

The Land Stewardship

42 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

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Keeping an eye on the flow of regenerative ag knowledge (page 14).



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- Sister Mary Tacheny's LSP Legacy*—
 - Mapping Our Future*—
 - 2024 MN Legislature Wrap-up*—
 - Senate Farm Bill Released*—
 - Silvopasturing's Silver Lining*—
 - An Urban Farm's 'R' Factor*—
 - CSA: Past, Present & Future*—
 - The Corruption of America's Food Industry*—



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Contents

Stewardship Roots...3

- Sister Mary Tacheny's LSP Legacy
- Mapping Out LSP's Future

Myth Buster...5

- Climate-Smart Ag & the "Cobra Effect"

LSP News...6

- LSP Staff Update
- Songs of the Soil

Farmer-to-Farmer...14

5 Examples of Regenerative Ag
Knowledge's People-to-People Flow:

- Soil
- Climate
- Livestock
- Food
- Entrepreneurship

Soil Health...25

- Johnson-Su Composting Results
- Composting: Look & Listen



Membership Update...34

- Membership Profile: Gina Aguilar
- Thanks to Our Holiday Card Designer
- Membership Questions?
- Planned Giving to LSP
- In Memory & in Honor

Stewardship Calendar...36

- Twin Cities Cookout
- Grazing School
- Policy Meetings

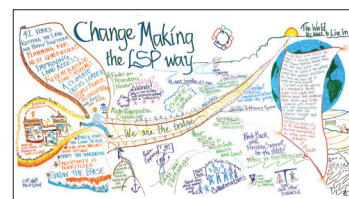


Policy & Organizing...7

- "Ag Groups" File Daley Farm Amicus Brief
- Nitrate Plan Falls Short
- 2024 MN Legislative Session Wrap-up
- Senate Releases Farm Bill Draft
- How LSAF Makes a Local Impact
- Tell Us Your Story

Climate Resilience...20

- Silvopasturing's Promise
- Tree Talk



Farm Beginnings...26

- Applications Being Accepted for 2024-2025 Course
- Future Farmers Speak Out
- FB Profile: R. Roots Garden

Farmland Access...30

- Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse
- Retiring & Beginning Farmer Resources

Community-Based Foods...31

- CSA's Past, Present, Future

Reviews...32

- *Barons*
- *Perennial Ceremony*

Sister Mary Tacheny's LSP Legacy

She Spoke Up for Farmers & the Land in Person & on the Page

Before the Land Stewardship Project was founded in 1982 by Ron Kroese and the late Victor Ray, there was something called *Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland*. Kroese credits this document with inspiring him to launch an organization that focused on how stewardship farming can connect people with the land in a positive way. Issued in May 1980 by Catholic bishops from 11 Midwestern and Plains states, *Strangers and Guests* is not simply a report. It's a strong, forthright statement on "land issues."

The document leads off by announcing: "We are witnessing profound and disturbing changes in rural America." It continues on to say: "Land ownership is being restructured, agricultural production is becoming more heavily industrialized and concentrated in fewer hands and the earth all too frequently is being subjected to harmful farming, mining, and development practices. Such changes are adversely affecting our rural people, their way of life, their land, and the wider national and international communities which depend on them to satisfy hunger."

Sounds like it could have been written today, doesn't it?

The statement then goes on to describe the wide-ranging, negative impacts of undermining the family farm, and why it is the responsibility of all of us — elected officials as well as the members of the general public — to take steps to fight this terrible trend. It isn't just about helping farm families — it's about conserving our soil, water, food system, and healthy rural economies, wrote the bishops. It's also about social and economic justice. In short, it is a moral imperative for us to resist the extinction of family farm-based stewardship agriculture.

One of the reasons the statement feels so relevant is that it was based on numerous listening sessions held in dioceses throughout the region. Farmers and other rural residents lined up to give often heart-wrenching testimony about how their lives were being torn apart, and what needed to be done to save the heartland. This document is not some



Sister Mary Tacheny speaking at LSP's 25th Anniversary event in Mankato, Minn., in 2007. (LSP Photo)

sort of sermon handed down from on-high — it speaks from the heart of the people.

Sister Mary Tacheny was teaching high school in Fridley, Minn., when she was tapped to help pull together the listening sessions, document the testimony, and develop a statement that reflected what people were saying. A member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, a group of nuns which

focuses on education, among other things, Sister Mary was eventually invited to serve on LSP's first board of directors, and she remained quite active with rural organizing over the years. Shortly before she died in late 2023 at the age of 99, Sister Mary was

"The Land Stewardship Project was something that was different — it was tackling the problem from the very bottom up."

— Sister Mary Tacheny

interviewed for LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast. During the interview, she talked about the unique role LSP played, and continues to play, in putting some of the ideals of *Strangers and Guests* into action. Below are excerpts of that conversation. The full podcast, along with a link to *Strangers and Guests*, can be found at landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-298-strangers-guests-lsp.

The Farm Crisis

"The Farm Crisis and the push to plant fencerow-to-fencerow in the 1970s really turned things around in rural communities, and it made people angry and committed to doing something about it. And of course, the thing that was destroying that community out there was corporate industrialized farming."

The Power of Stories

"Stories have a powerful way of influencing us, and the image was there of those people developing the story of what was happening to them and calling attention to the problem. When we understand the problem, we realize we've got to do something about it. So, we liked that idea of the people forming the document, rather than it coming from the upper level. We wanted to have gatherings in each of the six dioceses in Minnesota. We didn't want to call them meetings, we called them listening sessions. And the people wanted the bishop and his staff to listen to what was said, because that was one of their complaints — they didn't think they were listening. So, we pulled people together for these gatherings — each diocese had three

or four sessions, depending on how spread apart people were. During these sessions, the bishop and his staff were sitting up in front and people did the testifying. I remember that line-up of people behind the microphone. We wondered if rural people would do this, but there were lines of them. They responded and they told their tale, they told their story. It was just pretty impressive."

The Family Farm

"One of the main things the statement covered was ownership of the family farm, ownership by many people and the importance of that. But the other thing that was important was the guarding of the resources. The soil — people talked about conservation, some people practicing it and others not practicing it. The third point was this

Guests, see page 4...

whole notion of selling the product, getting the product to market in such a way that it provided the income necessary for that farmer instead of just rewarding the big corporations that were taking over. That was a big issue with those farmers out there.

“And that document influenced a lot of people. You had people with their copies — they’d bring them to a meeting, and it would thrill me to see them referring back to it at other meetings. So, I think it made an impression. It was an exciting time for people and they needed something they could get their hands on — they could see something they could do. It feels pretty lonely out there sometimes if you don’t have somebody helping you.”

LSP’s Role

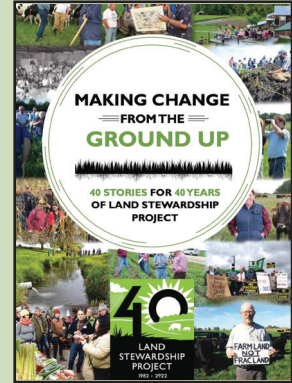
“I think from then on LSP picked up this idea and took it to the next step, which they could do better than we would: keeping the land and people together, and you can’t manage that without having good soil,

good care of the water and soil, and working together as a group. The Land Stewardship Project was something that was different — it was tackling the problem from the very bottom up.” □

Read More Stories

Sister Mary Tacheny’s experience with *Strangers and Guests*, LSP, and rural organizing is one of the stories included in *Making Change From the Ground Up: 40 Stories for 40 Years of Land Stewardship Project*, an oral history we put together to mark LSP’s 40th Anniversary.

To order a copy of the booklet, see landstewardshipproject.org/shop or call 612-722-6377.



Land Stewardship Project Maps Out Its Future

Every five years, the Land Stewardship Project’s board of directors gathers input from our members, supporters, allies, and staff on our organizational priorities. This input forms the basis of LSP’s long range plan.

Our current five-year plan (landstewardshipproject.org/long-range-plan) will be wrapping up at the end of 2024. So, for the past few months, LSP has been hosting member listening sessions (pictured) and holding staff and board discussions, as well as surveying our members and supporters. All of this input is going into developing a document that will guide our work from 2025 to 2030.

This work is being led by LSP’s Long Range Plan Committee, which is made up of LSP board members, member-leaders, and staff. They are being supported by our consulting partner, Seiche, a social impact strategy and communications firm.

For regular updates on the long-range plan process, see landstewardshipproject.org/long-range-plan-update. If you have any questions, contact Megan Smith, director of LSP’s Advancement Department, at 612-722-6377 or megans@landstewardshipproject.org.

Stay Connected

Want to get regular e-mails and action alerts related to various aspects of LSP’s work? See the “Stay Connected” web page at landstewardshipproject.org/building-people-power-2 to subscribe to updates by topic area.



