200 Land Stewardship Project member-farmers offering fruits, vegetables, grains, meats, chickens, eggs, milk, cheese and more. The list also includes food co-ops, restaurants, and food processors that handle products grown by LSP members.



Paper copies of the *Stewardship Farm Directory* are available in LSP's offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377). It is also available on LSP's website at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/findingjustfood](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/findingjustfood). □

## LSP Members Recognized

Several Land Stewardship Project members were recognized in 2013 for their efforts in the areas of farming, community service, creativity and research:

◆ **Mike and Jennifer Rupprecht** were named the Winona County Farm Family of the Year for 2013. The Rupprechts own and operate Earth-Be-Glad, a certified organic crop and livestock farm near Lewiston, in southeast Minnesota. The University of Minnesota Extension Service award recognizes families that “demonstrate a commitment to enhancing and supporting agriculture.”



Paul Sobocinski

Jennifer is a former member of LSP's board of directors and Earth-Be-Glad has been active in such LSP initiatives as Farm Beginnings and the Monitoring Project.

◆ **Dave and Florence Minar** of New Prague, Minn., have been named recipi-

ents of the Sts. Isidore and Maria Exemplary Award. The Minars own and operate Cedar Summit Dairy, an organic operation that produces, processes and sells dairy products under their own label.

The Sts. Isidore and Maria Exemplary Award honors a rural couple that “exemplify fidelity to a vision and vocation or rural life, which combines family, stewardship and faith.” It also “acknowledges those whose work through the tradition of Catholic social teaching has led to significant progress toward greater social justice and dignity for rural families and communities.” The Minars have served as mentors for participants in LSP's Farm Beginnings Program. Florence is on LSP's board of directors and Dave serves on the organization's State Policy Committee.

◆ **Dwight and Grant Ault** of Austin, Minn., have been recognized by Niman Ranch as “Top 10 Pork Quality Winners.” The Aults have long been active in LSP field days and Policy and Organizing Program work.

◆ **Paul Sobocinski** of Wabasso, Minn., was recognized by Niman for raising hogs for the sustainable swine company for 10 years. Sobocinski is an LSP Policy organizer.

◆ **Atina Diffley** was given the Memoir and Creative Nonfiction Minnesota Book Award for 2013. Her book, *Turn Here Sweet Corn: Organic Farming Works*, describes how she and her husband Martin launched one of the first certified organic produce farms in the Midwest. The Diffleys now run the consulting

business Organic Farming Works, and Atina is a regular LSP Farm Beginnings presenter.

◆ **Matt Liebman** was honored with the 2013 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture. Liebman, an Iowa State University agronomy professor, has done nationally



Matt Liebman

recognized research on diversified crop rotations. He is also a member of a team that is investigating integrating strips of native prairie with row crops (see No. 3, 2013, Land Stewardship Letter, page 24).

The Spencer Award recognizes farmers, teachers and researchers who have “made significant contributions to the ecological and economic stability of Iowa's family farms.”



## Shoptaugh & Eder Join LSP Staff; Esse Departs

**A**melia Shoptaugh has joined the Land Stewardship Project's staff as the organization's new Twin Cities office manager. She has a bachelor's degree in history and theology from the College of St. Catherine and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Shoptaugh has worked as an administrative assistant for Indecomm Global Services and Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, as well as a bookkeeper for United Campus Ministry of Fargo-Moorehead. Shoptaugh has also



**Amelia Shoptaugh**

worked as a youth leader and a customer service representative. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or [amelias@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:amelias@landstewardshipproject.org).

Shoptaugh replaces **Erik Esse**, who has served as the office manager since 2012. During that time, he led a major effort to upgrade LSP's computer and telephone systems and streamlined the organization's administrative processes. Esse is moving to Montreal, Canada.

**Dorian Eder** has joined LSP's staff as a Farm Beginnings Program organizer. Eder owns and operates Gemini



**Erik Esse**

Valley Farm, a market garden operation in Menomonie, Wis. She also works as a legal advocate for the Neighborhood Involvement Program and has served as a Safe at Home Program Administrator for the Minnesota Secretary of State, as well as community specialist and systems advocacy coordinator for the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women. Eder also was the managing partner of the Battered Women's Legal Advocacy Project.

In her new position, Eder is coordinating the Farm Beginnings Program's Driftless Region initiative. She can be contacted at [dori@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:dori@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-578-4497. □



**Dorian Eder**

## LSP Field Days, Workshops, Meetings, Events

Everything from cover crops and soil quality to vegetable production and affordable healthcare options were covered during Land Stewardship Project field days, workshops and meetings in 2013. For the latest LSP events schedule, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/upcomingevents](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/upcomingevents) or check the monthly *LIVE-WIRE* e-letter. See page 31 for information on subscribing to the *LIVE-WIRE*.



LEFT PHOTO: A soil "slaking test" is conducted at an LSP cover crops field day. ABOVE: Community Supported Agriculture vegetable production is discussed at a Farm Beginnings workshop. BELOW: Recent reforms to the healthcare insurance system and their impacts on rural communities were the topics discussed at an LSP community meeting. (LSP Photos)





# Policy & Organizing

## Federal Agriculture Policy

### A Farm Bill in 201?

By Adam Warthesen

In a sign that a new law governing federal agriculture law may actually be a reality in the near future, the U.S. House and Senate Farm Bill conference committee was created this fall. Its first meeting was Oct. 30, and the 41-member committee has three Minnesotans participating: Senator Amy Klobuchar, Rep. Tim Walz and Rep. Collin Peterson. The conference committee's job is to take the Farm Bills passed by the House and Senate in 2013 and create a final law that Congress as a whole

can pass and send on to President Barack Obama.

The new law is long overdue—it was originally supposed to be passed in 2012. When and if a final Farm Bill comes to pass is still a guessing game.

While the appointment of a conference committee is an important step toward creating a final Farm Bill, the gulf between the House and Senate bills remains wide, especially in the area of nutrition spending. The House is proposing cutting food stamp benefits by \$40 billion over 10 years.

Intertwined with the budget debate and macro politics, any number of scenarios could play out, such as a Farm Bill tied to some grand budget deal, no Farm Bill at all and then some extension of current law in 2014, or a Farm Bill passed on its own

accord and becoming law. LSP continues to track progress and engage in the debate. As part of that work, on Oct. 15 we sent a letter (see below) to Klobuchar, Walz and Peterson outlining our priorities for the Farm Bill. In addition to the letter provided to policymakers, we've also been communicating with congressional offices on competition/livestock issues, local foods and rural development initiatives.

Look for updates and opportunities to take action on our website, through the *LIVE-WIRE* and via social media. For more on federal farm policy, contact me at [adamw@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:adamw@landstewardshipproject.org) or calling 612-722-6377. More information is also available on our federal policy web page at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/federalpolicy](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/federalpolicy). □

*Adam Warthesen is an LSP organizer specializing in federal policy issues.*

#### Dear Farm Bill Conferees:

We are encouraged that both the U.S. House and Senate Farm Bill conferees have been appointed. Reauthorization of a new five-year Farm Bill has taken far too long and the delays have undercut the functioning of many programs that can help build a more sustainable food and farming system.

We recognize work is already progressing on how the House and Senate farm bills can be conferenced. Outlined below are measures the Land Stewardship Project farmer-members believe are the most relevant conference issues and priorities for a final Farm Bill.

We will gauge the merits of a Final Bill by how it supports beginning farmers, what conservation investments it makes, and whether it reforms unaccountable and wasteful programs. While we support and work on other aspects of the Farm Bill, mainly through coalitions, these are our top priorities:

#### Beginning Farmers & Ranchers

- Sustain funding at no less than \$20 million per year for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP). Funding for this program has been absent since 2012. Without future investments we will lose the ability of organizations and institutions to assist tens of thousands of beginning farmers across the country.

- Refrain from creating a "state grants" subsection within the BFRDP focused solely on farm safety. While farm safety is an important training effort, it should be integrated into the existing purposes for which grants can be offered to groups,

rather than prioritized in a block-grant that would divert funding away from the 13 other critical program purposes.

- Ensure a set-aside of 25 percent of yearly funds is available for socially disadvantaged producers, limited resource producers and military veterans.

#### Access to Farmland, Credit & Conservation Assistance for New Farmers

- Provide \$50 million for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Transition Incentives Program (a sub-program of CRP) and increase the advance payment option within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- Authorize a microloan program, including intermediary lending, in order to expand credit options and simplify the Farm Service Agency loan application process.

#### Crop Insurance & Commodity Policy

- Establish a \$750,000 Adjusted Gross Income limit for federal crop insurance. Included in the Senate Farm Bill and most recently in U.S. House Resolution 379 as a "sense of the House," this policy reform must be included in a final Farm Bill.

- Enact a nationwide sodbuster that reduces crop insurance premium subsidies and halts yield substitution methods for unbroken ground being leveraged into production.

- Require conservation compliance as a condition of receiving crop insurance premium subsidies. This policy change should not come at the expense or as a trade-off for other more substantial reforms such as income limits. Conservation compliance in general, whether a condition of crop insurance or as it applies now in other programs, needs to be

more vigorously and effectively enforced. The degradation of farmland resources is not being addressed by the manner in which conservation compliance is currently functioning.

- Reduce farm program payment limits in the commodity title and close loopholes to ensure actual farmers are the recipients of support. Incorporated in both the House and Senate Farm Bills are commodity program limits of \$250,000 for a married couple, or \$125,000 for an individual. These should be enacted in a final bill.

#### Conservation Investments & Policy

- Minimize cuts to the Conservation Title to the greatest extent possible. No conservation program should shoulder a larger burden of cuts than another and attempts should be made to equalize any cuts that are applied. With the important and unique role the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) plays in rewarding conservation outcomes on productive lands, efforts should be made to ensure its viability into the future. An additional focus should be made to simplify CSP and equalize the rewarding of funds for existing practices and new conservation practices a landowner employs.

- In addition, the Land Stewardship Project supports an adequate Nutrition Title that meets the needs of Americans struggling with food insecurity. We oppose the House funding proposal (it would cut food stamp benefits by \$40 billion over 10 years) and policy proposals for the Nutrition Title. The sheer scale of cuts would have deep and damaging impacts on millions of our fellow citizens and should be opposed.



## MDA Grants for Family Farms, Sustainable Ag Deadlines in January, February & March

By Bobby King

An element of advancing a family farm based system of sustainable agriculture is ensuring that state resources are available to support this type of farming. In fact, because of the multiple benefits sustainable agriculture provides by boosting the local economy, improving water quality, enhancing wildlife habitat and more, it should be favored. Working at the Minnesota Legislature, the Land Stewardship Project has attempted to ensure that the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) grant opportunities described on this page include, if not give preference to, family farms and sustainable agriculture.

If you decide to apply to any of these programs, LSP would like to hear about your experience with the process. Information or questions can be directed to me at [bkling@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bkling@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-722-6377.

### 1. Sustainable Agriculture

#### Demonstration Grant Program

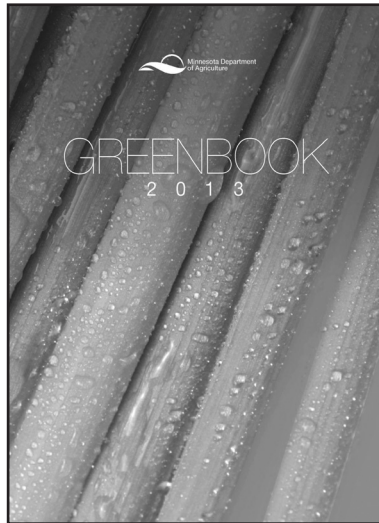
- **Amount:** Up to \$25,000 for three year projects.
- **Deadline:** Jan. 29.
- **Brief description:** Grants awarded to individuals or groups for on-farm sustainable agriculture research or demonstration projects in Minnesota. The grant is to fund practices that promote environmental stewardship and conservation of resources as well as improve profitability and quality of life on farms and in rural areas. Results of the research are published in the *Greenbook*.
- **More information and application:** [www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/demo-grant.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/demo-grant.aspx).
- **MDA contact:** Jeanne Ciborowski, Grant Program Coordinator, [Jeanne.Ciborowski@state.mn.us](mailto:Jeanne.Ciborowski@state.mn.us) or 651-201-6217.

### 2. Minnesota Value

#### Added Grant Program

- **Amount:** \$30,000 for business planning; \$150,000 for equipment purchase or improvement; total of \$1.5 million to be given out.
- **Deadline:** March 1.
- **Brief description:** Value added products can be thought of very broadly as any efforts to market, grow or process agriculture products so that they have more value than traditional farm commodities sold in

bulk. The goal of this program is to increase sales of Minnesota agricultural products by diversifying markets, increasing market access and increasing food safety. Proposals that have a meat processing or farm-to-school (or other institution) component, or are addressing a Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) or similar type of food safety plan, receive priority. Small- to medium-sized operations will also receive special consideration. Grants are intended to increase farmers' processing and aggregating capacity to enter farm-to-institution and other markets; purchase equipment to initiate, upgrade or modernize value-added businesses; initiate or expand livestock product processing; create feasibility, business, marketing and



The MDA's popular *Greenbook* provides practical, user-friendly updates on research conducted by farmers and others participating in the Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program.

succession plans for existing and new businesses; and increase on-farm food safety (example: implementing a food safety plan).

There are two grant categories:

- 1) Business Planning, Feasibility Study, Marketing and Succession Planning— covers 50 percent of the total project cost, up to a maximum grant award of \$30,000. Recipients must contribute the remaining 50 percent of the project cost as a cash contribution.
- 2) Equipment Purchases and Physical Improvements. Eligible for 25

percent of the total project cost, up to a maximum grant award of \$150,000. Recipients must contribute 75 percent of the project cost as a cash contribution. Equipment purchases must address improved efficiency, expansion, modernization or profitability.

- **More information and application:**

[www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/valueaddedgrant.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/valueaddedgrant.aspx).

- **MDA contact:** Emily Murphy, Program Coordinator, [Emily.Murphy@state.mn.us](mailto:Emily.Murphy@state.mn.us) or 651-201-6648; David Weinand, Program Coordinator, [David.Weinand@state.mn.us](mailto:David.Weinand@state.mn.us) or 651-201-6646.