Myth Buster Box

An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

→ Myth: ‘Climate-Smart’ NRCS Practices are all ‘Climate-Smart’

→ Fact:

Government policy is full of unintended consequences, something that economists sometimes refer to as the “cobra effect.” This term comes from a period when the British ruled India as a colony and decided to pay people a bounty to bring in dead cobras as a way to thin out the population of the sometimes-troublesome reptile. Some enterprising folks responded by breeding cobras so there were more of the snakes available to turn in for the bounty. The cobra’s population ballooned; not exactly the result officials had in mind.

Unintended consequences could result from certain climate-friendly agricultural practices that the federal government supports via cost-shares, grants, subsidies, low interest loans, tax breaks, and other incentives. That comes to mind while scanning the latest list of “Climate-Smart Agricultural and Forestry Mitigation Activities” published by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This is a listing of the practices eligible to be funded with nearly \$20 billion available through the Inflation Reduction Act’s (IRA) climate-smart initiative. That the IRA is targeting agriculture’s role in addressing the climate crisis is significant. After all, farm activities produce at least 9.4% of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S., according to the Environmental Protection Agency. And as the report on page 15 of this *Land Stewardship Letter* outlines, farmers are on the front lines when it comes to facing climate havoc.

Indeed, the NRCS’s list of what it considers “climate-smart” farming includes key practices that build soil carbon while making the land more climate resilient: cover-cropping, crop rotations, no-till, prescribed grazing, more perennials, silvopasturing, and composting. Because these activities are on the list, they are eligible to be supported through IRA funding via programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

However, also on the list is the practice of using anaerobic digesters to produce energy from manure. Unfortunately, as we described in *Myth Buster #60* (bit.ly/3xNGsbW), by supporting the construction of these incredibly expensive facilities

and the “green payments” that purchase the energy, the American taxpayer may be party to making the climate problem worse.

That’s because liquid manure, by having a “climate-smart” price tag attached to it, could become a more valued commodity than, for example, the milk produced by a large factory farm. So, owners of large concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) will have increased incentive to expand their herds, crowding out small and medium-sized farmers and creating more potential for water and air pollution, as well as greenhouse gas emissions. In other words, they will be producing more of the problematic product that government programs were hoping to reduce in the first place.

And taxpayers are helping foot the bill for making the problem worse. According to agricultural economist Aaron David Smith,

• • •

NRCS climate-smart practices are vulnerable to the “cobra effect.”

• • •

a new digester on a dairy farm, for example, costs roughly \$1,130 per cow, when capital costs, operating costs, and gas trucking costs are included. This practice is far and away the priciest of the almost 60 “climate-smart” EQIP practices listed by the NRCS. In 2022, seven EQIP contracts were issued by NRCS for digesters at an annual amount of \$283,424. The average cover crop and fencing contracts, in contrast, amounted to \$8,307 and \$5,882, respectively. The conservation math is striking: think about how many acres of land could be cover-cropped or rotationally grazed with all that money spent on digesters?

Demand for programs like EQIP and CSP far outstrip the funds available. During the 2023 fiscal year, a little over a quarter of EQIP applicants and 30% of CSP applicants were successful in getting funding. As an Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy analysis points out, that’s an improvement over previous years. But thousands of farmers (representing tens of thousands of acres of land) who want to undertake stewardship practices are being stymied as CAFOs gobble up expensive contracts.

Several practices on the NRCS climate-smart list promote CAFO farming and are of

dubious environmental value, according to an Environmental Working Group analysis. The NRCS, for its part, says that some practices are “provisional” — meaning they have no proven climate benefits yet and will be reviewed to determine if they remain listed. But all eight of the provisional practices on the 2023 list remain there for 2024, and are still tagged as “provisional.”

As Congress drafts the next Farm Bill (*see page 10*), debate swirls around what conservation practices will be supported via this legislation. That makes it even more critical that practices that have proven to be environmental winners through science and real-world farm experience should be on the NRCS’s climate-smart list. For example, prescribed grazing, or managed rotational grazing (*see page 16*) as it’s commonly called, is on the list for good reason: research shows that, in areas ranging from the Upper Midwest to the Southern Great Plains, this system supports the kind of perennial biomes that are net carbon sinks.

In a sense, promoting regenerative practices like managed grazing has already come with its own unintended consequence. When pioneers in this technique got started decades ago, they were just looking for low-cost ways to feed their livestock longer during the grass season. An unintended consequence was carbon being sequestered beneath all those hooves. That’s a snake in the grass we can all live with.

More Information

- “Are Manure Subsidies Causing Farmers to Milk More Cows?” *Ag Data News*, bit.ly/3xFKWBb
- “Many newly labeled USDA climate-smart conservation practices lack climate benefits,” Environmental Working Group, bit.ly/4b3buuE
- “Waste and Water Woes,” Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy, bit.ly/3W7CYei
- “GHG Mitigation Potential of Different Grazing Strategies in the United States Southern Great Plains,” *Sustainability*, Sept. 2015, bit.ly/44bipj1

Myth Buster Series

Check out LSP’s *Myth Buster* series at landstewardshipproject.org/myth-busters.



LSP Staff Update

Whitney Terrill has joined the Land Stewardship Project's staff as a Farm Beginnings and Land Access organizer. She has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Hampton Uni-

versity, as well as executive certificates in conservation and environmental sustainability from Columbia University and in social impact strategy



Whitney Terrill

from the University of Pennsylvania. Terrill has worked as an organizer for the Sierra Club, an environmental justice program manager for Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, and a credentialing specialist for the U.S. Green Building Council. She is a graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings course and owns and operates a small organic vegetable farm in Washington County, Minn., where she focuses on growing varieties of pumpkins and sweet potatoes.

At LSP, Terrill co-leads the Farm Beginnings organizing and Land Access-Land Legacy initiatives (see page 26). She can be reached at wtterrill@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-400-6346.

Shea-Lynn Ramthun has joined LSP's staff as an organizer in the Bridge to Soil Health initiative. She previously worked on a contract basis for LSP as a soil health organizer and as a specialist in the organization's Human Resources and Operations Department. Ramthun has a degree in equine facility management and has worked as a farm manager, horse trainer, and riding instructor. She is a 6th generation farmer from Cannon Falls, Minn., where her family has a herd of rotationally-grazed Black Angus cattle that they raise from start-to-finish. Additionally, they farm a variety of crops using no-till and cover cropping methods. Ramthun is a graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings course and a member of the organization's Animal Agriculture Steering Committee.

She can be reached at slramthun@



Shea-Lynn Ramthun

landstewardshipproject.org.

Seth Kuhl-Stennes is LSP's new operations specialist. He has over 15 years of experience with customer/client services and warehouse work, and has worked at Equal Exchange, Eastside Food Co-op, Home Depot, and Second Harvest Heartland. Kuhl-Stennes also has organizational operations experience through board service and volunteerism with Eastside Food Co-op, Gardening Matters, and the Green Party of Minnesota. He was born and raised in the small northern Minnesota community of Baudette and a passion for food and farming was instilled in him at an early age.

As LSP's operations specialist, Kuhl-Stennes supports day-to-day needs in the areas of facilities, technology, finance, and administration. He is also the organization's lead on information technology and facilities project coordination. Kuhl-Stennes is based out of LSP's Minneapolis office and can be contacted at skuhlstennes@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.

After three years working as an organizer with LSP's soil health initiative, **Maura Curry** has moved on. During her tenure at LSP, Curry worked extensively to build the Soil Health Network, which consists of hundreds of farmers and others in southeastern Minnesota, northeastern Iowa, and southwestern Wisconsin who are interested in sharing information on regenerative agriculture practices such as cover cropping, no-till, managed rotational grazing, and diverse



Seth Kuhl-Stennes

rotations. Curry coordinated on-farm field days and workshops, and assisted with LSP's on-farm research related to cutting edge composting systems (see page 25). She also worked

on assessing the results of a 2022 three-state survey of farmers and food systems workers that LSP undertook with the National Young Farmers Coalition, Midwest Farmers of Color Collective, and other allies. The results of that survey had a major influence on LSP's current Farm Bill platform (see page 10).

Charles Spencer has left LSP after serving for three years as its operations and support specialist. Spencer was instrumental in upgrading various aspects of the organization's internal infrastructure.

Among other things, he facilitated the development of a more effective telephone and e-mail system, and worked with information technology experts to upgrade LSP's computer capacity. During the COVID-19 lockdown, Spencer helped usher in LSP's use of virtual meeting spaces, a tool the organization continues to use today. □

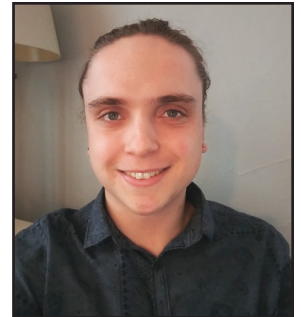
Dirt Ditties

Sometimes healthy soil can germinate creativity. For example, Minnesota musician Bret Hesla was inspired by the Land Stewardship Project's soil health work (and conversations with farmers) to write and record a set of songs that honor people's relationship with the ground beneath our feet and the importance of stewarding it via regenerative farming systems.