### 3. Livestock Investment Grant Program

- **Amount:** Up to \$50,000 (10 percent of the improvement to the livestock operation up to a \$500,000 limit).
- **Deadline:** Next deadline announced in January.
- **Brief description:** The competitive grants cover 10 percent of the cost of a livestock farm improvement and beginning and transitioning livestock farmers will be prioritized.
- **More information and application:** [www.mda.state.mn.us/en/grants/grants/livestockinvestment.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/en/grants/grants/livestockinvestment.aspx).
- **MDA contact:** David Weinand, Dairy Diagnostics, Livestock Development Team, [David.Weinand@state.mn.us](mailto:David.Weinand@state.mn.us) or 651-201-6646; Curt Zimmerman, Supervisor, Livestock Development Team, [Curt.Zimmerman@state.mn.us](mailto:Curt.Zimmerman@state.mn.us) or 651-201-6456.

### 4. Minnesota Organic Transition Cost Share Program

- **Amount:** Maximum of \$750 a year (75 percent of eligible costs) for three years.
- **Deadline:** February 14.
- **Brief description:** Up to 75 percent of any/all of the following costs: organic certifier's charges; soil tests; registration fees for up to two people to attend approved educational conferences.
- **More information and application:** [www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/transitioncostshare.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/transitioncostshare.aspx).
- **MDA contact:** Meg Moynihan, Principal Administrator, [Meg.Moynihan@state.mn.us](mailto:Meg.Moynihan@state.mn.us) or 651-201-6616. □

*Bobby King is an LSP organizer who focuses on state issues. Check out LSP's new web page listing MDA grants available to family farmers in Minnesota at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/minnesotastatepolicy/stategrantsforfamilyfarmers](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/minnesotastatepolicy/stategrantsforfamilyfarmers).*

# Policy & Organizing

## On the Road to Recovery

***LSP is Working to Win a Healthcare System that Works for Everyone, No Exceptions; MNsure is a First Step in that Direction***

*By Megan Buckingham*

For the past few years, the Land Stewardship Project has been working with allies across Minnesota to put people, not insurance company profits, at the center of healthcare reform in our state. As a result, during the 2013 legislative session, Minnesota put together “MNsure,” one of the best health insurance exchanges in the nation. MNsure offers some of the lowest premiums in the country, expanded and improved Medicaid and MinnesotaCare programs, and is empowered to hold insurance companies accountable. Most people in Minnesota who don’t have health insurance or are purchasing health insurance on the private market will be better off because of MNsure.

While many Minnesotans will have better health insurance options through MNsure, it’s also true that technology problems both at the state and federal level have made it difficult to enroll. That’s one of the reasons LSP has been holding meetings in rural areas around the state to talk with members about how MNsure works. In Esko, Lewiston, Chatfield, Fulda, Zumbrota and Granite Falls,

LSP members have gotten together to talk about how we can use this new system to get better healthcare for our families and communities now, and how we can build on this system to create a healthcare system that works for all Minnesotans, no exceptions.

### Healthcare Programs & Income

If your employer doesn’t offer quality, affordable health insurance, your family income determines your eligibility for insurance. This chart shows the income levels that determine eligibility for Medicaid, MinnesotaCare and MNsure subsidies at various family sizes. To determine where you fall, compare your income to the “federal poverty line.” Example: If a family of two has an income of \$30,000/year, that’s 193% of the federal poverty line, meaning they qualify for MinnesotaCare.

Family Size	100% Federal Poverty Line	Medicaid 0%-138%	MinnesotaCare 138%-200%	MNsure Marketplace with subsidies 200%-400%*
1	\$11,490	< \$15,856	\$15,856-\$22,980	\$22,980-\$45,960 275%=\$31,598
2	\$15,510	< \$21,404	\$21,404-\$31,020	\$31,020-\$62,040 275%=\$42,652
3	\$19,530	< \$26,951	\$26,951-\$39,060	\$39,060-\$78,120 275%=\$53,708
4	\$23,550	< \$32,499	\$32,499-\$47,100	\$47,100-\$94,200 275%=\$64,763
5	\$27,570	< \$38,046	\$38,046-\$55,140	\$55,140-\$110,280 275%=\$75,818
6	\$31,590	< \$43,594	\$43,594-\$63,180	\$43,594-\$126,360 275%=\$86,873

\* Children and pregnant women are eligible for Medicaid if their family income is less than 275% of the federal poverty line.

In Minnesota, the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) will primarily run through MNsure. It’s easiest to think of MNsure as an umbrella for healthcare reform: Medicaid, MinnesotaCare and “the exchange” are all included in MNsure, and a person or family that is eligible for any of these programs can enroll on the MNsure.org website.

*The majority of Minnesotans will see little or no change in their health insurance.* People over 65 who are on Medicare and people who can get affordable health insurance through their employers will not be affected by MNsure. Of the Minnesotans who will qualify for MNsure, more than half will be eligible for very low cost coverage through Medicaid and MinnesotaCare.

For farmers, people who are self-employed, and people who

aren’t offered insurance through their jobs, MNsure will likely offer more affordable, higher-quality coverage than is currently available on the private market. At its most basic level, MNsure makes insurance companies give people better, clearer and fairer choices for purchasing health insurance and will offer subsidies or public health insurance programs to make the cost of the insurance more affordable.

Insurance companies can no longer deny coverage for pre-existing conditions, nor are they allowed to charge higher rates for pre-existing conditions. Insurance plans must include coverage for a set of basic benefits, including preventative care, mental illness, maternity care and hospitalization.

Minnesotans’ eligibility for public programs and subsidies to make coverage more affordable will depend on their income, meaning no more asset tests to qualify for Medicaid or MinnesotaCare. Individuals and families with lower incomes—under 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)—will be eligible for Medicaid. Individuals and families with lower to moderate incomes—between 138 percent and 200 percent of the FPL—will be eligible for MinnesotaCare, and those with incomes between 200 percent and 400 percent of the FPL will be eligible for subsidies on the MNsure marketplace (see the chart to the left to compare your income to the FPL).

It’s clear that we need a healthcare system that works for all Minnesotans, no exceptions. MNsure is a step in that direction, but it will only work if people participate. It is up to all of us to make the best use of these new public programs, get better insurance for ourselves and our families, and continue to build toward a healthcare system that’s more efficient, more effective and doesn’t let anyone fall through the cracks.

For more details on MNsure, check out the Affordable Healthcare for All page on LSP’s website: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/affordablehealthcareforall](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/affordablehealthcareforall). There you can find definitions, information on improvements to Medicaid and MinnesotaCare, an explanation of the subsidies and more. □

*LSP organizer Megan Buckingham is based in southeast Minnesota. She can be reached at 507-523-3366 or [meganb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:meganb@landstewardshipproject.org).*



**LSP organizer Paul Sobocinski (right) explains the details of healthcare changes at a recent meeting in the southwest Minnesota community of Fulda. (LSP Photo)**



# Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

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

## Seeking Farmland

◆ Justin Boike is seeking to rent 40-400 acres of tillable farmland in **west-central Minnesota, within 30 miles of Willmar**. No house is required. Contact: Justin Boike, 320-894-2095.

◆ Andrew Bever is seeking to rent 400 acres of tillable farmland in **southern Indiana's Owen County**. No house is required. Contact: Andrew Bever, 678-630-0096.

◆ Eric Dougherty is seeking to rent tillable farmland in **south-central Indiana's Johnson County**. No house is required. Contact: Eric Dougherty, 317-695-7125.

◆ Paul Blundell is seeking to buy 100 or more acres of farmland in **North Dakota, South Dakota or Minnesota**. Pasture, outbuildings and land with fencing and that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Paul Blundell, [paul.blundell@us.army.mil](mailto:paul.blundell@us.army.mil), or Marisha, 915-217-8419.

◆ John Toft is seeking to rent 5-50 acres of farmland in **southern Wisconsin**. Pasture is preferred; no house is required. Contact: John Toft, [john.toft@tastum-holsteins.dk](mailto:john.toft@tastum-holsteins.dk).

◆ Clifton Johnsrud is seeking to buy 80 to 2,500 acres of tillable farmland in **northwest Minnesota's Pennington, Polk, Marshall, Kittson or Roseau county**. Contact: 218-689-8926, [clifton4592@gmail.com](mailto:clifton4592@gmail.com).

◆ Brent Schorfheide is seeking to rent tillable farmland in **Illinois**. No house is required. Contact: Brent Schorfheide, 618-559-5932, [schorfheide@frontiernet.net](mailto:schorfheide@frontiernet.net).

◆ Stacy Mente wants to rent farmland in **southwest Minnesota**. Pasture is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Stacy Mente, [dsmente@myclearwave.net](mailto:dsmente@myclearwave.net).

◆ Michael Cannon is seeking to buy or lease 1-5 acres of tillable farmland for organic vegetable production in the **Twin Cities area**. Water access is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Michael Cannon, 612-559-9096, [HeritageOrganics@Outlook.com](mailto:HeritageOrganics@Outlook.com).

◆ Jeremy Nelson is seeking to buy 20 to 2,000 acres of tillable farmland in **northwest Minnesota's Clay County**. Outbuildings are preferred; no house is required. Contact: Jeremy Nelson, 218-234-8591, [jsn9944@yahoo.com](mailto:jsn9944@yahoo.com).

◆ Christina Traeger is seeking to buy 160-800 acres of farmland in **northwest Minnesota's Clay, Becker or Wilkin county**. Pasture is preferred as well as outbuildings and a house. Contact: Christina Traeger, 320-293-2995, [britishwhitebeef@gmail.com](mailto:britishwhitebeef@gmail.com).

## Farmland Available

◆ Gordon Stangl has for sale 12.5 acres of farmland in **western Wisconsin's Dunn County (Tiffany Township)**. The land has not been sprayed for 15 years and there is pasture. There are two new pole sheds, a house and a small pond. The asking price is under \$250,000. Contact: Gordon Stangl, 651-398-0000, [gordonstangl@rocketmail.com](mailto:gordonstangl@rocketmail.com).

◆ Sharon Burch has for rent a 26-acre farm in **northern Indiana**. It has pasture and has not been sprayed since 2007. This farm is partially fenced and there is about 1.5 acres in vegetables and herbs, 18 acres of hay/pasture, 5 acres of conservation buffer and 1.5 acres of farmstead, etc. Burch is seeking tenants who have commercial organic gardening or farming experience. The price is \$500 per month plus utilities for the house, plus \$300 per year for the gardens. The fields aren't available until fall 2014 and their rent is negotiable. Contact: [www.BluefieldFarm.com](http://www.BluefieldFarm.com) or Sharon Burch, [awakentograce@gmail.com](mailto:awakentograce@gmail.com).

◆ Stan Simon has a 20-acre farm for sale in **western Minnesota's Swift County**. Fifteen acres are in pasture and +/- 3 acres are irrigated for vegetable and fruit production. There are numerous cherry, plum and apple trees—some are mature and fully producing. Also strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and currants, as well as various tree species. There is a house with an updated septic system and outside wood heating system. Contact: Stan Simon, 563-663-7532, [asadogasa@gmail.com](mailto:asadogasa@gmail.com).

◆ Robert and Renee' VanDrehle would like to rent their **central Minnesota** certified

organic farm to a beginning farmer. There are outbuildings, including a 56-cow tie stall barn, silos, pole sheds and a calf barn, as well as land in alfalfa. Contact: Bob or Renee' VanDrehle, 320-987-3365, [rvandrehle@hotmail.com](mailto:rvandrehle@hotmail.com).

◆ Merritt Bussiere has for sale 40 acres of farmland in **eastern Wisconsin's Kewaunee County**. The land has been chemical-free for 21 years. There are 3 acres of gardens close to a 1.5-acre farmstead. The garden soils have been built up with compost and other methods. Seven acres is in wetlands. There is a 1,260 square-foot garage/shop with an upstairs granary, a 3,000 square-foot barn, and a 375 square-foot outbuilding with stalls. Contact: Merritt Bussiere, 412-512-6289, [merrittbussiere@gmail.com](mailto:merrittbussiere@gmail.com).

◆ Dale Skaggs has for sale 15 acres of farmland in **northeast Wisconsin's Door County**. The land has not been sprayed for several years and there is pasture, a barn and a shed; no house is available. There is also the possibility of renting/sharing sheds and field equipment (tractors, discs, etc.). Contact: Dale Skaggs, 414-339-2556, [Lyn-dale5071@gmail.com](mailto:Lyn-dale5071@gmail.com).

◆ Peggy Timmerman has for rent 6 acres of farmland in **southwest Wisconsin's Richland County**. Timmerman owns the adjoining property, which has some fields on it suitable for small-scale farming—vegetables, small fruits and small animals. Inputs were last added in 2012, and Timmerman would like to transition it to organic. Contact: Peggy Timmerman, [burrhollow@yahoo.com](mailto:burrhollow@yahoo.com).

## Seeking Farm Work Experience

◆ Samuel Araoye is seeking farm work experience. Araoye is a military veteran and has an MBA, as well as degrees in accounting and business information systems. He has experience managing a 500-acre produce and livestock operation in West Africa; he supervised picking, transportation and vineyard activity during harvest. Contact: Samuel Araoye, 267-428-9916, [AFROXYLIN7@GMAIL.COM](mailto:AFROXYLIN7@GMAIL.COM).

# Farm Beginnings

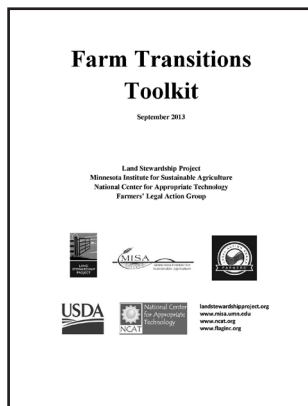
## A Farm Transitions Toolkit

*LSP & MISA Have Developed a Comprehensive Resource for Landowners Looking to Pass on Their Legacy to the Next Generation*

Owners of farmland who are looking to transition their enterprise on to the next generation of farmers can now turn to the *Farm Transitions Toolkit*, a comprehensive resource released this fall by the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA).

“Whether you are a farmer, an absentee landowner who rents or leases your land to a farmer or simply someone with farmland in your family, the *Toolkit* provides a starting point for the important process of transitioning it to the next generation,” says Karen Stettler, an organizer with LSP’s Farm Beginnings program. “The need for such a comprehensive resource is more critical than ever. With the percentage of older farmers on the rise, it is projected in the next 20 years 70 percent of ranchland and farmland will change hands.”

The *Toolkit*, which was authored and edited by MISA’s Jane Grimsbo Jewett, contains resources, links to services and practical calculation tables to help landowners establish a commonsense plan for farm transitions. 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 by LSP journalism intern Alex Baumhardt of farmers who are in various stages of transitioning their enterprises to the next generation (*see pages 14-24*).

“The target audience for the *Toolkit* is those people who want to pass their farm on

in a way that supports healthy rural communities, strong local economies and sustainable land stewardship,” says MISA executive director Helene Murray. “Too often retiring farmers or people who find themselves in possession of family land feel pressured to make decisions that go against their own values. The *Toolkit* can help people align those values with the decisions they make as far as their land’s future is concerned.”

The *Farm Transitions Toolkit* was developed through a collaborative project involving LSP, MISA, Farmers’ Legal Action Group and ATTRA. Its development was guided by individuals representing a number of organizations. This project was supported by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA, Grant # 2010-03107. To find more resources and programs for beginning farmers and ranchers, visit [www.Start2Farm.gov](http://www.Start2Farm.gov), a component of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. □

### Getting a Copy of the *Farm Transitions Toolkit*

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

## The Time for Transition Thinking is Now

*The Farm Transitions Toolkit is an Important Start to Re-casting the Future of Sustainable, Family Farming*

By Karen Stettler

Since 2010, Land Stewardship Project staff members have talked to hundreds of beginning and retiring farmers and professionals about transitioning land to the next generation of farmers. During these visits, a few questions consistently emerged:

◆ Retiring farmers were saying, “I know I should be doing some planning for the future; where do I start? Are there really beginning farmers who want to farm?”

◆ Both beginning and retiring farmers asked, “How do we find each other?”

◆ Financial planners said, “I wish I had more tools for clients thinking about next

steps with their land—what are people doing and what is working?”

In response to these questions, LSP envisioned the *Farm Transitions Toolkit* described in the above article to share the best examples and resources available for farmers and landowners who are seeking to transition their land to a beginning farmer.

LSP continues to work to better understand what is needed for farmland to be successfully passed on to the next generation of farmers. Farmers face many problems today. Some solutions can be found on an individual level, and others are deep societal problems that require collective organizing. Our work on both of these fronts is guided by a steering committee of beginning and retiring farmers.

### The Need for Successful Farm Transitions

Healthy rural communities, strong farm businesses, continued land stewardship—all of these things result from successful farm transitions. These things benefit us all: the retiring farmer, the beginning farmer and the communities that surround them. With the percentage of older farmers on the rise, it is projected in the next 20 years 70 percent of farmland and ranchland will change hands.

Without proactive planning by individuals and communities, the Midwest will lose the family farms that are the cornerstone of its economy and culture. Farmers are already seeing these alarming trends: mega-farms

*Farm Transitions, see page 13...*



are gobbling up all available land and bulldozing the homesteads, investors are padding their portfolios with farm real estate, and family farmers struggle to find available and affordable acres (*see page 3*).

Reversing these trends will require deep structural change. At the same time, retiring farmers have an opportunity to determine the legacy of their farm by planning their farm transition and potentially providing a beginning farmer with a once-in-a-lifetime chance to start farming.

### A Valuable Community Asset

Beginning farmers represent a lot of opportunity. They can operate strong businesses, care for the land and be an active part of vibrant rural communities. At a time when many small towns are experiencing a decline in population, these new community members can contribute to schools, places of worship, and local government and organizations.

In addition, good food, grown locally and sustainably by family farmers, is increasingly valued by eaters and businesses. These eaters are willing to pay premiums that provide a living wage for farmers, which in turn contribute to a vibrant Main Street.

Established farmers and rural communities also have an opportunity. They can start *today* by envisioning the future they desire for their farms and towns, and laying out a plan to establish that vision. What would it look like if a county supported three new



**Jane and John Fisher-Merritt have transitioned their Community Supported Agriculture farm near Wrenshall, Minn., to their son Janaki. Even though the transition took place within the family, it still took years of planning and strategizing. (LSP Photo)**

farms each year? What if every farm had a transition plan in place?

### Transitions Stories

During the summer of 2013, Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings journalism intern Alex Baumhardt interviewed families in Minnesota and Wisconsin that were in various stages of farm transitions. The “Farm Transition Profiles” on pages 14-24 are the result of those interviews.

They range from the story of Mary Ellen Frame, a retired farmer and local leader in sustainable agriculture who has successfully passed her land on to Erin Johnson and Ben Doherty, to Craig Murphy, who is just starting to plan how he can find the right person to continue his organic farming legacy.

These profiles make it clear that there is no one set way for making farming accessible to the next generation, and that often traditional financing tools aren’t adequate—or at the least need to be modified. For example, Ryan Batalden and Caleb and Lauren Langworthy represent

farmers who have found investors to give them a leg-up. Jon Peterson is hoping the conservation easement he has placed on his productive, scenic farm will keep it affordable for the next generation.

The common thread connecting these profiles is that all parties involved—retiring farmers as well as new farmers—have given the transitioning process long, careful thought. Planning, flexibility and creativity are key elements of any transition plan. And in the end, these profiles illustrate that no matter what the circumstances, successful transitions require help and support from a broad spectrum of community members.

As Ryan Batalden says, “Anyone who tells you that they got into farming without any help is lying — or they have a bad memory.” □

*Karen Stettler is a Land Stewardship Project organizer with the Farm Beginnings Program. She can be reached at 507-523-3366 or [stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org).*



**When their own children left the farm, Dave and Deb Welsch (left) searched for someone outside their community who would steward their Nebraska operation. Steve and Shelley Lorenz (right), in turn, were looking for a chance to put in practice the sustainable farming techniques they had been exposed to through LSP’s Farm Beginnings training program. (LSP Photo)**

### Get Started

- Use the *Toolkit* to start planning for the future of your farm.
- Give us feedback: let us know how this *Toolkit* helped you and what we should add.
- Tell your story: share your vision for your farm or transition experience with neighbors, civic organizations, the media, a faith community and more.

For more information, contact the Land Stewardship Project’s Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or [stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org).

# Farm Beginnings

## Farm Transitions Stories

### A Return to the Community

By Alex Baumhardt

Ryan Batalden grew up on farmland in southwest Minnesota that was given to his family during the late 1800s homesteading acts. When he returned to the community of Lamberton to become a fifth-generation Batalden farmer, his experience with land access was a far cry from that of his great-great grandfather's, his grandfather's, or even his father's.

"All of the other family members that wanted to farm were able to buy that land or buy land next to it, but historically where I'm at, it's just not where that's even possible," Batalden, 36, says.

As he says this, Batalden is standing on an 80-acre section of the 340 acres he rents, several miles from the very farm he grew up on. This 80-acre parcel was the first land Batalden was able to rent and it was his foot in the door when it came to getting started as an independent farmer. Batalden treats all of his land with a pride of ownership that supersedes his reality as a renter. He's established native pollinator habitat, uses cover crops to build the soil and is carving out a place in the community that he hopes will allow him to continue his family's farming legacy.

#### A Reverse Brain Drain

After graduating from high school in 1995, Batalden did what he says most kids that grow up in rural areas nowadays do—leave. "That's what I did because that's what you're supposed to do—get off the farm and go get a good job. We're taught to never come back," he says, adding that there was also the sense that there simply wasn't room for him on his family's home place. "There was never even any talk of me farming because I couldn't just jump in and farm some of their land—they wouldn't have enough income."

He received a bachelor's degree in com-

munications at the University of Minnesota, got an office job in the Twin Cities and, when he was ready to "crawl out of his skin" for want of the outdoors, took off backpacking in Europe for several months. When he got back to the U.S., he helped his parents during fall harvest to save some money and get his bearings. He knew he wanted to work outside and, as the season wore on, he knew he wanted to be a farmer.

"I realized that I was as excited about Sunday evening as I was about Friday evening," Batalden recalls. "I'd never had a job like that before."

But it soon became clear that lack of access to land was going to be a problem, even for someone with a farming background and deep roots in the community.

In 2003, Batalden went to an auction with his father and uncle to get an idea of what land in the area was going for. The farm went for \$3,200 an acre, and Batalden's father and uncle told him it was too high a price to be buying land for.

"I'm sure that same piece would sell for \$10,000 an acre now," Batalden says.

He tried to buy land with a USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan but found that such a loan cannot be used to buy land sold at auctions, which is the means by which most

of the land in and around Lamberton was being sold. When Batalden did find a private sale he could apply the loan towards, he discovered that it would take six to 12 months for the loan to come through. The family he wanted to purchase the land from at the time couldn't wait that long, especially as other offers on the land could come through faster.

"The only way I see the FSA loan program working is if you have someone that can buy land at an auction, sell it to you privately and wait that six to 12 months for your loan to come through," Batalden says (see "FSA Beginning Farmer Loans" sidebar on page 21).

During summer breaks throughout college, Batalden had worked part-time at the University of Minnesota's Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton. A few people at the center knew that Batalden was back and wanting to farm and they helped him get in touch with an absentee landowner who was interested in renting to a farmer who would take good care of the land. In 2012, Batalden renewed his lease on that original 80-acre plot for another 10 years.

The rental contract is set up through a "sharecropping" arrangement. That means that Batalden and the landowner share the expense of the fertilizer, and the young farmer covers everything else—seed, equipment, labor. At the end of the year, the landowner gets 40 percent of the crop value and Batalden receives the other 60 percent. Sharecropping was ideal for Batalden as a new farmer because he didn't have to borrow money for cash rent. During a good year, Batalden's landlord stands to receive a higher profit than if she had a simple cash-rent agreement with him. But in a bad year, she shares the risk with him.

#### A Competitive Advantage

Batalden's landlord is providing the young farmer this opportunity because he takes special care to treat the fields in an environmentally friendly manner. For example, Batalden is certified organic, which stands out in an area where chemical-intensive operations are often 10 times the size of his popcorn, soybean and wheat operation.

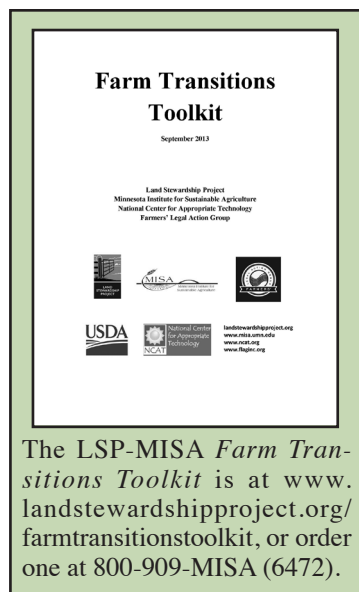
He wasn't the first Batalden to go organic. His parents switched to organic farming in the late 1990s without even telling the rest of the family.

"They had 300 acres tillable ground and 50 acres of pasture, and that was just barely enough for them to live off conventionally," Batalden says. This, along with the desire to wean their land off destructive pesticides, prompted them to transition to the organic market where they could sell their crops at a higher price.

Batalden likes organics not only because of the higher premium price he receives for his crops, but because he feels he's giving back to the land that sustains his livelihood while building the soil for future farmers who may someday find Lamberton an attractive community to live in.

#### An Investment in the Future

Batalden's commitment to stewardship has opened up another door to farmland access. Five years ago, he got an e-mail about



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a private investment company called New Spirit Farmland Partnerships based out of Milwaukee, which focuses on connecting investors to early stage projects concerned with land stewardship and ethical farming. One thing the initiative does is to link socially-minded investors with sustainable farmers who need capital to purchase land.

"It just seemed way too pie-in-the-sky. I thought, 'There's no way this is going to work,'" Batalden recalls. "Nobody just calls you up and says, 'I want to spend a huge amount of money on you.'"

But one investor did just that. She bought 160 acres in the Lamberton area and in 2008 gave Batalden a 15-year, cash-rent lease. Then, in 2010, she bought another 100 acres to rent to Batalden. He pays a "very fair rent" to her (Batalden says he is charged less than what a landowner would probably ask for at a rental auction) and she has likely seen the value of the land double since she bought it, given the rising price of land in the area. In order to expand his farming operation, Batalden discovered that outside private investment was not only a good option, "It was the only option."

Batalden's rental of the farmland he uses is mutually beneficial for he and the landowners. The landowners get to have someone care for their land, build the soil and keep invasive weeds out while the young farmer, who supplies all of his own equipment, gets access to prime cropping ground

in his community.

### Farming with Foresight

It's not just the price of the rental rates that provided Batalden a leg-up when he was getting started—the length of those leases has also helped. The long-term leases he has are rare among the farmers in his area

• • •

*The long-term leases Batalden has are rare among the farmers in his area who are typically renting on a year-to-year or three-year basis. Long-term leases give him the confidence to invest in conservation measures, among other things.*

• • •

who are typically renting on a year-to-year or three-year basis. Batalden feels more secure with his long-term leases, which give him the ability to work towards projects that will develop over longer periods. For example, he's built a four-acre native pollinator habitat with money from the USDA's Environmental Quality Initiatives Program. Batalden also has a contract with the USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program that supplies him with the resources to have a soil-friendly crop in his rotation, to buy seed for cover crops and to purchase some necessary equipment needed to carry out these projects.

The long-term leases provide security

in the immediate future, but Batalden does wonder about his post-farming plans. "Your retirement is your land when you farm," he says. "I don't own any land; I'm not building any equity."

He and his wife Tiffany have invested in mutual funds, stocks and bonds in preparation for retirement, but Batalden has his heart set on truly owning his own land one day. Still, he says, "I can't take out a 25-year-loan based on income projections on record crop prices, because there are not going to be record prices for 25 years in a row."

### A Farming Family's Future

Batalden's parents are in their 60s and still actively farming. Retirement is not on the forefront of their minds, but in 2013 they started a dialogue with their children about transitioning the land and different scenarios that could come-up in the future. Most of Batalden's siblings are farming and he feels they would all be excellent candidates for taking over their parents' operation one day. He realizes the importance of this conversation for farmers everywhere.