Want to give them a listen? Go to landstewardshipproject.org/songs-for-the-soil to listen to Hesla and the band Six Feet Deep as they perform songs like "A Little Better," "Dead Dirt's Coming Back," "The Boundless Earth," and "Six Feet Deep." If you're interested in using any of these recordings for an event or other purposes, contact Hesla directly at brethesla.com. □



Maura Curry



Charles Spencer

Local Democracy

‘Ag Groups’ File Amicus on Daley Court Case

By Martin Moore

In January, five “agricultural groups” filed an amici curiae (friend of the court) motion with the Minnesota Court of Appeals in support of Daley Farm’s request that a recent District Court ruling be overturned, thus allowing the Lewiston dairy operation to circumvent Winona County’s zoning rules related to livestock operation size. If the District Court’s decision is successfully appealed, Daley Farm would be allowed to expand to 6,000 animal units (roughly 4,500 cows); the current Winona County livestock operation size limit is 1,500 animal units.

In the amicus filing, the groups — Minnesota Milk Producers Association, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, Minnesota Pork Producers Association, Minnesota State Cattleman’s Association, and Winona County Farm Bureau — attempt to divide Winona County and undercut democracy by advancing false ideas about the Land Stewardship Project, our members, and our work. This latest legal maneuver is a desperate attempt to yet again bypass the will of the

people and advance the interests of a select few at the expense of the community.

In their filing, the groups chose to parrot the baseless claim that LSP “tainted” the Winona County Board of Adjustment’s decision (in two separate votes) to deny Daley’s request for a variance from the zoning rules. The courts have repeatedly supported the rights of local citizens to have their voices heard and to participate in local decision making when it comes to the Daley Farm issue. It’s clear the groups filing this amicus are confusing a “tainted process” with local citizen engagement and local democracy.

The groups are also asking that the Court of Appeals examine the role Minnesota’s anti-corporate farm law, which keeps farms in the hands of Minnesota families rather than multi-national corporations, plays in the Daley Farm issue. LSP has repeatedly fought to prevent the anti-corporate farm law from being weakened.

In fact, Minnesota’s anti-corporate farm law allows an operation like Daley to exist in its present form. Asking the courts to introduce the corporate farm law issue into the picture is a distraction from the fact that nitrate pollution is at crisis levels in

the region (*see story below*) and that local citizens have made their voices heard when it comes to what they want their community to look like. It’s a deflection from the fact that consolidation and market manipulation in the dairy industry are putting family farms out of business. It’s time we addressed the overall crisis that afflicts family dairy farming rather than make it easier for a select few to grow and consolidate, thus pushing their neighbors out of business. How will the expansion of factory farms address the fact that while farmers were recently receiving record low prices for milk, consumers were paying more at the grocery store?

In their filing, the groups have characterized LSP as “anti-agriculture.” Our record shows otherwise. We have helped launch hundreds of farming operations through our Farm Beginnings program. And via our Soil Builders’ Network, we are supporting farmers of all types in Winona County and throughout the region who want to build soil profitably. Every year, LSP works at the Minnesota Capitol to pass legislation in support of small and medium-sized farmers.

LSP has filed a legal brief in the case; the Minnesota Court of Appeals is expected to issue a ruling later this year. □

LSP organizer Martin Moore is at mmoore@landstewardshipproject.org. To view the legal brief LSP has filed in the Court of Appeals case, see landstewardshipproject.org/lsp-media-statement-on-latest-daley-farm-appeals-filing.

LSP Says State Work Plan Falls Short in Addressing SE MN Nitrates

A work plan submitted by Minnesota state agencies to address nitrate pollution in southeastern Minnesota does not address the root cause of the problem and instead relies on pre-existing programs that have shown little evidence of success thus far, say members of the Land Stewardship Project.

“We know that we can have successful, multi-generational farms in southeastern Minnesota without compromising our water quality. My farm is proof of that,” says Bonnie Haugen, a Canton, Minn., dairy farmer. “Ultimately, this comes down to what kind of farming systems are we, as a state, going to support? We need to lift up farming systems that build our soils, protect our water, and use manure as a source of fertility, rather than a waste product to be disposed of.”

On January 12, three state agencies — the Department of Agriculture (MDA), the Department of Health (MDH), and the Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) — submitted a work plan for addressing nitrate

contamination in southeastern Minnesota. This plan is the result of a petition filed in 2023 with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency calling for public action on the issue. The petition was signed by LSP and 10 other community organizations.

In their plan, the state agencies divided their response into three phases. Phases 1 and 2 will be primarily led by the MDH, while Phase 3 is jointly spearheaded by the MDA and the MPCA. Phases 1 and 2 focus on widespread well-testing throughout the region and a public health response defined mainly by supplying alternative drinking water supplies to affected residents.

LSP believes that this part of the work plan is sufficient to address the immediate public health concerns for southeastern Minnesota. However, Phase 3 is lacking in its response to addressing the root causes of nitrate contamination in the long term. It doubles down on the Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Plan and the Groundwater Protection Rule, both of which have shown

little evidence that they are meaningfully reducing nitrates in groundwater.

LSP organizer Martin Moore expressed disappointment in the agencies’ decision to stall immediate action by assembling a task force of citizens and local leaders to develop a “shared understanding” of the problems and the facts of the nitrate issue and then provide recommendations by June 2025.

“LSP’s members and other residents in southeastern Minnesota already have a shared understanding of this issue and how to fix it: farmers utilizing practices that build soil health in the long term,” he says.

LSP’s members and staff will fight to make sure its farmer-members are given a voice when it comes to participating in and providing input to the nitrate task force in coming months.

Says Dodge County farmer Sonja Trom Eayrs, “We cannot allow a few special interests who want to continue business as usual to dominate the discussion.” □

State Policy

MN Legislature Supports Water, Soil, Farmers

LSPers Push for Increased Support of Key Programs While Bolstering 2025 Agenda

By LSP's Policy Team

As the clock struck midnight on May 20, the Minnesota Legislature concluded its 2024 session. During the past few months, lawmakers primarily focused on policy changes that will not require more public spending; some targeted funding of specific programs was also approved.

Land Stewardship Project members worked hard during the session to make progress on advancing our legislative priorities and built a strong foundation to hit the ground running with larger proposals in 2025. LSP members were particularly successful around time-sensitive issues, such as the southeastern Minnesota water quality crisis (see page 7) and the prioritization of emerging farmers within Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) programs (see pages 18-19). It's clear that the hard work of LSP and our members paid off in some areas. It's also clear we need to continue to build power and shift the public narrative, particularly in addressing the root causes of consolidation, water pollution, and climate change. Below is a rundown of how LSP's priorities fared at the state Capitol in 2024.

Policies That Passed

→ Land Access & Emerging Farmers

✓ The Legislature maintained the existing definition of what the MDA defines as an “emerging farmer” when administering various programs such as the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit and the Technical Assistant Grant Program. “Emerging farmers” are farmers from historically underserved communities, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), immigrants, women, veterans, persons with disabilities, young and beginning farmers, LGBTQ+ farmers, and others. Such groups often face barriers to the education and resources necessary to build profitable agricultural businesses. In recent months,

there have been attempts in Minnesota to undercut public policy that supports directing more public agriculture program dollars to emerging farmers. (You can learn more



On March 7, LSP members and allies gathered for a quick photo in front of the Capitol after a series of meetings with lawmakers. During the lobby day, which took place after the Family Farm Breakfast, over 140 people met with 90 legislators. (LSP Photo)

about this issue in a recent LSP blog: bit.ly/emergingblog.)

✓ Among other things, lawmakers ensured the final language changing prioritization for the MDA's Farmland Down Payment Assistance Program and Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grants works for emerging farmers. The Farmland Down Payment Assistance Program will now prioritize eligible applicants who raise specialty crops and/or had gross farm profit of \$100,000 or less the previous year.

✓ The Beginning Farmer Equipment

and Infrastructure Grant Program will now prioritize eligible applicants experiencing limited land access or limited market access. “Limited land access” is defined as an individual farming without ownership of land who is under a lease or other rental arrangement of no more than three years or rents land from an incubator farm where a majority of the farmers grow specialty crops. “Limited market access” is defined as an individual who grosses no more than \$100,000 per year from the sale of farm products. An additional \$300,000 for Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grants will also be available.

→ Soil Health

✓ The Legislature provided an additional \$495,000 for the Soil Health Financial Assistance Program, targeted for southeastern Minnesota where the need for widespread adoption of soil health practices is most urgent to address the nitrate pollution crisis.

→ Regional Food Systems

✓ There is now an additional \$125,000 for the Farm to School and Early Care Program, and lawmakers clarified that in-home childcare providers are eligible to apply to this initiative.