"Typically a couple retires, they rent their land, they pass away and their kids, who are no longer living in the farming community, inherit it and sell it at auction," he says.

What's often not a part of this scenario is the conversation where an older couple talks to their children about what would become of the farm once they're gone, what they want their legacy to be on that land and whether or not they should start looking for a new farming family with similar values to look after it.

"By the time I'm ready to retire or am semi-retired, I hope I've built up the soil and that I have a system that will allow someone else to come in and take it over," Batalden says. "Not everything I do out here is perfect, but I have to ask myself, 'What's the best I can do?'"

When Batalden realized he wanted to be a farmer, he knew it had to be in Lamberton. He couldn't imagine farming without his dad, and the equipment, mentorship and support his family has provided him were a great advantage. His best advice for new farmers looking to get started is to go to the communities they're considering living and working in and start knocking on doors.

"There's no great database of absentee landowners," says Batalden. "Some people may just turn you away, but you may knock on the door of someone who knows someone who can help. Anyone who tells you that they got into farming without any help is lying — or they have a bad memory." □



Ryan Batalden: "Not everything I do out here is perfect, but I have to ask myself, 'What's the best I can do?'" (Photo by Alex Baumhardt)

# Leaving an Organic Legacy

By Alex Baumhardt

Craig Murphy, 58, brushes the dust off an aerial photo of his farm from the late 1980s. He sets it on his kitchen table in the home that five generations of Murphys have grown up in near the west-central Minnesota community of Morris and uses his finger to draw a map on it. He points to different structures and fields to explain what has changed and what has remained. He draws imaginary borders outside of the frame to create a picture of how the community and his neighbors' farms have changed since he got started as one of the first certified organic farmers in the area. As he talks about potentially transitioning his land to non-family for the first time in its history, his words draw a broad, borderless image where anything seems possible.

## Pioneering Roots

Murphy's great-grandparents started the homesteading process in Morris in 1876 and eventually raised 12 children on the same

land Murphy farms today. The torch was passed from Murphy's great-grandfather to his grandfather, to his father, to him. They were the ones that wanted to stay on the land and farm it; everyone else left. His great-grandparents and grandparents had horses, pasture, diversified crops and livestock; they understood that all of those things were critical to supporting the health of the soil they relied on.

Murphy's father, Ray, farmed wheat, corn, soybeans and alfalfa. But after high school, Craig's original goal was to become a veterinarian, and he eventually got an animal science degree from the University of Minnesota. After school, he moved 300 miles south to Battle Creek, Neb., to sell services and supplies for a co-op. He lasted eight months before the farm in Morris wooed him back equipped with a different mentality towards his relationship with the land.

"I just didn't want to deal with a jug that had a skull-and-crossbones on it," Murphy recalls. "I just thought there's got to be a more natural way. And I kind of wanted the challenge of it too, to see if I could make or-

ganic work."

Soon after returning to the farm in 1980, Murphy talked to his father about farming organically. Through other farmers and newsletters, Murphy had heard about the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society (NPSAS), a grassroots educational and advocacy organization that helps farmers in the Dakotas, Minnesota, Montana, Iowa, Wyoming and Nebraska transition to organic. Murphy attended a conference NPSAS was holding in North Dakota, where he met

Gary Ehlers, an organic crop grower who lived 30 miles from Morris. Ehlers served as the young farmer's mentor throughout the development of his organic dream.

Murphy's father was open to the idea of his son coming back to farm and offered to help him get started with 80 acres and a barn in exchange for help on the other 800 acres of owned and rented land he worked at the time. Craig Murphy used the 80 acres to raise hogs, soybeans and alfalfa. Ray Murphy shared what machinery he could, and an uncle loaned Murphy the money to buy the rest of the implements he needed. By 1983, the 80 acres was certified organic. Through NPSAS, Murphy connected with a company that was willing to buy his entire organic production and market it. Today, he either direct-markets it himself or uses a broker and marketing agent through the National Farmers Organization.

Over the years, Murphy increased the amount of land he rented from his father and a neighboring farm until he had 450 acres certified organic.



Craig Murphy describes how he uses a rotary hoe to control weeds on his organic cropping operation. "I just didn't want to deal with a jug that had a skull-and-crossbones on it," Murphy says of his conversion to organic production. "I just thought there's got to be a more natural way. And I kind of wanted the challenge of it too, to see if I could make organic work." (Photo by Alex Baumhardt)

## Farm Transitions Toolkit

September 2013

Land Stewardship Project  
Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture  
National Center for Appropriate Technology  
Farmers' Legal Action Group



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**Farm Transitions**, see page 17...



His father retired from farming in 1987, and Murphy decided to transition out of hogs and into organic beef cattle, which he raised for 25 years, along with a diversity of crops. Murphy got rid of his cattle operation in 2011 and now grows organic wheat, rye, sunflowers, flax, soybeans and corn.

Murphy doesn't regret his decision to go organic, but concedes there are challenges on a day-to-day basis: managing weeds, insect pests and an organic fertility program, as well as dealing with rain that turns soil into a swamp.

Murphy's conventional neighbors look at what he's up against, "And they're like, 'No way,'" he says.

They respect what he's doing, and one of his neighbors even helps with Murphy's harvesting but, "They see it all; they don't want to go organic. With all of the technology at their disposal they're making it conventional look pretty good, and if you don't get in too close, if you don't think about the GMOs, it does look pretty good."

### Passing on the Land

Ray Murphy passed away in 2011 and with that, his family went through a puzzling land transition. The elder Murphy had 240 acres in his name, and it was split-up between Craig and his seven siblings. Murphy had been renting some of that land from his father, and he had transitioned it to organic. His brothers and sisters all decided to sell their shares and, while Murphy would have loved to have purchased that land from them, it would have cost upwards of \$1.3 million.

He bought 11.8 acres from his siblings at a discounted price, as well as 32 acres of his father's pasture and 15 acres of Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) land. The CREP land has to stay in grassland in exchange for a yearly rental payment from the Farm Service Agency that Murphy will receive until 2016.

Although some of the land Murphy's father put into CREP was tillable, he did it to promote diversity on his property. Murphy is glad his father did it and proud to now own that land himself. "I don't mind having that kind of diversity," he says, "It's okay not to farm every square inch."

Today, Murphy owns 145 acres of tillable land and rents 150 acres from his uncle—all of it is certified organic. The land his

• • •  
*Murphy benefited from a mentor and family support when he started farming. Now he hopes he can provide the same guidance and material assistance to someone else.*  
• • •

siblings didn't sell to him immediately lost organic status to the new owners, who are growing wheat and sugar beets conventionally. On a recent summer day Murphy watches the land that used to be organic getting sprayed with chemicals several fields away from his rye. "I've seen this happening quite a bit," Murphy jokes sardonically, "so, I think we can say that it is officially not organic anymore."

That clearly troubles him. Even with all of the challenges and rocky transitions, Murphy has an organic or bust attitude. "If I couldn't have done organic," he says, "I wouldn't have farmed. I wouldn't have the heart for it."

In order to avoid a situation like this, where his land is one day sold to the highest bidder rather than the best caretaker, Murphy is already looking to begin transitioning it. Through the Land Stewardship Project and other networks, he's seeking a farming family interested in getting a foothold in agriculture. Murphy is open to any ideas and enterprises that a new farmer has in mind, and, because he's starting the transition process early, he's hoping to find someone with an organic enterprise to keep the land chemical-free.



**"Whoever would come here would have to, first of all, love the area," says Murphy.** (Photo by Alex Baumhardt)

"I'm not old," Murphy says. "I just don't want to start something new without help." He's hoping within 10 years to start renting tracts of his land gradually so that his control of the farm diminishes while a new farmer takes the reins.

"Whoever would come here would have to, first of all, love the area," Murphy says. Ideally, they would spend a season working with Murphy on the land, and then come up with a project of their own. They'd need to develop an enterprise and business plan that could support them, whether that's a Community Supported Agriculture operation, greenhouse business or a livestock enterprise.

"What we have right now is supporting one family, so they'd have to develop something else that could support another person or family through the transition," Murphy says.

In return for all of this, they would get a discounted rental rate and the benefit of Murphy's 30-plus years of experience, his support and the use of his equipment. Murphy believes that every beginning farmer could benefit from a Gary Ehlers to mentor them and someone like his dad to give them a chance to get started on some land. He hopes he could be both.

"Most older farmers want to see younger farmers on the land, because the alternative is just more factory farms," he says. □

# Placing Trust in the Land

By Alex Baumhardt

Jon Peterson's day starts at 5 a.m. He milks the 55 organic dairy cows at his farm near (aptly named) Peterson, Minn., while his son collects the eggs from their 2,300 organic hens. Both the milk and the eggs will be picked up by the Organic Valley Co-op and transported from their farm, which is tucked amongst rolling green hills along the Root River. It's hard to imagine subdivisions, or a thousand-head livestock farm, or a frac-sand mine looming up through the morning mist of the surrounding landscape. But these enterprises are a potential part of this region's changing landscape and, in the early 1990s, Peterson was feeling these pressures on his land as well as his father's neighboring farm to an alarming degree. The father and son decided they needed to do something binding and permanent to protect their land from development. Now Peterson is hoping this protection will help ensure a new generation will have the opportunity to produce food profitably in such a beautiful place.

## Changing Times

Peterson started his farming operation when he was 17. Just out of high school, he bought 12 cows and rented a barn with a loan his father, John, reluctantly co-signed. They went to a local bank and talked with the loan officer who, as Peterson puts it, either trusted you or he didn't. In Peterson's case, it was the former.

"You could go in there and your word was good enough," he recalls. "You didn't have to fill out form after form—he trusted you, and I made dang sure I paid him back, and each time he trusted you more and more."

Among other things that have changed with banking since then are interest rates. Peterson borrowed at an interest rate of around 15 percent, almost five times current rates. When he was ready to buy his first 80 acres, he paid \$600 an acre, a tiny fraction of what land in his area is going for now.

The other thing that's changed is that the industrial model has become the norm on most livestock farms in the area, with conventional livestock farmers forced into getting bigger and bigger in order to compete.

"When I first got started dairying here 25-years-ago, I didn't know any farms that

had 100 cows," Peterson says. Now, "there are some that have 1,000."

He began transitioning to organic in 1997 after researching the USDA's Low-Input Sustainable Agriculture (LISA) program—now the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program—and attending Land Stewardship Project meetings on grazing. Organic wasn't that much of a stretch from what he was already doing on his diversified farm, and he was interested in getting a higher price for his milk and eggs. It also helped that his father was not that interested in using chemicals on his own land and frugal when it came to any inputs he might need.

"Everybody ships in fertilizer and ships in other inputs, and fertility wasn't built that way," says Peterson. "Four, five hundred years ago, nature didn't haul nitrogen in from Kuwait to dump everywhere."

## Easement Protection

In the early 1990s, prior to the acceleration of industrial agriculture in the area, Peterson and his father were more concerned about the growing number of housing developments springing up in areas where woodlands used to be. The father and son, with their properties right across the road from one another, thought that if they could find a way to protect all of their land from developmental interests, in perpetuity, it would make even the land right around theirs seem undesirable to potential developers.

"The big thing was that we didn't want the land to become new housing," Peterson says. "We were afraid that all of this land around here was going to get split up for houses, and a lot of it did."

The younger Peterson had read about conservation easements and land trusts, which are nonprofit organizations interested in preserving land from development. They do this by acquiring the developmental rights to a parcel of land by either buying them or, more often, receiving them as a donation from a landowner (see the "Land Easements" sidebar on page 19).

Eventually, Peterson approached the Minnesota Land Trust about such an arrangement. At the time, he had about 210 acres of land and he wanted to protect almost all of it, so he entered into four years of negotiations and appraisals with the Trust about what they were willing to allow him to do, how much the land was worth and what development rights he was willing to give

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up. The Minnesota Land Trust is generally averse to allowing farming on eased land, but they were interested in Peterson's property because of the large amount of timber he has along the Root River. The Trust appraised his land, came up with a dollar figure that represented what they saw as the developmental potential of his land that he was giving up, and paid him about 40 percent of that value. The rest of it Peterson was able to claim as a charitable donation on his federal taxes.

According to the agreement the farmer and the Trust came up with, he is able to continue farming on the land, but cannot build any new structures, mine, or split up the land and sell it in pieces; and he must keep certain areas in grassland. Peterson still owns all of the land, but he has, essentially, sold its development rights.

Through the agreement, the farmer exempted several acres of buffer zones surrounding the buildings already existing on the property so he could expand them if he wanted. The bottom line is Peterson has agreed to give up a large amount of the potential market value of his land in order to ensure his legacy of stewardship.

"I have to realize that when I sell it, I'm not going to make a ton of money on it," he says.

After Peterson signed his agreement with the Trust, his parents started their own negotiation process with the organization to place easements on most of their land. Before it was all finalized, John Peterson had passed away. The younger Peterson bought approximately 400 acres of his parents' land in 2006, which was mostly under an easement

**Farm Transitions**, see page 19...



by then (it's largely woodland and pasture). In 2011 his mother, Arlyss, put another 150 acres of the original homestead under an easement, meaning a total of approximately

Peterson says. "I thought, 'Do I have the right to make that decision for my kids or grandkids—that they can't do certain things with the land?' They can't build on it. If they choose to start a hog farm or expand the dairy, they can't build a big confinement building."

easements may restrict a future farmer from adapting to changing markets and farming techniques.

## A Farmer's Legacy

Peterson's father was 79 when he passed away, and he never retired. The conversation about transitioning the land was seemingly too difficult to address, and he didn't talk about a life after farming.

"About other farms that came up for sale I'd ask, 'Well should I buy that or are you going to sell me some of yours?' and he just kind of pushed away from it," Peterson recalls.

The foresight his parents, particularly his mother, had to put their land into easements, however, made it affordable for Peterson to purchase farmland after his dad had passed away.

Both of Peterson's children—Taylor, 24, and Kaitlyn, 20—are interested in dairying and he and his wife Lori are hoping one or both of them eventually farm the family's land. Their daughter graduated in 2013 from Northeast Iowa Community College with a dairy science degree. Taylor went to school there for a year before coming back to farm with his dad and he intends to continue farming organically.

While he wishes easements could be amended by future parties, making them more flexible and better tailored to preserving land on working farms, Peterson also knows

he's given future farmers like his children more than just strictly regulated land.

"I'm also giving them the opportunity to buy land at a reasonable price, like I did," says the farmer. □



**During a Land Stewardship Project event Jon Peterson describes how his family uses rotational grazing and other conservation measures to protect the land. He is concerned that the conservation easement he's placed on the farm will restrict what future generations can do with it. But, he says, "I'm also giving them the opportunity to buy land at a reasonable price, like I did." (LSP Photo)**

750 acres of the Peterson farm is now protected from development.

The decision to enter all of his land into easements was not made without seriously considering the opportunities the easement would and wouldn't offer future farmers. "You're doing something that's forever,"

Peterson worries about the rigidity of the easements given inevitable changes that will come to the community.

"Have I created this island that someone is stuck in? Land that someone can't do anything with while everything around them is developed?" Peterson asks, adding that the

## Land Easements

A conservation easement is an agreement between a landowner and a land trust to limit or end development on a piece of property in order to permanently preserve it for its conservation features. Conservation features could include significant wildlife and plant habitat, natural and agricultural resources, lake or river shoreline, wetlands, or important scenic or cultural lands that benefit the

public. The agreement applies to the current landowner, as well as all future landowners.

Easements are great if you have a strong land ethic and the desire to preserve your land for future generations, but don't count on big financial benefits. In Minnesota, the tax incentives for an easement—like reduced income, estate and property taxes—are not as great as, say, Iowa's. Minnesota still taxes on the full, pre-easement value of the land. That means a farmer like Jon Peterson is only receiving the

federal tax benefits and still paying state taxes on the original, financial value of the land before the easement was put in place.

Accessibility to land trusts is also based on region, with such organizations much more prevalent on the East and West Coasts than in the Midwest, for example. More trusts mean more opportunities to find one that is open to providing easements to farmers who wish to continue farming on eased land.



# Teeming with Team Members

By Alex Baumhardt

Caleb and Lauren Langworthy approached their farm dream like racecar drivers. They assembled a pit crew of people that could help them get moving and who were invested in seeing them succeed. They spent years honing their farming skills and months developing the financial chops and networks that resulted in land ownership. The process was multifaceted and, at times, almost haltingly difficult, but Blue Ox Organics now has two experienced, ambitious and able-bodied farmers at the wheel.

## Finances & Farm Beginnings

In 2010, the Langworthys, native Minnesotans, made their return to the state after gaining extensive experience in sustainable farming in Washington. Caleb had studied

own backyards.

Between the two of them, they were building a solid knowledge of low-input, sustainable agriculture and community outreach, but neither had developed a keen sense of the financial responsibilities that came with running a farm. “I did five internships while I was getting into sustainable agriculture,” Caleb, 28, explains, “and the finances were the one thing that was often left out. I knew that was going to be the weak spot.”

In Rochester, Minn., Caleb was teaching an urban gardening program to at-risk youths when he heard of the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings course ([www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org)). He and Lauren saw it as a now-or-never opportunity to start their own enterprise.

“It was sort of right on the cusp of the internships and everything when we were kind of stepping into farming and starting to

it,” says Lauren.

They started vegetable production in 2012 on their rented land and connected with some local markets. But several months into production, they knew they weren’t going to be able to do a year-to-year lease again. “We had to get off the rented land,” Lauren says. Caleb and Lauren had long-term goals for their farm that required

production methods needing two to three years to show results, something they couldn’t rely on with a year-to-year lease.

## The Land Search

The Langworthys started looking into different ways to secure land tenure in the Eau Claire and Menomonie, Wis., area, where they had developed great relationships with buyers at the markets they sold to. They considered long-term leases, lease-to-purchase and contract-for-deed arrangements. They were intimidated by land prices and were focused on rental options that would give them some longevity so they could build the soil they would grow on. What they found were many absentee landowners who couldn’t give them that long-term security, or many that had their own ideas about what the young farmers should be

doing on the land.

“Many of [the landowners] really wanted to be a part of the farm, and that’s great in some ways, but when it’s your business, you need the flexibility to be making your own decisions,” Lauren says.

The Langworthys resolved to buy land with the hope that they could secure a USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) begin-

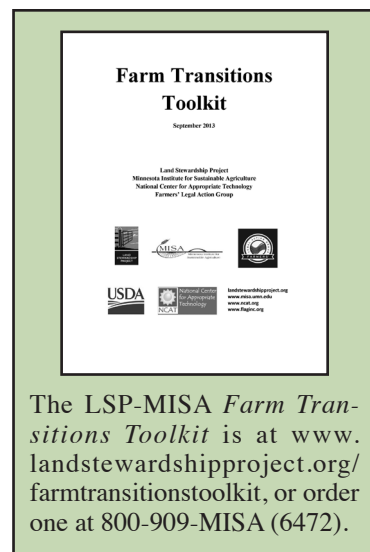


**Caleb and Lauren Langworthy have connected with numerous people in their community to launch their farming enterprise. Now they’re striving to prove their enterprise is a key part of the local food economy. “They’re not just going to believe that we’re a business—we have to show them,” says Lauren of their neighbors. (Photo by Alex Baumhardt)**

sustainable agriculture at Evergreen State College in Olympia and had, among other things, worked on what is reportedly the most diversified farm in that state. Lauren was an AmeriCorps volunteer who was involved with Master Gardener and 4-H programs in Olympia. She worked with low-income neighborhoods and youth, as well as at senior centers, teaching people in the community about the origin and economics of their food and how to grow it in their

wonder if we should have our own business,” Lauren, 27, says.

The couple received a Farm Beginnings scholarship for the course and found some land to rent on a year-to-year basis just south of Eau Claire, Wis. All of a sudden, they were farmers, farming. “We had a place and some financial education and we had connected with a Farm Business Management Instructor through Farm Beginnings, and then it was like, well, now we’ve got kind of a mentor and our finances and we’re doing



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ning farmer loan. For three months, the couple would look through listings and network within the community, as well as talk to friends at church, at the co-ops and at farmers' markets. Then, once a week, they would take a day to look at six to 10 properties in an area. Over a period of three months, they looked at over 100 farms. Most in their budget were bare ground, fallow or old hunting properties. Some had poor soil from years of monocultural soybean and corn production, no infrastructure or deteriorating structures that could almost be pushed over with one hand. Other new farmers they talked to told them to avoid the, "I can just build on it" mentality. Beginning farmers they knew didn't get insulation installed in their renovated home until they were on their property for three years.

"After awhile we were almost like, is this even worth doing or should I go back to my job teaching?" Caleb recalls.

### The Investors

While the Langworthys were busy looking for land and trying to sell their produce, one of their buyers was busy selling the farming couple. At one of the co-ops in Eau Claire, they had a worker-owner who delighted in talking about them and the quality of their produce. He was their biggest advocate, and he would stop people in the community to introduce Lauren and Caleb and to see if anyone had some leads on land.

"He was huge with helping us connect to a network of people who could help us find long-term access to land," Caleb says. All of his pitching paid off when a couple who were longtime customers of the co-op told him that they were looking to invest some money in an organic farm, and that they would like to meet with the Langworthys.

The two couples sat down to talk long-term farming ventures and to sort through their mutual skepticism. The Langworthys were curious about this type of socially-

### Multimedia Slideshow

In an LSP multimedia slideshow, Caleb and Lauren Langworthy discuss how they used a team approach to launch their farming enterprise: [www.youtube.com/user/LSPNOW](http://www.youtube.com/user/LSPNOW).

minded investment and what kind of control the investors would want to have over the farm. The private investors were curious about how the young couple would pull off a farm business and how risky their investment would be.

The Langworthys' ability to talk both farming and business and the financial knowledge they'd picked up in the Farm Beginnings course impressed the private investors and made them feel more secure in investing in the pair. "If we had only been able to speak in terms of farming, I don't know that it would have worked out very well," Lauren says.

The two parties held these discussions on the Langworthys' business proposal for a month or so before they all started looking at land together. Then they spent three months looking for land, going through business plans and negotiating one another's desires. The investors had owned several businesses and knew what it would take to get a new enterprise to a profitable place.

In the beginning, the Langworthys were interested in raising elderberries, starting a small vegetable Community Supported Agriculture operation and buying organic feeder calves to raise grass-fed beef. The investors were keen on all of these ideas except the grass-fed beef. They thought feed prices were too high, and waiting two years for the finished product was too risky for a beginning farm. So they all agreed on sheep as an alternative. That way, the young farmers would have animals to help build the land's fertility while producing cash flow with the wool and lamb.

"It was a pretty symbiotic relationship going back and forth with them," Lauren

says. "In the end, we found a plan that everyone was excited about."

"Communication was huge," Caleb adds. "We went back and forth with business plans—two or three times a day we would be answering and asking a litany of questions."

After a business plan was settled on, the investors were pretty hands-off. "They said they were ready to defer decisions to our best judgment and the judgment of our mentors," Caleb says. "They're not involved in running the farm."

After a six-month search for land that covered over 100 farms, the farmers and the investors narrowed it down to eight possibilities and then to one: a 153-acre former dairy farm near Wheeler, Wis., just outside of Menomonie. The investors closed on the property in December 2012.

Initially, the plan was to have the investors buy the land, and then the Langworthys would either rent it from them or buy the property. But the farmers were worried about how they would build equity on a farm if they didn't own any of it. Eventually, the investors agreed to sell the land to them and to provide them a mortgage on it. Then, the Langworthys approached the FSA about taking on half of that mortgage so the private investors could spread the risk.

In the end, the investors used their purchasing power to buy the farm at a reasonable price per acre and get it off the market straight away, while Caleb and Lauren began the four-month-long process of getting their FSA beginning farmer loan approved. This is a "split mortgage" with the FSA—the investors have the first lien on the property (see the "FSA Beginning Farmer Loans" sidebar below).

The private investors decided that, based on the Langworthys' business plan, the farm would reasonably turn a profit in five years. They also realized that the couple would need an additional "incidentals loan" to cover fuel and other small costs. They

**Farm Transitions, see page 22...**

## FSA Beginning Farmer Loans

While Caleb and Lauren Langworthy had to wait four months to get a USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, they were actually quite fortunate. FSA loans can take anywhere from four months to over a year to finalize, making it nearly impossible for beginning farmers to actually use them.

"We couldn't have done FSA if the investors wouldn't have come in and bought

the land initially," Caleb says. "There's no way the sellers would have waited four months for our loan to come through."

Their loan process was sped up in part because FSA was confident taking a chance on the Langworthys after other investors already had. The loan was also expedited because when the couple made Blue Ox Organics a Limited Liability Company (LLC) it was listed as a female-led farm. By making Lauren the

majority owner, Blue Ox was a "socially disadvantaged" new farm, qualifying it for special beginning farmer program treatment.

"FSA is a big animal to maneuver," Lauren says. "The structure of it is not easy on the people working there and it's not easy on the people applying for loans. There's got to be a way to streamline the process that doesn't require a four-inch binder full of paperwork by the time it's done."

generously allowed the farmers to defer payments on both loans for the first five years while the farm is being established, meaning the Langworthys' first mortgage payment to the investors will be in 2018. The interest accruing over those five years will be amortized—that means it is spread out over the life of the loan, and the investors will eventually receive the interest due them over that period of time. The Langworthys only need to pay interest on the first year of their FSA loans, a bit of principle and interest during the following two years and then full mortgage payments by year four.

Today, the Langworthys are producing vegetables for their markets in Menomonie and Eau Claire, expanding their production

to begin a Community Supported Agriculture operation and starting an elderberry enterprise. They recently launched a sheep operation with 50 ewes, with plans to grow to 100 breeding animals over the next four years. The Langworthys are also enrolled in the Land Stewardship Project's Journeyer-person Course ([www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/lspfarmernetwork](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/lspfarmernetwork)) as a way to further their Farm Beginnings education and experience.

"We always tell people that it took a team to do this," Lauren says. In taking the Farm Beginnings course they had the benefit of a Farm Business Management Instructor, and through the co-op and the FSA, they received outside, private investment, secure land tenure and start-up loans. Now, their team includes a retired organic farmer a few miles down the road who has taken them

under his wing and is helping them to get established in the Wheeler community.

And that team includes the community itself. Having grown up in small towns themselves, the Langworthys know that the social dynamics in rural pockets like Wheeler can be touchy to navigate. They are hoping that their contribution to keeping the countryside alive—keeping up a barn and a home as well as farming ethically—will get the community on board. As small-scale farmers in a climate of industrial agriculture, Caleb and Lauren are ready to prove that Blue Ox Organics is a necessary part of the local food economy.

"I think it's kind of up to us to prove that we're not just playing hobby here over the next 10 years," Lauren says. "They're not just going to believe that we're a business—we have to show them." □

## Farm Transitions Stories

# Luck, Pluck & Relationships

By Alex Baumhardt

With any luck, a young farmer shouldn't need it—luck that is—to access land. Mary Ellen Frame, 77, is a retired farmer in Northfield, Minn., and she and the two young farmers she has helped get established describe their farming relationship as one in which each of them got extremely lucky. In reality, what brought them together has a little to do with luck and happenstance, and a lot to do with careful planning and negotiation.

### Opportunities in Ag

The two young farmers are Erin Johnson and Ben Doherty, and their journey into owning and operating their own farming operation started when they were both working at the Food Bank Farm, a 60-acre organic operation in western Massachusetts. There they gained valuable farming experience and learned how to make a living with a small-scale produce farm, sowing the seeds of their dream to one day own and operate their own Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation.

They chose to start in Northfield, a community south of the Twin Cities that in recent years has become a hotbed of sorts for sustainable agriculture in the state. Johnson's family had moved there and she and Doherty wanted to be closer to them and to

a community that has become increasingly attractive to small-scale, low-input farmers. Northfield has two college campuses with research and student resources, a burgeoning farmers' market and co-op and the appeal of a diverse and lively town in the heart of rich farmland. These factors were conducive to finding a retiring farmer that wanted to transition her land. In turn, the community's dynamics helped a landowner like Frame find new farmers who shared her land stewardship values.