→ Water Quality in SE MN

The Minnesota Legislature took significant steps forward to ensure that southeastern Minnesotans have safe drinking water — a direct result of a petition to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that LSP signed onto with partner organizations calling for immediate action on the nitrate pollution crisis facing the region. LSPers in southeastern Minnesota have laid the groundwork for this action for decades by speaking up about nitrate pollution in their communities. While more work needs to be done to clean up our aquifers and address the root causes of nitrate pollution, it's exciting to see the Legislature take action on this issue. For example, lawmakers passed:

✓ \$2.8 million for home water treatment for private wells in southeastern Minnesota at or above the EPA's safe drinking water limit for nitrates of 10 mg/L.

✓ \$2.79 million from the Clean Water Fund to inventory, test, and provide education and outreach around private wells in southeastern Minnesota.

✓ \$3 million from the Clean Water Fund to monitor and evaluate nitrate levels.

✓ \$850,000 for grants to feedlots under

Legislature, see page 9...

1,000 animal units to implement manure management projects, such as dry manure management systems, that improve water quality or reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Anaerobic manure digesters are not eligible for this grant. This legislation was championed by the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy.

Setting a Foundation for 2025

LSP members and organizers also did the groundwork needed to push through some exciting policy initiatives during the 2025 session of the Legislature:

✓ We were able to get introduced proposed legislation that would bring about the kind of manure management reforms that protect our water and soil, while building fertility sustainably.

✓ LSP and our allies also got legislation introduced that would promote soil-friendly, climate-smart practices by, among other things, creating a pilot program based on the highly effective Olmsted County Groundwater Protection and Soil Health Program (*see the No. 2, 2023, Land Stewardship Letter*).

✓ An updated version of the Next Generation Minnesota Farmer Act was introduced in the House of Representatives. This legislation would provide financial resources for supporting beginning farmers who need to get direct experience working on agricultural operations.

What Stalled

Unfortunately, a few bills that LSP actively supported did not move forward during the 2024 session, primarily due to lack

of political will on the part of a handful of legislators. What did not move forward included:

✓ A mandatory environmental impact statement (EIS) for feedlots over 10,000 animal units, which was opposed by organizations such as Agri-Growth, the Minnesota Farm Bureau, and Minnesota Milk.

✓ Redirecting an existing 40-cents-per-ton fertilizer fee from the Agriculture Fertilizer Research and Education Council (AFREC) toward private well drinking-water assistance. LSP advocated for these funds to go toward supporting on-the-ground soil health practices and runoff prevention programs. We should note that there were some LSP-backed improvements made to AFREC, including reauthorizing the fee for five years instead of 10, and adding sustainable agriculture and public health representatives to the Council. When it comes to AFREC and other issues, it's disappointing that a handful of legislators in the Minnesota Senate Majority continue to side with Big Ag at the expense of small and mid-sized farmers, rural communities, and the water and climate.

LSP Members Step Up

Thousands of LSP members and supporters made their voices heard this legislative session in a variety of ways:

✓ Three LSP steering committees and working groups made up of 25 LSP members set LSP's legislative agenda and strategy.

✓ Dozens of LSP members shared their stories by testifying in legislative hearings focused on water quality, emerging farmers, soil health, and more.

✓ In February, members of LSP's Climate Policy Steering Committee spent a day at the Capitol to meet with Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Aric Putnam, Senate Environment Committee Chair Fong Hawj, House Agriculture Committee Vice Chair Kristi Pursell, along



In February, LSP member Bonnie Haugen, who has a dairy farm in southeastern Minnesota's Fillmore County, spoke at a Capitol press conference about the need for public policy that supports agricultural practices which reduce nitrate pollution in her community. (LSP Photo)

with the Governor's office.

✓ In February, LSP members from southeastern Minnesota traveled to the Capitol to attend a hearing and hold a press conference about the nitrate crisis facing Minnesotans in their communities.

✓ In March, LSP held our largest-ever Family Farm Breakfast and Day at the Capitol with approximately 305 attendees, about 140 of whom stayed to meet with their legislators. Thirty-four percent of attendees were farmers this year. During our Lobby Day, we also held a town hall Meeting with Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, Rep. Pursell, and MDA Emerging Farmers Office Director Lillian Otieno.

✓ In March, LSP members, staff, and partners authored a *Star Tribune* commentary in support of prioritizing emerging farmers within MDA grant programs.

✓ In April, 10 LSP rural, urban, and farming members participated in LSP's Animal Ag Day at the Capitol, where we delivered a letter from farmers asking legislators to co-author our manure management reform bill. Folks shared their stories with eight legislators, most of whom became co-authors of our legislation.

✓ Nearly 1,000 people took action by signing a petition, adding their name to a farmer sign-on letter, or contacting their legislators about LSP's legislative priorities. □

For more on LSP's state policy work, contact organizer Amanda Koehler at akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org or see landstewardshipproject.org/state-policy.



Over 300 people attended the 18th iteration of the Land Stewardship Project's Family Farm Breakfast on March 7, making it the largest LSP breakfast event ever. (LSP Photo)

Federal Policy

Senate Ag Committee Releases Farm Bill Draft

LSP Continues Work on Legislation as September Deadline Approaches

By Amanda Koehler

For decades, Land Stewardship Project members have been organizing to ensure that our federal farm policy serves people and the land, not corporate interests. This latest Farm Bill cycle has been no different. A new federal ag law is drafted approximately every five years, and the current version was due to expire in 2023. However, Congress failed to pass a new bill last fall, so they've extended the current legislation until Sept. 30. That means LSP and its allies still have time to have an impact on this major piece of public policy.

With approximately \$1.5 trillion on the table, it's important that LSP members are engaged in the process of drafting and passing a new Farm Bill. Following a series of listening sessions, one-to-one conversations, and surveys, LSP's Farm Bill Organizing Committee launched our New Farm Bill Platform (landstewardshipproject.org/federal-policy/farmbill2023) in August 2022. Since then, LSP members and leaders across the organization and the Upper Midwest have been actively organizing for our top priorities:

- Crop Insurance for small, beginning, and diversified farms.
- Historic investments in improving land access and beginning farmers.
- Protecting and strengthening working lands conservation and climate programs.
- Building a more competitive, less consolidated, farm and food system.

On May 1, the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee released its draft Farm Bill. An analysis of what's contained in this proposed legislation indicates how the hard work of LSP and our allies has paid off in some areas — and how we need to continue to build power and shift the public narrative in others. Following is a summary of how LSP's top priorities fared in the Senate's proposal.

Crop Insurance

During this Farm Bill cycle, one of LSP's top priorities has been ensuring that small, beginning, and diversified farms have an

accessible, effective safety net. This is more important than ever in the face of climate change, which exposes farmers to extreme, unprecedented weather events such as



In March, LSP farmer-members and organizers joined the Midwest Farmers of Color Collective and the National Young Farmers Coalition in Washington, D.C., to talk to lawmakers about the need for a Farm Bill that supports beginning and emerging farmers. (Photo courtesy of the National Young Farmers Coalition)

droughts and floods — often in the same month.

In partnership with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), LSP members have been advocating for the inclusion of the Whole Farm Revenue Protection Improvement Act in the next Farm Bill. This legislation would increase the accessibility, efficacy, and success of the Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) Program and Micro-Farm Program, particularly for small and beginning farmers.

LSP members organized around this by flying to Washington, D.C., to share their stories, organizing a letter signed by

over 125 Minnesota farmers that successfully secured Minnesota U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar's co-authorship of the legislation, meeting directly with staffers that work for Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow, and more.

As a result, the Senate's proposed Farm Bill includes a majority of the provisions of the Whole Farm Revenue Protection Improvement Act. Some key provisions included are:

- Providing a "whole farm" option for coverage for beginning farmers and providing flexibility for beginning farmers to establish a revenue guarantee.
- Directing the establishment of a streamlined process for submission of records and acreage reports to assist producers in graduating on a voluntary basis to WFRP or Micro Farm insurance.
- Directing the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) to simplify Micro Farm coverage for producers with less than \$1 million in revenue.
- Providing for increased buy-up coverage levels — up to 70% and 75% coverage for non-forage crops.
- Increasing the limit on growth expansion, which is particularly important for quickly growing beginning farms.
- Improving access to agents experienced in selling WFRP plans and providing additional educational and training opportunities to approved insurance providers and insurance agents.

Land Access & Beginning Farmers

Another top LSP priority during this Farm Bill cycle has been getting more farmers on the land; many people who want to farm are facing significant barriers to getting established and sustaining their businesses.

That's why, in partnership with the Midwest Farmers of Color Collective (MFCC) and the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC), LSP members have been advocating for including in the Farm Bill the Increasing Land Access, Security, and Opportunities (LASO) Act, which reauthorizes the Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program with an infusion of \$100 million.

This innovative legislation, championed by Minnesota U.S. Senator Tina Smith, would fund powerful, community-led solutions to the land access crisis facing the new generation of young and Black farmers, Indigenous farmers, and other farmers of color. Inclusion of this legislation in the Farm Bill would be a significant victory for everyone who has been fighting to win fed-

Farm Bill, see page 11...

eral funding to address issues of equitable land access. This bill will increase access to capital for underserved farmers, boost training and economic opportunity for beginner farmers, and help make land more affordable for BIPOC farmers.

LSP members organized around this by flying to D.C. to share their stories with members of Congress and their staff, making their voices heard in the media, organizing a letter from Minnesota farmers to Senator Klobuchar, and more. As a result of this visit and other work, U.S. Minnesota Representatives Angie Craig, Betty McCollum, and Ilhan Omar agreed to be co-authors of this legislation.

Unfortunately, the LASO Act was not included in the proposed Senate Farm Bill. However, we are working with Senator Smith's office and partners to offer an amendment that would add it to the text.

Working Lands & Climate

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) are essential initiatives that give tens of thousands of farmers the tools they need to implement sustainable practices such as cover cropping and managed rotational grazing. Yet, a significant majority of farmers who apply to these programs are unable to access funding. In 2023, only 12% of CSP applicants in Minnesota were awarded contracts, less than half the national average of 30%, according to an analysis by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. In 2023, 22% of EQIP applicants in Minnesota were awarded contracts; the national average is 25%.

At the same time, hundreds of millions of dollars in EQIP and Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) funds were spent on bolstering concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and mega-cropping operations, providing little environmental benefit and, in some cases, causing great environmental harm.

LSP believes that EQIP should be providing smaller grants to more farmers, rather than large grants to a smaller number of producers, and that these dollars should be used for practices that are truly good for our soil, water, climate, and air. As the *Myth Buster* on page 5 of this *Land Stewardship Letter* reports, many of these dollars are currently spent on factory farm infrastructure, such as waste facility covers, waste storage facilities, and anaerobic manure digesters.

LSP members organized around this issue by flying to D.C. to share their stories with

members of Congress and their staff on multiple occasions, making their voices heard in the media, and consistently contacting their members of Congress about these issues. This advocacy produced mixed results.

Positive provisions in the Senate bill:

- Permanently authorizes conservation programs for the first time and increases access to climate-smart agriculture and conservation resources.
- Increases funding for conservation programs supported by the Inflation Reduction Act and mostly continues to be dedicated to climate-smart agriculture.
- Creates a 10% set-aside of EQIP funds for practices implemented on small farms.
- Requires confined livestock feeding operations to submit a greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan, in addition to the currently required comprehensive nutrient management plan, in order to be

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In 2023, a handful of giant ag corporations spent \$178 million — more than the defense industry — on lobbying to sustain and increase their power over our food and farm system.

• • •

eligible to receive payments under EQIP.

- Expands the purposes of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to include, according to legislative language, “facilitating the conversion from concentrated animal feeding operations to climate-friendly agricultural production systems (including regenerative grazing, agroforestry, organic, and diversified crop and livestock production systems).”

Negative provisions in the Senate bill:

- Doubling down on using programs like EQIP, CSP, and REAP for anaerobic manure digesters in a variety of ways.
- Maintaining the too-high \$450,000 payment cap for EQIP.

Competition

As our farm and food system has become more consolidated, it has also become significantly less competitive, driving small and mid-sized farms, processors, and food businesses out of business. As the *Food and Environment Reporting Network* recently reported: “...a handful of giant corporations — from Cargill to Bayer to JBS — has taken control of every aspect of agriculture, from

producing and selling seeds and fertilizers to the processing, distribution, and retail sales of the foods farmers produce. In 2023, those companies and their related associations collectively spent more than \$178 million — more than the defense industry — on lobbying to sustain and extend their power.”

To have a fair and resilient farm and food system, it is imperative that Congress leverages the next Farm Bill to make meaningful progress on the issue of consolidation.

As a part of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, LSP members have been organizing to ensure that Congress enforces, rather than weakens, the Packers and Stockyards Act (PSA), a comprehensive set of regulations that takes a meaningful step toward leveling the playing field in our farm and food system. LSP farmer-members and our allies have specifically been organizing in opposition to efforts to interfere with the USDA's Packers and Stockyards Act rulemaking process and in support of creating an Office of the Special Investigator for Competition Matters to strengthen enforcement. LSP members have primarily been involved in this effort through coalitions, as well as by flying to D.C. to share their stories with members of Congress and their staff.

LSP is thrilled to see that the Senate's proposal does not interfere with PSA rulemaking and establishes an Office of the Special Investigator for Competition Matters. This office will, according to draft language, “use all available tools to investigate and prosecute violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act, maintain staff attorneys and other appropriate professionals, and coordinate with USDA's Office of the General Counsel and the Packers and Stockyards Division of the Agricultural Marketing Service.” The proposal also requires USDA to report on consolidation and concentration within the livestock industry and its impacts on farmers, ranchers, and consumers.

Continuing the Push

While it's exciting to see movement from Congress on the Farm Bill, there is still a lot of work ahead before it crosses the finish line. The House and Senate proposals will no doubt be significantly different from each other and it will take some serious negotiation to land on an agreement. LSP will continue to give our members opportunities to take action in meaningful ways. □

LSP policy manager Amanda Koehler can be reached at akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org. For the latest on LSP's federal policy work, see landstewardshipproject.org/federal-policy.

Building People Power

Land Stewardship Action Fund's Local Impact

By Emily Minge

Did you know that the Land Stewardship Project has a partner organization, Land Stewardship Action Fund (LSAF), that can engage directly in elections and with candidates at all levels of government? In 2018, LSP's board of directors created LSAF because the membership realized we could no longer sit on the sidelines in the current political environment. To make a bigger difference to advance our values of stewardship, justice, democracy, community, and health for people and the land, we need to engage LSP's members in elections at all levels and support candidates for office who will lead with us and champion our priorities.

This year, leading up to the fall elections, LSAF will focus on engaging members, supporting candidates, and building power at local levels of government. This includes elected county commissioners, township supervisors, Soil and Water Conversation District officers, and the appointed positions within their scope.

Why is local government the right path for LSAF this year? We've had conversations with members from across the state, staff from each of our organization's teams, LSP and LSAF board members, as well as various partner organizations, where we asked questions such as: What do you think is our role to play in elections? What level(s) of government have the biggest impact on our farm and food systems? What we heard in these conversations is that our base feels directly impacted by local government bodies. Additionally, LSP staff members say that local governments have the most direct impact on their area of work because they implement programs and distribute funding to farmers.

By focusing on local government, LSAF aims to build trust in government institutions. Our member conversations have shown that our base has a higher level of trust in and relationship with local

government compared to state or federal government, due to the localized nature of the offices. Local candidates are often an acquaintance to many voters. We've also heard that folks are less intimidated engaging with local government compared to the state or federal level when it comes to running or applying for positions as well as getting involved as a constituent. Leveraging this existing level of trust, we can start getting people involved locally to break down



LSP's board of directors created LSAF as it became clear we could no longer sit on the sidelines in the current political environment. (Photo by Sarah Goldman)

the perceived barriers around engagement and then encourage them to continue taking action at higher levels.

LSP's policy team has organized in many situations where county and township governments are the decision makers. These include our work opposing factory farms and manure digesters, promoting local groundwater protection/soil health programs, and changing zoning ordinances to reduce barriers for beginning and emerging farmers wanting to transition into agriculture. Therefore, it's strategic to promote the power of local government, engage our base around these issues, and support candidates who will be champions on these issues.

Throughout LSP's history, we've seen the importance of local government when

it comes to some of our milestone wins. Minnesota is a state with strong local control laws, which means that each level of local government can create stricter regulations than the level above it. For example, if a county sets a cap of 2,000 animal units per livestock operation, a township within the county can create their own cap of 1,999 or lower. Additionally, county or township officials can put in place a manure digester moratorium, even if the state or county they reside in doesn't have such a restriction.

Local control has allowed LSP's members to enforce the animal unit cap in Minnesota's Winona County and put in place a county-wide ban on frac sand mining. It also prevented a large concentrated animal feeding operation from being built in nearby Dodge County. This was all possible because of community voices and widespread public pressure. But to be heard and successful in preserving local democracy, community members need people in local offices looking out for them and their neighbors.

Community Impacts

For example, LSP members in southeastern Minnesota's Fillmore County are pushing back against the county board's decision to double the animal unit cap in a region struggling with nitrate pollution problems. Despite public pressure, including a petition with over 300 community member signatures opposing the raising of the cap, the board voted for the increase. Many LSP members and others felt as if their voices didn't matter, and are

wondering what can be done to protect their water, land, and community. Is the next step changing who leads the county government?

There are also many proactive measures LSP members are pursuing at the local level to build the farm and food system we want and need. As was highlighted in the last *Land Stewardship Letter*, Minnesota's Olmsted County implemented an innovative and, thus far, highly effective, groundwater and soil health program, incentivizing farmers to implement regenerative practices. This happened because the county board of supervisors, the elected SWCD officers, and SWCD staff identified the problem, came up with a proactive solution, and made it a priority.