In the early 2000s, Frame, a Northfield native, began noticing that many of the sustainable farming projects starting up in town were being pioneered by young people, fresh out of college with liberal arts

degrees. It was the start of a shift in thinking about the connection between the health of the planet and how food was being grown. More young environmentalists were seeing farming as a way to support, and participate in, cultivating local food systems. Doherty, 34, has noticed it accelerating even more in the last three or four years. "There has been this college-level focus on local food and it's boomed in Northfield," he says. A third of the produce Doherty and Johnson raise goes to the dining programs at Saint Olaf College and Carleton College in Northfield.

This focus on supporting small-scale farmers is a stark contrast to the agricultural trends Frame experienced in her 20s and 30s, when the philosophy of fencerow-to-fencerow farming kept young people out of

...Farm Transitions, see page 23



Mary Ellen Frame sees opportunities for beginning farmers who want to plug into the local food economy. This is in stark contrast to the message she got when she was younger. "Young people were told that you couldn't earn a living farming unless you got really big." (Photo by Alex Baumhardt)



agriculture in droves.

"Young people were told that you couldn't earn a living farming unless you got really big," Frame recalls. The next generation of farmers tried to acquire more and more land and embrace the industrial model that still exists today. "At that time, the countryside was emptied out of a lot of young people. They were going to towns and cities to figure out how to earn a living."

### Seed Money

During Johnson's four years and Doherty's three at the Food Bank Farm, they had saved \$20,000 to put towards securing land. When they arrived in Northfield to begin scouting plots, they discovered they had much to learn. "We didn't know anything

about finding land," Johnson, 38, says.

They were hoping to work with a land trust, a popular model in the Eastern and Western U.S. where a nonprofit organization buys the rights to the development potential of a piece of land, allowing a farmer to pay much less for it (see "Placing Trust in the Land," page 18). But land trusts have not gained widespread traction in the Midwest, so it soon became clear to Johnson and Doherty that they would need to rent property at first.

Johnson's mother had mentioned that they should contact Frame, who had deep roots in the sustainable farming community, had helped establish a local co-op and had held a number of positions within the Cannon River chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota. Frame was taken with the couple, whose dream of having a CSA farm was similar to one she

had always had. Frame had title to five acres of tillable land and four acres of woodlot with a house she had built on it. The five acres had been farmed by two brothers, and they had honored Frame's wishes that it not be sprayed. The brothers owned many more acres and Frame told Johnson and Doherty she would consider asking the brothers if they would terminate their lease on her five acres in order to free it up for the couple.

Johnson and Doherty returned to Massachusetts to consider their farming future. Two months later, Frame sent them a handwritten letter asking them if they'd like to rent her land starting in 2006, and the couple jumped on it. Johnson's parents took photos and collected soil samples while Johnson and Doherty prepared to make the move to

...Farm Transitions, see page 24

## How to Find Each Other in the Farm Transitions World

*Ben Doherty and Erin Johnson weigh in on starting a CSA and finding a Mary Ellen Frame:*

### • Start by interning on somebody else's farm.

"Work for many years for other people," Doherty says. "No less than three years, five or more would be better. Learn from their mistakes."

### • Start interning or working on a farm in the area you intend to start your own farm.

"Start learning about that community and the land," Johnson says. "If my parents hadn't been here [in Northfield], we don't know how it would have come together."

### • Ask for help.

"Farming is a community event, especially if you need help," Doherty says. "There are some local, conventional and organic corn and bean farmers around here that are really supportive and encouraging and open with equipment and knowledge."

### • Save money.

"Save as much money as you can," Doherty says. "At least \$20,000 — more is better, of course."

### • Be flexible.

"The vision of the farm has changed over the years, but we've really achieved what we set out to do," Doherty says. He and Johnson have thought about bringing goats onto the farm and adding chickens

and grains. They've expanded to more acres and decided to cap at fewer CSA members than they had initially planned. "You have to be really nimble," Doherty says.

### • And to the future Mary Ellen Frames who may consider a farming couple outside of the family to transition land to:

"Trust and be open," Doherty says. "Be discriminating and careful, but it's so easy to just say, 'they can't do it' and stop there."

*Mary Ellen Frame weighs in on transitioning land to non-family and how to choose a new farming family for your land.*

### • Get to know their farming background.

"Erin and Ben had farming experience. They'd been working on a CSA in Massachusetts and had learned how to do everything. I had been watching [while they rented] what they did and how much knowledge and skill they brought to farming."

### • You can't farm forever.

"Nobody is going to live forever and nobody is going to be able to farm when they're 90 and 100 years-old. It is important to start thinking about it. I didn't think about it then. I just got lucky. We can't all count on being lucky. I could've had some accident that made it impossible for me to work. I could've gotten sick."

### • Consider the legacy you'd like to leave.

"If you have a long-term interest in what happens to the land, if it is important to you, think about the health of the land."

### • Take into account the farmers'....

- **Character:** "The way people talk about what they are going to do."

- **Dedication:** "There are going to be really tough times; farmers have to be super adaptable. So if you get hit by a flood or hit by a drought, or three years of drought, what kind of dedication will you have to be able to work and adapt to the new climate and conditions you'll face? And market conditions will change all the time."

- **Ask yourself:** "How realistic is their business plan? Is it something that is actually going to work?"

### • And to the future Erin Johnsons and Ben Dohertys who may seek out a retiring farmer, outside of the family, to transition land to them:

"Not everyone is going to succeed; there are going to be failures. One of the plagues of the sustainable system is economic — you have to be able to pay for the land, and that's not easy. It's very hard in the present market for somebody to pay for the land by farming it, in any system. So you have to find out if the [potential renter or buyer] has skills to not only do the farming but the business — promotion of the products and things like that. There are plenty of young kids who are idealistic but don't know how to work, don't have a practical attitude toward what they're doing, and it doesn't do anybody any good for them to take over some land and fail."

Northfield. Over the following few months, Frame and the young couple exchanged hand-written letters—the new farmers were shocked at how much trust and confidence Frame had in them (see “How to Find Each Other in the Farm Transitions World” sidebar on page 23).

“She knew we were coming from organic, but she didn’t know if we could grow anything. She just immediately trusted us,” Johnson says.

Doherty adds, “We were ready and experienced enough to start it, but there were so many things we still didn’t know.”

The first few conversations that the three of them had about the land were simple and came down to one guiding principle: no chemicals. The rest was played by ear. Frame okayed a compost pile, irrigation system, greenhouse and electricity in the greenhouse. Johnson and Doherty were articulate in laying out their dream for the operation, including ideal number of CSA members, how they intended to market extra produce and how they would both generate a living while making payments to Frame.

The brothers who had farmed the five acres helped Johnson and Doherty with plowing and Johnson’s relatives and their friends helped them prepare the ground and plant. The couple got an apartment in town and spent two summers getting everything established. They talked to the company in charge of spraying the brothers’ land about ways they would need to mitigate potential chemical drift. During the winters, Johnson worked at the local food co-op while Doherty worked at a plant nursery and substitute taught.

They paid Frame the same rental rate that conventional farmers in the area were paying. The first year, they suffered through softball-size hail and growing pains learning how to operate the new farm. Besides dealing with soil, climate and pest obstacles that were new, the couple had the daunting responsibility of owning a business rather than simply working for one.

The difficulties of their first year, however, only strengthened Frame’s faith in the young couple. “It was kind of a test for them, but I had thought they passed the test very well,” she recalls. The next winter, as luck would have it, the renter of the home Frame had built on the woodlot moved to town and in 2008 Frame sold the farm — the

five acres and the woodlot with the house—to Doherty and Johnson.

After just two years, Frame had found farmers outside of her family who shared her land ethic, and she had discovered that she was willing to sell them some of her land and the very home she’d built on it. Frame hadn’t thought about how she would transition her farm before she met the couple.

“Ben and Erin were talking about their vision for their farm, and I hadn’t been able to achieve that. There are two of them and they’re young,” Frame says.

The three worked out a contract for deed, which means for the first 10 years of their mortgage payments, Frame is essentially the



**Ben Doherty and Erin Johnson say they feel fortunate to have found a landowner who appreciates what sustainable farming practices can add to the community. (Photo by Alex Baumhardt)**

bank. She holds the mortgage, and Johnson and Doherty pay her every month based on the price and interest rate they agreed upon with her. Frame told Johnson and Doherty the assessed value of the land and property (the assessed value of property is often lower than the market value) and had the couple come up with three prices and interest rates that they thought they could pay based on that value. She accepted both the lowest price and the lowest interest rate the two proposed.

The contract for deed is beneficial for Frame because it includes a balloon payment after the 10-year period. This means that when the contract is up, Johnson and Doherty will go to a bank to take out a loan for the remainder of the money they owe Frame, pay her, and then finish paying off that loan at the bank. When the time comes for them to take out the bank loan, they are

more likely to secure it given their experience paying a 10-year mortgage to Frame.

## More Than Luck

Besides selling wholesale vegetables to local institutions, Doherty and Johnson’s operation, Open Hands Farm, is also a CSA. It started with six members, Frame being one of them, and has grown to 160 members today. Johnson and Doherty intend to keep it at that number for the time being.

Farming neighbors and community members that have grown up around the farm comment to Frame about the speed with which it has been established and how beautiful it has become. Frame has the satisfaction of not only seeing it thrive in the hands of people she respects, but of still being seen as a part of its success. The amount of work Johnson and Doherty put into the farm worries Frame at times, but she can’t help getting excited about the respect and admiration the two have earned from the community.

“I could sense their dedication to farming,” Frame says. “You aren’t really dedicated to any land until you’ve worked it, but when you have worked on a place, then you begin to love it. It’s a connection that grows and it’s exciting; it gives me hope. They’re doing what I had hoped to do; they’re carrying my dream forwards.”

That’s an awesome responsibility, but Johnson and Doherty say that taking it on creates a win-win situation.

“I think the hardest part is probably finding somebody outside of the family that you feel shares your values,” Johnson says. “She poured her heart and soul into the whole place. I think she’s pleased to have us here doing what we’re doing and taking care of it and feeding lots of people with great food.” □

**Farm Transitions Toolkit**  
September 2013

Land Stewardship Project  
Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture  
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# Profits from Perennials

## Can Cover Crops Catch On?

*Long-Term Benefits are One Thing—Short Term Practicality is Another*

By Brian DeVore

As soon as Jerry Morical walked into a stand of corn on his west-central Minnesota farm one recent day in August, he entered a scene being replicated on millions of acres around the Midwest: towering green stalks stretching toward the sky, clone-like in their repetition. But then the farmer bent down below the lower leaves and points out an ever so slight difference—biding its time in the deep shade was a diverse mix of small grains and legumes. Not impressive at first glance, but their mere presence is a mini-revolution of sorts.

These are cover crops, and as their name implies, when the corn is harvested in the fall Morical's soil will still be covered in a blanket of living vegetation. Suddenly, this field will look quite different than all of its cousins spread across the landscape—above and below ground.

The plot will also be different because it will still be producing economic activity well after the corn is put into storage or sold. In June, Jerry and his grandson Taylor planted up to 10 species—peas, clover, ryegrass, lentils, vetch, radish, millet, cowpeas, oats and turnips—of cover crops into standing corn. They are hoping that integrating these plants into their farming system will help ease the transition they've recently undertaken into no-till production. Whether the soil building properties of cover cropping pay off could take years to prove. But in the short term, the Moricals already have a Plan B that will help them justify the diverse plantings.

The seed cost \$20 to \$22 an acre, and on one 40-acre cover cropped cornfield, Taylor figures he can make back that cost with his 21-head beef cow herd.

"If I can graze that 40 acres for 30 days, I can get my seed cost back and it will take pressure off my hay crop," he says, adding

that his hope is to build enough soil health that he can save money in other ways.

"Maybe we can cut down on fertilizer use down the line."

John Baker, a soil scientist with the USDA's Agricultural Research Service, says using short term gains to open the door to some big picture ones is key if cover cropping is to ever become more common in the Upper Midwest. In the struggle to get soil covered with living plants longer than the typical 90-day growing season that comes with corn and soybean production, cover crops could represent a good compromise



**Soil conservationist Jay Fuhrer (right) describes the cover cropping system used by Penny Meeker and Todd McPeak (center) on land they farm in North Dakota's Burleigh County. Farmers, conservationists and scientists are flocking to the region to view firsthand a system that combines cover cropping, no-till planting and rotational grazing. (LSP photo)**

between planting land to perennial systems like grass, and growing only annual row crops. Farmers can theoretically slip cover crops into their current production system without completely upending everything.

"Instead of saying to farmers now here's something completely different, you provide ways to transition into something that resembles their current system of cropping," says Baker.

Striking such a balance is worth pursuing, given the multiple benefits such a system can produce. Growing small grains, root crops such as turnips and other so-called "non-commodity" plants on fields before and after cash crops are harvested can

build soil organic matter, cut erosion, break up compaction, protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat. Cover cropping can even help sequester greenhouse gases, something Baker is studying in Minnesota.

But at a time when there is intense pressure to grow as much corn and soybeans as possible, planting anything other than cash commodity crops is not a priority with the vast majority of farmers.

According to a National Wildlife Federation survey of seed dealers released this fall, less than 2 percent of farmland in the Mississippi River Basin—an area covering 18 states and encompassing Midwestern states like Minnesota and Southern states like Arkansas and Kentucky—are planted to cover crops.

Cover crops can be particularly difficult to manage in the Upper Midwest, where inclement weather often shortens the growing season considerably. And because most farmers have so little experience with cover

crops, there are concerns they will basically compete with corn and soybeans for nutrients, water and other resources. In addition, relatively little research has been done at land grant universities on cover cropping systems—large commodity groups, which foot the bill for a lot of university research, simply aren't interested in non-cash crop science.

However, recently there have been indications in Farm Country that cover cropping may be getting a more positive image in the Corn Belt. Agronomic innovations, the limits of conventional soil conservation methods and challenges posed by a changing climate are making such plantings increasingly attractive. But conservation and agronomy experts agree that for cover cropping to become a consistent presence on Midwestern fields, it

will need to cover more than soil—it needs to cover the economic bottom line.

### Not Flashy, But Reliable

Perhaps no place has gotten people more excited about the potential of cover crops than Burleigh County in south-central North Dakota. Over the past decade or so the Burleigh County Soil Health Team has used a combination of cover crops, rotational grazing and no-till farming to increase soil's natural ability to build its own fertility, resist erosion and make better use of moisture.

...Cover Crops, see page 26



# Profits from Perennials

...Cover Crops, from page 25

The Team consists of local farmers, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) experts, Soil Conservation District personnel and USDA scientists (*see the No. 3 and No. 4, 2013 Land Stewardship Letter for more on the Burleigh County Soil Health Team*).

One thing the Soil Health Team has found is that planting multiple species of cover crops—as many as eight, 10 or more—produces a soil that is a reliable producer, especially in difficult conditions.

“With healthy soil, you may not out-yield your neighbor in the best years, but you will out perform them in the not-so-good years,” says Kristine Nichols, a soil microbiologist at the USDA’s Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory who works with the Soil Health Team.

Nichols made her comments to a contingent of Minnesota farmers and soil experts who had just spent an August day seeing what people in Burleigh County were doing to develop the kind of soil that’s not just reliable, but resilient enough to produce profits in even the harshest conditions. This tour was sponsored by the Minnesota NRCS and the USDA’s Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program. This part of North Dakota receives on average only 16 inches of precipitation annually—that’s a foot less than what most of Minnesota gets in a typical year. At the time of the tour, there had not been a significant rain in that part of North Dakota for two months, but corn that was raised on ground where cover cropping and other methods had been used to build soil health appeared to be thriving.

“I have worked with irrigators for 20 years and I have never seen a corn crop look this good with eight weeks of no rain,” says Brad Wenz, a soil conservationist for the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District in central Minnesota who participated in the tour. “There is something going

on there.”

All that cover crop foliage above ground and living roots beneath the surface can build the kind of soil health that helps fields make better use of available moisture. A bare soil holds 1.7 inches of water while a stand of living plants can hold 4.2 inches of water, according to the NRCS.

That fact was reinforced this summer when the USDA and the Conservation Technology Information Center released the results of a farmer survey showing that cover crops more than paid for themselves in the Upper Mississippi River watershed during the drought of 2012. Corn and soybeans planted in 2012 after cover crops had a 9.6 percent and 11.6 percent yield increase, respectively, when compared with fields that had no cover crops, according to the survey.



**David Larson (left) describes his cover crop planting of radish and winter rye during a Land Stewardship Project field day in early November. Larson, who farms near Rushford in southeast Minnesota with his wife Sue, planted the cover crops in early August after flooding prevented him from growing corn on a field. The deep tap roots of the radishes helped break up the soil compaction that resulted from the flooding. In addition, the Larsons were able to graze their beef cattle on the radishes this fall, providing cheap forage. (Photo by Caroline van Schaik)**

## Adding Value

During the Burleigh County tour, farmer Jerry Doan showed the Minnesotans a shoulder-high stand of cover crops that included millet, a type of sunflower and grazing corn. He explained that this stand, which was planted June 20, was to be grazed starting in November, providing winter-feed for his beef herd. Doan estimates that in 2011 grazing cover crops produced \$50,000 in savings for his operation and took pressure off his regular pastures.

## Give it a Listen

The Land Stewardship Project’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast features farmers Jerry and Taylor Morical, along with soil scientist Sharon Weyers and forage expert Jim Paulson, talking about cover crops and soil health: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/506](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/506).

“I had a goal that every acre of cropland on this place would be profitable,” says Doan, who has recently been joined in the farming operation by two sons. “Fifty thousand dollars when you’re bringing in another generation is another family income.”

This brings up an important point: like the Moricals in west-central Minnesota, many of the Burleigh County farmers are utilizing livestock to make cover crops pay. That’s great in an area where livestock like cattle are present on farms, but is increasingly difficult as more Midwestern operations become specialized, with corn and soybean production clustered in areas far away from livestock concentration.

During the recent Burleigh County tour, a typical comment made by Minnesota natural resources professionals was, “This is great where there are cattle on farms, but how can we make cover crops work in a corn-soybean rotation?”

When livestock or other ways to add economic value to cover crops aren’t immediately available, the results can be disastrous. For example, a particularly late, wet spring in 2013 made it next to impossible to plant corn and soybeans in parts of Minnesota and Iowa in a timely manner. To stay in compliance with government commodity programs on “prevent plant” acres—those acres too wet

to get cash crops planted on—many farmers seeded cover crops, often for the first time. This offered a prime opportunity for farmers to get familiar with this system without exposing themselves to a lot of risk.

But to the chagrin of soil conservationists, by September there were reports that farmers were spraying and plowing up cover crops on prevent plant acres to prepare for the 2014 growing season. Not only are such

...Cover Crops, see page 27



steps unnecessary—winter kill takes care of most cover crops—but early termination removes the environmental benefits having living plants on a field can provide. Lack of familiarity with cover cropping had prompted farmers to fall into old routines. But to be fair, after they had met the government's requirements for planting those acres for a growing season, what short-term financial incentive did they have for keeping those rye and radish plants in place?

Doan and other members of the Burleigh County Soil Health Team insist that even if they are not grazed, cover crops pay off by building enough organic matter to reduce the need for expensive chemical inputs in the future. Burleigh County farmer Gabe Brown has reported that raising organic matter on his farm has allowed him to reduce the use of commercial fertilizer by over 90 percent, and herbicides by 75 percent. At today's fertilizer prices, each 1 percent of organic matter contains \$751 worth of nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, sulfur and carbon, he estimates. That means Brown's 5 percent organic matter content is worth \$3,775 per acre. Ohio State University estimates that each 1 percent of soil organic matter is worth \$680 per acre—that's not as high as Brown's estimate, but it's still an impressive financial boost provided by all those microbes we tend to take for granted.

But building organic matter levels to the point where they pay off financially can take years, caution soil scientists. Many farmers may feel they don't have the luxury of time.

"It's a tough sell," says a western Minnesota farmer who promotes cover cropping as a board member of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conserva-

tion Districts. "It's a tough sell for me." This particular farmer tried planting cover crops for three years in a row and droughty weather at the wrong time has prevented good seed germination every time. "I realize I need to try it in the long term to really give it an honest shot," he concedes.

### A Public Good

Part of the reason farmers have a hard time taking the long, patient view with cover crops is that many of the benefits they produce are outside a farm's borders. Survey results showing that only 2 percent of farmland in the Mississippi River Basin is cover cropped are troubling because we're talking about a watershed that covers 41 percent of the continental U.S. Agriculture in this watershed is the source of 70 percent of the nitrogen and phosphorus runoff that makes its way to the Gulf of Mexico, where they are creating a hypoxic "dead zone." A recent report that 73 percent of the nitrogen escaping into Minnesota's rivers is coming from cropland (see page 4) is a reminder that we need a system that not only creates a healthy water cycle but also reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.

Cover crops have the potential to reduce nutrient and pesticide runoff by half, and soil erosion by 90 percent, according to Ohio State University. That means the public benefits tremendously from more cover crops on the ground, and thus needs to provide farmers the support needed to take some of the risk out of adopting these systems.

A few government programs already recognize the public good cover crops can provide. Right now, the use of cover crops can help increase farmers' scores when they apply to be enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program



Farmers and government conservation staffers examined a cover crop planting of German hay millet during an Aug. 8 Land Stewardship Project field day on the Dan and Linda Jenniges farm near Glenwood in west-central Minnesota. The millet was planted July 7 after a harvest of edible peas and was later baled for the Jenniges' beef cattle herd. (Photo by Robin Moore)

(see page 8), which in turn results in higher contract payments. And the Minnesota NRCS recently started providing funds to farmers who will plant multiple species of cover crops on the same field for up to five years in a row.

Paying farmers to put in place more protection for the soil is an important step toward a more resilient, sustainable agriculture, says Burleigh County's Jay Fuhrer. But it's important to treat options like cover crops as just that—steps.

"Cover crops aren't an end goal—they are a tool," he says while grubbing up a sample of rich, fragrant soil from a field planted to more than half-a-dozen species of plants. "It's about a system." □



Jerry Morical (left) custom built a seeder with hanging tubes so that he could place cover crop seed below the leaves of standing corn on his west-central Minnesota farm. He and his grandson Taylor had good success with the system last summer, but plan to make further modifications to increase the germination rate. (LSP photo)

### LSP & Soil Health

The Land Stewardship Project is working in watersheds in western Minnesota (Chippewa River) and southeast Minnesota (Root River) to promote cover cropping and other farming systems that are good for landscape health and economically viable for farmers. For more information, see the **Stewardship & Food** link at [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org).

Check out LSP's **Soil Health, Profits & Resiliency** page on our website for links to resources on everything from cover crop selection to methods for monitoring soil health.

Details on upcoming soil health workshops and field days are available on LSP's website as well as via *LIVE-WIRE*, our monthly e-letter. See page 31 for details on subscribing.



## Rebuilding the Foodshed

### How to Create Local, Sustainable, and Secure Food Systems

By Philip Ackerman-Leist

Foreword by Deborah Madison

2013; 321 pages

Chelsea Green Publishing

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

*Reviewed by Brian DeVore*

A few years ago, a travel writer penned an opinion piece in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* lambasting the “local foods movement.” One thing that really galled him was seeing all those Volvos, Saabs and Hondas that consumers parked at the farmers’ market while they shopped for vegetables that had been transported into town by numerous, often gas-guzzling, pickup trucks. That, argued the commentator, was a major reason locavores were being hypocrites when they claimed they supported “local” for economic and environmental reasons.

Scoffed the writer, “If patronizing local producers is so important to building local economies, why did I see so many foreign cars parked at the farmers’ market?”

He made a good, if somewhat narrowly observed, point, and as Philip Ackerman-Leist argues in his new book, *Rebuilding the Foodshed: How to Create Local, Sustainable, and Secure Food Systems*, the so-called local food movement has probably set itself up for such derision. Participants in the movement have too often characterized it as one that’s superior because of strictly defined geographic, economic and environmental benefits. These are all part of the picture, but can be limiting if we “fetishize” any element in isolation and don’t consider it part of the whole, writes Ackerman-Leist.

A prime example of this is the argument that buying local food is good for the environment because it reduces food miles, which automatically cuts the carbon footprint of those tomatoes raised in the next county. In recent years this has pretty much been debunked; it turns out a semi-trailer hauling tomatoes a couple thousand miles from Florida in August produces fewer greenhouse gases than all those individual

farmer vehicles trundling in from past the outer ring suburbs. “See,” say promoters of the conventional, industrialized, multinational food production and distribution system, “our way is better.”

But Ackerman-Leist, a farmer and professor who directs Green Mountain College’s Farm & Food Project in Vermont, uses his well-researched book to show how thinking “locally” when it comes to food should not mean taking a parochial view of the world. In fact, a successful local food movement consists of quite the opposite approach.

He spends a good part of the book outlining in detail the reasons why we should care about the local food movement in the first place. Many of the pro-local arguments in *Rebuilding the Foodshed* won’t be a surprise to anyone who follows the issue even from a distance, but Ackerman-Leist does a nice job of bringing them together into one place. And despite debunking the “food miles” rationalization, the author even makes a convincing case for supporting local food because it’s more energy efficient. Hint: we need to stop focusing so narrowly on how the food gets from the farm to the market, and more on the systems approach that gets it from the soil to the farmer’s hands in the first place.

So now that we’ve reaffirmed the local food movement is good for us, how can it be moved beyond the niche status that’s sustained it thus far, but is starting to show signs of wearing out its welcome? Well, just as we should not get too focused on individual benefits to the exclusion of the big picture, we should figure out a way to pull together all the excellent local food efforts that exist around the country into a more coherent whole, says Ackerman-Leist. For this movement to have a real impact on our economic, social and environmental landscape, it needs to start making connections.

“Thinking of our own local food systems as dots on a map is shortsighted, and it stymies the real potential of this critical work,” he writes. “We should be concentrating much more on the flows than the dots. Just as a good ecologist understands the organisms in and of themselves aren’t really the point of study—the interactions between all the different organisms are the point....”

In some ways, Ackerman-Leist is well qualified to make such an argument, since he lives in one of those “dots.” His family produces much of their own food in a bucolic part of Vermont where local food is not only available, but ways of making it more avail-

able are being taught at the local college.

But the good professor knows we can’t all live in Vermont, or southeast Minnesota or the San Francisco Bay area, for that matter. That’s why we need to pay attention to those inter-community flows and encourage the development of food councils, cooperatives and even national initiatives like the USDA’s Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative. These can help connect those dots and develop efficiencies that are lacking in disparate local food systems, particular ones trying to get going in sparsely populated areas.

And in the end, argues Ackerman-Leist, we need to stop calling it “local food” and start using terms like “community-based food systems.” When we look at this system as community-based, it beats the conventional system hands-down. As Ackerman-

Leist says, “food production” is about a terminal point in the act of agriculture while farming is about a continuum that includes an entire community, from what’s in the soil to who takes part in this process, including not only farmers but workers and eaters. “Such a mindset helps us break out of the restrictions geography can impose,” he writes.

Such thinking helps us consider the community-based foods movement as the kind of force that, at times, can move beyond our national or even

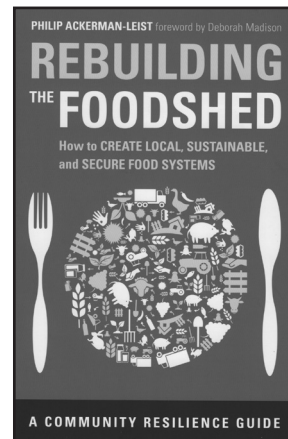
continental borders as we forge marketing relationships with farmers who may be thousands of miles away, but share our desire to build a healthy, sustainable community. That sound was one of Midwestern lovers of bananas and coffee breathing a collective sigh of relief.

This isn’t just about getting a permit to put on a Saturday morning farmers’ market. This is complex stuff and involves reforming everything from agronomic systems and transportation to farm policy and the way we treat workers. Ackerman-Leist concedes that there is an irony here.

“While sustainable agriculture involves the careful *conservation of resources*,” he writes, “the building of a resilient community-based food system involves *utilizing as many resources as possible*: farmers, entrepreneurs, social justice advocates, and technologies old and new.”