A policy priority for LSP's Land Ac-

LSAF, see page 13...

cess and Emerging Farmer working group is passing county and township ordinances that would support multi-family and multi-generational farming by allowing additional residential dwellings on farms without obtaining conditional use permits. Many farmers struggle to find housing when acquiring land, and this solution would allow for communal style farming and for retiring farmers or non-operating landowners to start the land transition process with beginning farmers without having to leave their homes. County and township boards appoint planning and zoning commissions, and they are the ones that will make the decision to approve such an ordinance.

Making it Possible to Step Up

County and township boards also appoint Economic Development Authority Boards to make decisions regarding financial investments that boost the local economy. This includes investing in regional food markets (such as farm-to-school initiatives) and processing and storage infrastructure. Currently, LSP staff in western Minnesota are in conversation with Economic Develop-

ment Authority staff there about this type of investment to support local farmers and create pathways that make small scale and specialty farming more viable, therefore getting (and keeping) more farmers on the land while maintaining the money and what's produced in the local economy. This is all possible, but it takes people who want to champion regional food systems applying to be on their county or township Economic Development Authority board. It also takes allies serving on the county or township board to appoint these potential champions.

There are countless ways that local government — from county to township, from elected to appointed positions — impacts our farm and food system. That means there are countless ways we can all work to create a just and sustainable farm and food system. But it takes people who can advocate for our needs to step up and fill public positions. LSAF's goal is to make those voices heard by supporting those who care about the future of their local community and want to make it a better place — one vote at a time. If you'd like to get involved, see the sidebar below for information on contacting me. ☐

Emily Minge is a Land Stewardship Action Fund political organizer.



During conversations with members from across the state, we're hearing that local government bodies have a major impact on their lives. (LSP Photo)

Want to Have a Policy Impact? Connect with Land Stewardship Action Fund

In February 2018, the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors created the Land Stewardship Action Fund (LSAF), a 501(c)(4) partner organization, because they recognized the power that comes with being able to drive forward the mission and goals of LSP with an expanded set of political and electoral tools.

LSAF came out of the realization that our members and leaders could no longer sit on the sidelines in the current political environment, but instead must proactively engage in elections so that we have a say in who is elected and representing us.

For more information on LSAF and to get involved in such initiatives as voter education and deep canvassing, see landstewardshipaction.org or contact Emily Minge at eminge@landstewardshipaction.org, 612-400-6353.



Sharing Stories

The Land Stewardship Project is collecting the stories of rural residents who question the “get big or get out” narrative and the power and bullying tactics wielded by Corporate America. The *LSP Powerline Story Center* is seeking firsthand reports and stories from rural residents across the Midwest who oppose the power of Big Ag, and are seeking ways to fight back. Have factory farms or other major unwelcome developments arrived in your community, or are you worried that such developments are being proposed? Is local control and the ability of rural communities to determine their own future important to you? Would you like to talk about a type of food and farming system that relies on small and medium-sized operations that contribute to local economies while building healthy soil?

To submit your story, see landstewardshipproject.org/powerline. If you have any questions, contact Brian DeVore at bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-816-9342. ☐



The Regenerative Ag Movement's Human Element

5 Examples of Farmer-to-Farmer Information Flow

By Brian DeVore

What are the critical elements to creating a regenerative farming system? Is it taking a cue from nature when it comes to managing soil? Building climate resiliency and mending the broken link between animals and the land? Reforming the food system so that it rewards those practices that support rural communities while leaving the landscape better than we found it? Making certain that everyone, no matter the color of their skin or their background, has the opportunity to thrive within the food and farming system?

All of the above, and more. And it has to be orchestrated in a way that these and other elements operate in a holistic, interconnected manner. For example, building soil health isn't "sustainable" in the long run if the people who are doing the building don't have an economic incentive to take the extra care with the biome beneath our feet. So what kind of glue holds these and other regenerative elements together? Well, as we outline on pages 8, 10, and 12 of this *Land Stewardship Letter*, public policy can be an important binding agent. But an even more critical connection is people. Or more specifically, farmers talking to farmers — sharing ideas, grappling with problems, and cheering each other on. Such relationship building can open people up to new ideas and make it okay to take on the kind of innovation that gets talked about in not-so-kindly terms at the local coffee shop. On the next few pages are reports from five LSP-related events held the past few months where these farmer-to-farmer connections were on full display.

1) Soil, ROI, IRA, Training Wheels

Gary Zimmer says he's 80. Spend any time with him, and one can't help but wonder, "Is he referring to his age or the speed at which he talks at?" "I speak as fast I think," he likes to say. And the so-called "father of biological farming" thinks a lot about how to create a farming operation

that's viable long into the future. His overall message during a Land Stewardship Project workshop on soil health economics held in March: you have to regenerate a farm before it's sustainable, and that regeneration starts and ends with the soil.

Zimmer has been preaching that gos-

begin dabbling around with cover crops. Since the 1990s, the farmer has seen his soil's organic matter levels roughly double. His hilly fields are not only soaking up and storing water better, but his crop yields have increased and Fulsaa is spending less money on inputs such as fertilizer. He explained that while methods like cover cropping produce short-term benefits such as inexpensive grazing for his cow herd, along with erosion control and a lower chemical input bill, he also sees the building of soil health as a long-term investment. For example, by increasing water holding capacity, his operation is better able to weather periods of drought and is more resilient in the face of extreme weather overall.

That's why he compares building soil health to investing in an individual retirement account, or IRA: there are times when that IRA is worth less at the end of the year than it was at the beginning, but that doesn't mean one stops paying into it. It's a long-term investment in something that's building



Farmers share ideas for building soil health during an LSP workshop in Ridgeway, Iowa. "There are times when the training wheels are off and you're ready to go hotdogging it down the road," says farmer Josh Nelson. (LSP Photo)

pel for over 50 years. He is the founder of Midwestern BioAg, which offers various services for farmers hoping to tap into their soil's homegrown biology. He also owns Otter Creek Organic Farms, a 1,000-acre certified organic cropping operation in southwestern Wisconsin. During the workshop, which was held in the northeastern Iowa town of Ridgeway, he shared with the roughly 80 participants examples of farm ground he's regenerated utilizing cover crops, composting, and the addition of key minerals and other elements. Such a strategy often requires shucking old methods, as well as old ideas.

"The biggest compaction on a farm is between your ears," said Zimmer with a smile, before speeding along to more topics.

Jerome Fulsaa, who raises crops, cattle, and hogs just a few miles from Ridgeway, provided the workshop participants a local perspective on the benefits of breaking up compaction — above the neck as well as beneath the feet. In 1998, he started experimenting with no-till production, and in 2010

Farmer-to-Farmer, see page 15...

Give it a Listen

On LSP's *Ear to the Ground* episode 336, Gary Zimmer talks about why before a farm can be sustainable, it has to be regenerated — and that starts with the soil: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-336-biology-booster.

Episode 337 features Josh Nelson describing how his approach to farming means looking beyond the next corn crop and building the kind of soil that generates long-term return on investment: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-337-roi-riding-a-bike.

On episode 338, Jerome Fulsaa describes building an IRA based on a living soil bank, not dead dirt: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-338-microbial-ira.

overall value.

“I see the same thing with my soils over time,” said Fulsaa. “Some years we have setbacks because of Mother Nature, but we’re still on the trajectory of improving soils overall.”

Josh Nelson agrees that healthy soil is building his farm’s return on investment — even the nonmonetary aspects of it, like protecting the environment and giving him more time to spend with his children. Such a big picture, systems approach has given the young farmer a more nuanced view of what true profitability is. For example, high yields are often equated with high profits, but what are the costs of obtaining those few extra bushels? “I would love to harvest 200-bushel corn someday,” the north-central Iowa crop and livestock farmer told the workshop participants. “But are you just searching for yield, or are you searching to be a profitable business?”

However, he warned, too often farmers who get excited about regenerative farming think the way to a sustainable ROI is to start dropping inputs cold turkey. As Zimmer made it clear, for a farm to be sustainable, first it has to have its soil regenerated, otherwise one can be set up for agronomic, ecological, and economic disasters. That means not being afraid to ask “dumb questions,” checking in with other farmers who have already tried some of these practices, and taking a cue from them when it’s time to jump in headfirst, said Nelson. He compared it to when he taught his son to ride a bike.

“He was going down the bike trail and didn’t even realize I had stopped following him,” recalled Nelson. “There are times when the training wheels are off and you’re ready to go hotdogging it down the road.”

Later, workshop participants took the words of Zimmer, Fulsaa, and Nelson to heart as they broke up into small groups and discussed ways of making soil health practices more prevalent in their communities. They discussed practical ideas such as reforming crop insurance so it would stop incentivizing systems that harm conservation. They also talked about developing more local markets for small grains. But there was a more philosophical angle to the discussions as well. Concluded more than one group: You have to be okay with being different. ♦

For details on LSP’s work to help farmers build soil profitably, see landstewardshipproject.org/soil-health or contact Alex Romano at aromano@landstewardshipproject.org.

2) Climate & Community

When it comes to farming, climate change plays no favorites, whether you’re raising protein or produce. “Be ready for anything,” said vegetable farmer Joan Olson, as she showed two photos: one of her two children kayaking in a flooded field and the other of her plots broiling in droughty conditions.

Yes, be ready for anything, including an entire season getting canceled. “Springtime doesn’t feel like springtime anymore. It feels like a tug-of-war between winter and summer,” said beef farmer Tyler Carlson.

In January, Olson and Carlson presented at an LSP-University of Minnesota Extension climate resiliency workshop in Saint Cloud, Minn. They described to the mix of



“Be ready for anything,” says vegetable farmer Joan Olson. The flooded fields pictured on her farm here have also been parched as a result of extreme weather. (Photo courtesy of Prairie Drifter Farm)

produce and livestock farmers that attended what adaptations they’ve made in recent years and what short-term as well as long-term changes are coming for their farms down the road.

Olson, along with her husband Nick, owns and operates Prairie Drifter Farm, a 150-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise in Meeker County. They also sell vegetables to two local food co-ops and three area schools.

Prairie Drifter has installed three high tunnels, which allows the farmers to extend the growing season and protect plants from intense rains as well as disease outbreaks. They use shade cloth inside the high tunnels and have adjusted when they grow certain crops. Broccoli is difficult to grow in today’s climate, so the Olsons have been experimenting with broccolini. They are also leaning more into heat-loving crops like sweet corn and sweet potatoes. The Olsons have adjusted work schedules for themselves and their employees to avoid the hottest part of

the day and have cut back the number of CSA shares they provide.

“Listen to your body,” said Joan.

A solar array and back-up generator provide piece-of-mind when power outages occur — something that’s more prevalent with climate change — threatening the farm’s ability to cool produce and irrigate.

Carlson, along with his wife, Kate, operates a grass-fed beef operation called Early Boots Farm near Sauk Center, Minn. A cornerstone of their operation is silvopasturing, which blends wooded habitat with rotationally grazed pastures (see page 20). They direct-market the meat they raise.

The dappled shade provided by the wooded acres provides relief for the animals and increases their productivity, so the farmers save the grazing of those acres for heat waves. In fact, during recent hot spells, open pastures were at 10% to 20% of their productive capacity, while silvopastured acres retained 75% of theirs. Carlson focuses on grazing taller forages and leaving plenty behind with each rotation, which helps the paddocks develop deeper roots and more litter to protect the soil from hot, dry conditions.

As far as long-term adaptations, Carlson is looking into cattle with lighter-colored coats and establishing more silvopasture acres and heat-tolerant forages. Olson said Prairie Drifter has added a second well for irrigation and they are considering a variable speed irrigation pump.

Both farmers agree on one way to build climate resiliency: develop tighter community connections with other farmers weathering the same difficulties. Olson

Farmer-to-Farmer, see page 16...

Give it a Listen

On *Ear to the Ground* podcast episode 329, Joan Olson and Tyler Carlson talk about how climate change may impact a vegetable producer and a livestock farmer in different ways, but the results are the same: uncertainty, stress, and a deeper desire to connect with community: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-329-weather-whiplash.

Ear to the Ground 299 features regenerative agriculture expert and author Laura Lengnick talking about why, if farms are to survive (and thrive) in the age of climate change, we need to remember it’s not just about soil and water — it’s also about people: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-299-road-to-resilience.

...Farmer-to-Farmer, from page 15

has a “phone-a-friend” strategy to feel less isolated and to compare notes when disaster strikes. As the weather becomes more unpredictable, such human connections are only going to grow in importance, said Carlson.

“One thing Kate and I are thinking about is how to deepen our social connections in our community. That’s one of the best things we can do for climate resilience.” ♦

For more on LSP’s climate resiliency cohorts, contact organizer Nick Olson at nicko@landstewardshipproject.org.

3) Land, Livestock, Linkages

In an out-of-the way attic-like room in the heart of the University of Minnesota’s Saint Paul agriculture campus, right next to the College of Veterinary Medicine and near the Animal Science Department, down the street from the Cargill Building for Microbial and Plant Genomics, a group of farmers, scientists, graduate students, and natural resource experts got together on a Friday in April to discuss a system of farming that’s quite different from the one being promoted via land grant laboratories, classrooms, test plots, and research barns. That latter system is based on removing animals from the landscape and crowding them into concentrated animal feeding operations, otherwise known as CAFOs, where feed is shipped in and manure hauled out in quantities that pose threats to the soil, water, and climate.

“The whole system of livestock is quite wrong at the moment,” Azadeh Farajpour Javazmi, founder of betterSoil, an international initiative to improve soil quality for climate resilience and sustainable food production, told the participants via an online link during one of the sessions of “Regenerative Livestock Systems Symposium: The Role of Livestock in Restoring Natural Resources and Agroecosystems.” The event was organized by the Sustainable Animal Ag Study Group, which was created by graduate students in the U of M’s Animal Science Department who have a strong interest in animal welfare and sustainable farming research and outreach. Sponsors included the Land Stewardship Project, Grazing Lands

Conservation Association, and Green Lands Blue Waters, among others. As the title and sponsors imply, this event was centered on discussing how to reconnect livestock and the land in a way that animal welfare, soil, water, the climate, farmers, and rural communities benefit.

At the core of that reconnection is covering the soil with living plants as much of the year as possible. Nicholas Jordan, a U of M professor of agronomy and plant genetics, had some good news to share: research he and others have done through initiatives such as Forever Green show the tremendously positive environmental impact that results from having continuous living cover on the landscape in the form of perennials such as grasses, forbs, and trees. That continuous living cover can also take the form of annual cover crops that are grown in-between the corn and soybean seasons.

And livestock, particularly in the Midwest, can give farmers an economic incentive to establish and grow that continuous



“There’s a saying that with nature you pull a string and it’s all connected,” says grass-based dairy farmer Derek Schmitz. “I think that’s very true.” (LSP Photo)

living cover, maintained numerous presenters, which included not only scientists, graduate students, and natural resource professionals, but, perhaps most importantly, farmers who are implementing perennially-based livestock farming day-in and day-out.

Presenters included cow-calf producers who have converted row crop land to grass or are grazing marginal land that formerly was overgrown and all but abandoned, dairy farmers who are tapping into markets that reward the use of regenerative grazing systems, and a poultry producer who is replicating a system long used by indigenous people. The common theme: how do we strike that balance of doing right by the land, the animals, and bank accounts?

“It was the environmentally right thing to do because it’s near moving water,” said

Give it a Listen

On *Ear to the Ground* podcast episode 330, milk producer Derek Schmitz talks about how linking cows, ecology, and economics gives him a reason to be optimistic despite dire times in the dairy industry: landstewardship-project.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-330-string-theory.

Dave Evans, who farms near the Minnesota River and has converted all of his row crops to grass, which he rotationally grazes a beef herd on. “But I also wanted to increase my carrying capacity.”

Diane Christofore, executive director of the Regenerative Agriculture Alliance, described how her group is working with farmers in the region to re-create the poultry production system founder Rejinaldo Haslett-Marroquin grew up with in his native Guatemala: raising chickens under trees.

“We are creating jungles here in the Midwest,” she said, describing how they are planting a mix of hazelnuts and elderberries, and will eventually add sugar maples.

An important theme of the symposium was the importance of making sure innovations in regenerative livestock production are part of a multi-directional system of communication involving scientists, farmers, government agency staff, and policymakers. Such connections are not always available through the traditional land grant research/education/extension infrastructure.

“If there are faculty members in the room, you might be really sad to learn that a lot of farmers don’t read your papers,” said Jane Grimsbo-Jewett, a farmer and associate director

of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture.

Another message: corn and soybeans aren’t going away anytime soon, and creating a regenerative livestock infrastructure does not require replacing all row crops with perennial grasses and forbs.

George Boody, of SoilCarbon LLC, described a study he did of Minnesota farmers who were integrating livestock into cropping operations. The farmers he interviewed for the study described how they were blending livestock and crops by, among other things, grazing marginal land unsuitable for corn and soybeans, or grazing cover crops and small grains that were part of the cash crop system. Boody said his analysis showed that not all farmers must own animals to cre-

Farmer-to-Farmer, see page 17...

ate a regenerative livestock system overall — there are opportunities to connect row crop farmers who may have cover crops or pasture remnants to graze with livestock producers who need access to low-cost forage. Twenty percent of corn and soybean acres in Minnesota are considered marginal, meaning they don't produce optimal yields. What if those acres were converted to grazing? Boody's analysis shows that there is the potential for shifting 7.5 million acres of Minnesota farmland to a system that integrates ruminants into grazing continuous living cover either in the form of cover crops or perennial pastures. Such a shift, along with utilizing cover cropping and no-till, could help reduce the state's agricultural greenhouse gas emissions by 30%, or the equivalent of taking 2.2 million cars off the road.