But like a healthy soil, all that energy that goes into establishing a community-based food system can be self-perpetuating. □

*Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.*





# Muskrat for Supper

## Exploring the Natural World with the Last River Rat

By Kenny Salwey

2012; 145 pages

Fulcrum Publishing

[www.fulcrum-books.com](http://www.fulcrum-books.com)

*Reviewed by Dale Hadler*

**M***uskrat for Supper: Exploring the Natural World With the Last River Rat* is another in a series of books by Kenny Salwey, who, as the subtitle implies, is a self-described “river rat.” Salwey is the last of a breed of people whose lifestyle has all but disappeared in this fast-paced, high-tech digital world. For 30 years, he eked out a living on the Mississippi River in Wisconsin’s Buffalo County running a trapline, hiring out as a river guide, digging and selling roots and herbs, and eating the food he hunted and fished. Today, Salwey is a storyteller, environmental educator, keynote speaker, nature writer and advocate for the Upper Mississippi River he loves so dearly.

Through it all, Salwey is very focused on reaching young people with his message of land stewardship. So it’s no surprise the target audience for *Muskrat for Supper* is pre-teens. Its narrative is based on a visit by two former students who return with their family to have him teach their kids outdoor skills. Salwey makes it clear everything is “factual” in the book, but that the people he talks about are composites.

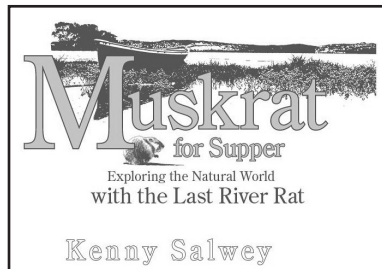
The book opens with the family arriving at Salwey’s rustic shack. The children are excited at the prospect of learning about the environs of the Upper Mississippi River Valley from someone as experienced as Salwey. “Welcome to my shack. Let me show you around,” he says in welcome. “As you can see, I’ve gathered a lot of treasures over my years on the river. I’m not only a river rat; I’m a pack rat as well.”

Beaver skulls, turtle shells, monstrous catfish heads — anyone familiar with a

“touch and see” room at a nature center knows how such treasures can fire up a kid’s outdoor passion and desire to learn more.

Salwey is very clear that many of his outdoor skills were taught to him by Native Americans and French-Canadian descendent family members. Now it’s his turn to pass it on. At the center of all this is his “Possible Bag,” which is designed to carry all the things you might need in the outdoors. This bag can be as simple as a recycled shoulder purse. In Salwey’s case, his Possible Bag is crafted out of a burlap gunny sack made by a Native American friend of his and decorated with turtles, which are the author’s totem animal.

Salwey then explains that he prefers these



“possible bags” to backpacks because they do not ride up on the shoulders like a pack and are more easily accessed. Salwey then describes three items he always places in his possible bag: a pocketknife, field guide and his lucky rock. There is also a penny “so you’re never really broke.” These are items that have practical and emotional values.

At the center of all this practical advice is a message of outdoor ethics—treating the natural world with respect, taking only what you need and can use, respecting laws and regulations so the resources can be maintained for others.

At the heart of the book is a Thanksgiving holiday hunting trip the family takes, using the author’s ideas and knowledge to help the children develop outdoor skills such as hunting, tracking, observing animals and reading natural signs. Even though the hunting trip is successful in bagging game, the real success is the family learning and teaching together and becoming closer. Salwey sees family, children and passing skills on to future generations as key parts of the

outdoor experience.

The setting for many of the author’s experiences is the Driftless Region of the Upper Mississippi Valley, and he provides the kind of detailed, beautiful descriptions that only someone living close to the land could. Salwey discusses his own experiences exploring sloughs and river bottomlands, fishing and hunting, as well as the many animals he has known, including several dogs that were frequent companions on his outdoor adventures. Salwey has become part of this place along the Mississippi, and with that has come a desire to see it preserved and thrive.

This book is no mere pining for days gone by. The river rat makes it clear we don’t all need to live in a shack by the river to gain a love of nature. He emphasizes to his young charges the importance of finding the natural world in small city parks and vacant lots—wherever there’s a natural treasure to be found.

This philosophy is similar to the ideas discussed in Richard Louv’s popular *Last Child in the Woods*, which is a book-length argument for exposing kids to nature as much as possible. Salwey’s writing style is less academic than Louv’s. This makes the woodsman’s ideas more accessible to young readers and parents without an academic background in education or environmental studies, but still wishing to introduce their children to the outdoor world. Salwey has an earthy, conversational style all his own, making his ideas appear simple, but important all the same.

“This here is a snapping turtle shell,” he explains to the kids. “A snapping turtle has thirteen sections, or plates, on its shell. Every hard-shell turtle has thirteen parts to its shell: a painted turtle, a map turtle, a snapping turtle, a blanding’s turtle.”

Rest assured Salwey didn’t Google that information. He possesses the kind of “touch and see” knowledge that sticks with a person. With knowledge comes respect, and with respect comes a desire to protect the environment that turtle shell resides in. □

*Frequent Land Stewardship Project volunteer Dale Hadler lives in the Mississippi River town of Winona, Minn., and is an avid angler.*

## Listen in on the Voices of the Land

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

We now have more than 140 episodes online and are adding more each month.

A few of our recent shows featured:

- ◆ Soil health and the soil ecosystem
- ◆ Cover cropping
- ◆ Beginning farmers in the Lake Superior region
- ◆ A brother-sister farming team
- ◆ Improving a stream with grazing

- ◆ Minnesota’s top Conservation Stewardship Program county
- ◆ Using grazing to improve wildlife habitat and the bottom line
- ◆ Community Supported Agriculture in China

To listen in, go to [www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast).



**LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT**

## *Membership Update*

### **Land Stewardship Project 2012-2013 Financial Update**

#### **Expenses by Operational Area**

Organizing/Policy	21%	\$472,044
Food Systems	29%	\$654,008
Farm Beginnings	25%	\$556,514
Membership/Outreach	9%	\$195,722
Communications	3%	\$67,489
Other	<1%	\$6,244
Management & General	8%	\$177,829
Fundraising	5%	\$122,671
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$2,252,520</b>

#### **Unrestricted Operating Revenue**

Religious Grants	2%	\$52,500
Foundations & Corporations, Including Released from Restriction	37%	\$936,416
Government Grants	27%	\$689,447
Membership & Contributions	23%	\$580,881
Contract revenue	6%	\$162,053
Fees, Rents & Sales	3%	\$78,891
Other	1%	\$26,277
Unrealized Investment Gains (Losses)	<1%	\$9,859
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$2,536,324</b>

### **Statement of Financial Position** (As of June 30, 2013)

#### **Assets**

Cash & Investments.....	\$700,180
Board Restricted Long-Term Reserve.....	\$451,734
Property & Equipment.....	\$916,786
Grants, Contracts & Pledges Receivable.....	\$1,022,248
Other.....	\$57,310
<b>Total Assets.....</b>	<b>\$3,148,258</b>

#### **Liabilities & Net Assets**

Total Liabilities.....	\$781,226
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#### **Net Assets:**

Board-Controlled Long-Term & Short-Term Reserves.....	\$1,190,124
Temporarily Restricted Grants for Future Fiscal Years.....	\$1,176,908

**Total Liabilities & Net Assets.....\$3,148,258**

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

- Expenses include contracts with collaborating nonprofit, university or government partners for jointly conducted work.

- Reserve funds under Liabilities and “Net Assets” include previous gifts of farms donated to LSP for long-term support and sold to family farmers in a way that protected the land for farming and open space.

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



## Membership ???

Have questions about your Land Stewardship Project membership-status, or want to give a gift membership? Contact LSP's Membership Program:

- Megan Smith, 612-722-6377, megans@landstewardshipproject.org.
- Abby Liesch, 612-722-6377, aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org.

You can also join LSP or renew your membership at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate). ☐

## Get Current With

**LIVE**  **WIRE**

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* to get monthly e-mail updates from the Land Stewardship Project. To subscribe, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/signup). ☐

## Want to Volunteer?

Thanks to all of our volunteers that helped the Land Stewardship Project out in all aspects of our work during 2013. LSP literally could not fulfill its mission without the hard work of our volunteers.

Volunteers help us do everything from stuff envelopes and make telephone calls to enter data and set up logistics for meetings. If you'd like to volunteer in one of our offices, contact:

- **Montevideo, Minn.**— Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105, [tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org).
- **Lewiston, Minn.** — Karen Benson, 507-523-3366, [lpse@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lpse@landstewardshipproject.org).
- **Minneapolis** — Megan Smith, 612-722-6377, [megans@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:megans@landstewardshipproject.org). ☐



## In Memory & in Honor...

Periodically, the Land Stewardship Project receives gifts made by members and friends to honor or remember loved ones, friends or special events.

If you'd like to make such a donation in the name of someone, contact LSP's Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or [mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org).

## Wear Your LSP Pride

Show your support for the Land Stewardship Project with our limited edition black t-shirt. It has LSP's logo on the front and the words "Land Stewardship Project" on the back. The t-shirt is USA Union Made, 100 percent preshrunk cotton, and is available in adult sizes: small, medium, large and extra large. The cost is \$15 and orders can be made by calling 612-722-6377 or visiting [www.landstewardshipproject.org/store](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/store).



## Support LSP in Your Workplace

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

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

You can support LSP in your workplace by giving through the Minnesota Environmental Fund.

Options include giving a designated amount through payroll deduction, or a single gift. You may also choose to give to the entire coalition or specify the organization of your choice within the coalition, such as the Land Stewardship Project. If your employer does not provide this opportunity, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For more information, contact LSP's Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or [mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org). ☐






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## STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **WINTER—LSP Soil Health Workshop, southwest Minnesota** (*details to be announced*); Contact: Richard Ness, LSP, 320-269-2105, [rness@landstewardship-project.org](mailto:rness@landstewardship-project.org)

→ **JAN. 10-11—Minnesota Organic Conference**, Saint Cloud, Minn.; Contact: [www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic.aspx) 651-201-6012  
→ **JAN. 10-12—Wisconsin School for Beginning Market Growers**, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Contact: [www.cias.wisc.edu](http://www.cias.wisc.edu), 608-265-3704

→ **JAN. 13—Deadline for submitting descriptions for the 2014 LSP CSA Farm Directory for the Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region** (*see page 6*)

→ **JAN. 16-18—GrassWorks Grazing Conference**, Wausau, Wis.; Contact: [www.grassworks.org](http://www.grassworks.org), 715-965-8324  
→ **JAN. 17—SFA “Keep Cattle in Minnesota Project” workshop**, Moose Lake, Minn.; Contact: [www.sfa-mn.org/keep-cattle-in-minnesota](http://www.sfa-mn.org/keep-cattle-in-minnesota), 763-260-0209

→ **JAN. 18—Frac Sand Citizen Summit**, Winona, Minn.; Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 507-523-3366, [bking@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bking@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **JAN. 23—Burleigh County Soil Health Workshop**, Bismarck, N. Dak.; Contact: [www.bcsd.com](http://www.bcsd.com), 701-250-4518, Ext. 3  
→ **JAN. 23-24—Midwest Value Added Conference**, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.; Contact: [www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.html](http://www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.html), 715-579-5229

→ **JAN. 23-24—Introduction to Holistic Management course**, Des Moines, Iowa; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, [caroline@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:caroline@landstewardshipproject.org), 507-523-3366, [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org)

→ **JAN. 23-25—Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference**, Ames, Iowa; Contact: [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org), 515-232-5661

→ **JAN. 24-25—Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society Winter Conference**, Aberdeen, S. Dak.; Contact: [www.npsas.org](http://www.npsas.org), 701-883-4304

→ **JAN. 25—Deep Winter Production of Greens & Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy**, Ashby, Minn.; Contact: SFA, [www.sfa-mn.org](http://www.sfa-mn.org), 763-244-6659

→ **JAN. 29—Application deadline for the MDA Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant Program** (*see page 9*)

→ **FEB. 1-2—9th Immigrant & Minority Farmer Conference**, Saint Paul, Minn.; Contact: Minnesota Food Association, [www.mnfoodassociation.org](http://www.mnfoodassociation.org), 651-433-3676

→ **FEB. 5-6—Financial Planning with Holistic Management course**, northeast Iowa/southeast Minnesota; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, [caroline@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:caroline@landstewardshipproject.org), 507-523-3366

→ **FEB. 8—Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Annual Conference**, Saint Joseph, Minn.; Contact: [www.sfa-mn.org/conference](http://www.sfa-mn.org/conference), Jason Walker, 612-605-9269

→ **FEB. 14—Application deadline for Minnesota Organic Transition Cost Share Program** (*see page 9*)

→ **FEB. 19-20—Midwest Soil Health Summit**, Alexandria, Minn.; Contact: [www.sfa-mn.org](http://www.sfa-mn.org), Jason Walker, SFA, [jason@sfa-mn.org](mailto:jason@sfa-mn.org)

→ **FEB. 25—2014 session of the Minnesota Legislature begins** (*contact LSP organizer Bobby King at 507-523-3366 or [bking@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bking@landstewardshipproject.org), or see [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) for details on LSP's priorities*)

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

→ **FEB. 27-MARCH 1—MOSES Organic Farming Conference**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: [www.mosesorganic.org](http://www.mosesorganic.org), 715-778-5775

→ **MARCH—9th Annual LSP Family Farm Breakfast & Day at the Capitol** (*date to be announced*); Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 507-523-3366, [bking@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bking@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **MARCH 1—Minn. Value Added Grant Program application deadline** (*see page 9*)

→ **MARCH 8—Last 2013-2014 class session for St. Cloud LSP Farm Beginnings**

→ **MARCH 15—Last 2013-2014 class session for Winona Farm Beginnings**

→ **MAR. 21-22—Planned Grazing with Holistic Management course**, northeast Iowa/southeast Minn.; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, [caroline@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:caroline@landstewardshipproject.org), 507-523-3366

→ **APRIL 5—Last 2013-2014 class session for Esko Farm Beginnings**

→ **JUNE—Biological Monitoring with Holistic Management course**, northeast Iowa/southeast Minn.; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, [caroline@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:caroline@landstewardshipproject.org), 507-523-3366

→ **AUG. 1—Deadline for LSP's 2013-2014 Farm Beginnings course**; Contact: [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org), 507-523-3366

Check [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) for the latest on upcoming events.