Boody said some of the farmers he talked to saw integrating livestock into their cropping systems as a way to make room for the next generation on their enterprise.

"It produces opportunities," he quoted one farmer as saying.

But in order for regenerative livestock production to be sustainable ecologically, it has to pay off economically. Kevin Mahalko, who dairy farms in western Wisconsin's Chippewa County, said he relies on the premium he gets from Organic Valley Cooperative for producing 100% grass-based milk. He showed charts documenting the results of studies showing how grass-based livestock products are consistently higher in Omega-3s, which are beneficial to human health. "I don't think we would be farming without that market," he said of the grass milk certification.

It's not just human health that can provide a marketing boost for regenerative graziers. Sarah Hewitt, a senior conservation manager with the National Audubon Society, described how her organization has developed a certification system for grazing operations that are creating a mosaic of grassland bird habitat while improving livestock health and welfare and protecting riparian areas and water quality. The program thus far has certified livestock operations in 14 states on a total of three million acres, and the initial results are encouraging: grassland birds increased 35% on the first operations that were certified. The eventual goal is that the livestock producers who are certified

under this program can use Audubon's seal of approval as a way to market meat and other animal products to eaters who want to support birds on the landscape.

But getting such products to the consumer requires recreating basic infrastructure such as meat processing facilities that can serve local markets. Christofore said the Regenerative Agriculture Alliance has had to invest in a processing facility in Iowa in order to fill the gap between field and fork. "We knew if we were going to have a regenerative system, we weren't going to



Farmer and local food marketing expert Sara George (purple shirt) speaks to farmers and buyers during an LSP "speed-dating" event in Montevideo. George says relationships between the two parties need to be based on a straightforward strategy: "Communicate, communicate, communicate." (LSP Photo)

be successful without a way to process the birds," she said.

Several of the farmers who spoke during the day referenced phrases like "farming in nature's image" to describe what guides their livestock production systems. And when it all comes together as an ecological whole, it can be a beautiful thing, said Derek Schmitz, who farms with his wife, Taylor, near Cold Spring in central Minnesota. He milks 70 cows and has a long-term goal of expanding to 120. To put that in context, the average dairy herd size in the United States is now well over 320 cows.

But at a time when massive production is equated with profitability, Derek focuses more on return on investment. In his case, that means keeping expenses to a minimum and not pushing his herd to produce as much milk as possible. In fact, he's estimated that at times his operation is producing milk at about half the cost of other dairies. Schmitz finds such a system not only results in more money in the bank, but is less stressful, and thus more humane, for the cows as well as his family. "The cows are a joy to be around," he said. "It's just enjoyable."

That's why he spends plenty of time ob-

serving the connections between a healthy, grass-based ecosystem, healthy cows, and a healthy bottom line — they are all inextricably linked. As he's gone deeper into regenerative grazing, soil health has improved, which has spawned more beneficial insects, which, in turn, has resulted in more wildlife. Meanwhile, the diversity of plants in his pastures is over 100 species.

"There's a saying that with nature you pull a string and it's all connected," said the farmer. "I think that's very true." ♦

For more on regenerative livestock, see LSP's Grazing and Soil Health web page at landstewardshipproject.org/grazing-soil-health or contact Alex Romano at aromano@landstewardshipproject.org.

4) Chasing Food Connections

When it comes to field-to-fork, you name it, and Sara George has been involved with it. Not only does she operate a vegetable and fruit farm in western Wisconsin, but she is the market manager for the Red Wing area farmers' market across the Mississippi River in Minnesota. She's also a food safety trainer for the State of Minnesota, and through a position with the nonprofit group Renewing the Countryside, provides support for farmers throughout the Upper

Midwest. But George also has insights on another key aspect of the food business. For nine years, she worked at the Harborview Café, a restaurant in Pepin, Wis., that works to source from local farmers.

That's one reason George is such a valuable source of information for people who make up all the components of the local food equation: restaurateurs, school food service managers, and others seeking locally produced food, as well as the farmers who produce it in the first place.

But often we learn best from our mistakes, or ideally, the mistakes of others. For example, during a recent meeting LSP held for farmers and buyers in Montevideo in western Minnesota, George shared a story about the time she proudly lugged six beautiful flats of heirloom tomatoes she had raised into the Harborview's kitchen. Grinning ear-to-ear, she told the chef that they would be ready to serve once they had sat in a sunny window for 24-to-48 hours.

"He looked at his watch and said, 'I need these for today's lunch service, and that's in about an hour-and-a-half,'" George recalled.

She said that story illustrates the first

Farmer-to-Farmer, see page 18...

...Farmer-to-Farmer, from page 17

rule of developing a successful marketing relationship based on local food: “Communicate, communicate, communicate.”

A lot of communication has been going on between buyers and sellers at a recent series of LSP meetings being held in western Minnesota. These meetings are a follow-up to surveys and other forms of research showing that the region’s food system is broken. It’s not that there aren’t farmers willing to raise product for local markets — there are — or businesses and institutions that want to support a local food economy — there are those too. The problem is that there is not enough of a processing, storage, and distribution infrastructure available to support regional food webs on a consistent basis. Building such an infrastructure will take time and resources. In the meantime, LSP and its allies are working around the gaps by connecting farmers and buyers via community meetings.

One buyer who’s been attending such meetings is Beverly Dougherty, who heads up the five-year-old Real Food Hub, which purchases vegetables, eggs, and grains, as well as meat and dairy products, from farmers and delivers them to area consumers and schools via a weekly subscription service. Based out of Willmar in west-central Minnesota, the Real Food Hub delivery van logs around 300 miles a week and in 2023, the hub was able to put around \$100,000 straight into farmers’ pockets.

And Dougherty expects that figure to grow, thanks to a joint grant she recently received from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the USDA that makes it possible for the hub to provide bags of healthy food to Head Start families in the area. Dougherty said such funding allows her to pay farmers what they are asking for while keeping it affordable for eaters.

Ryan Pesch knows firsthand that there is potential to grow more food for local markets in states like Minnesota. As a University of Minnesota Extension direct-marketing specialist and a vegetable farmer himself, he works with other producers who are looking for guidance on how to sell their product straight to eaters in a way that’s profitable and sustainable from a quality-of-life point of view. When speaking to farmers at meetings organized by LSP and other groups,

Pesch offers up a combination of positivity and frankness when discussing making a living direct marketing farm products.

He sees what he calls the “good food movement” as experiencing a bit of a boom at the moment, something that, along with busts, has happened in the past. But this current surge comes with a twist: there is a general societal interest in building a food system based on local, healthy options.

And policymakers on the state and federal level have responded. LSP and its allies have had success in recent years getting the



“Think how much food there is that can come from here,” says Beverly Dougherty, who runs the Real Food Hub in Willmar, Minn. (LSP Photo)

Minnesota Legislature to provide support for initiatives that build local and regional food systems. Pesch is excited by this influx of support and its ability to prime the pump and create a more consistent, long-term, locally-based food economy.

“Hopefully there are these buying-selling relationships that get created through this start-up funding that live longer than the grant funds,” he said.

Such relationships can be sparked in a number of creative ways that maneuver around the marketing, processing, and distribution might of Big Food. In fact, it can start with a simple face-to-face conversation. During the Western Minnesota Local Foods Forum LSP organized in March, a “speed-dating” session held at the Montevideo Community Center connected 10 producers with seven buyers in the region, including institutional buyers and school districts.

These connections were made in light of a striking statistic that was shared by LSP organizer Scott DeMuth at the beginning of the meeting: every year in west-central Minnesota, \$240 million is spent on food that originates from outside the region

“That’s a huge economic opportunity for this region,” said DeMuth. “If you care about healthy communities and more kids

in the schools, you should care about this statistic. We don’t need to be chasing methane digesters, we don’t need to be chasing factory hog farms.” ♦

For more on LSP’s community-based food systems work, see landstewardshipproject.org/community-food or contact Amy Bacigalupo (amyb@landstewardshipproject.org) or Scott DeMuth (sdemuth@landstewardshipproject.org).

5) Entrepreneurial Equity

Rodrigo Cala believes in the part of the American Dream that has formed the seedbed for many an entrepreneurial enterprise. He also believes that Latinos like him have proven to be hard workers in the farm economy. So why, he asked a couple dozen participants in an LSP workshop on farmland access, can’t those two pieces of reality come together to form a third one: a new immigrant who also owns and operates their own farm?

In some ways there was nothing new about this workshop Cala was speaking at — its content was similar to what LSP has presented to prospective beginning farmers for the past eight years during such sessions. Participants are taken through a “values-goals” exercise, the basics of setting up financials for a farm business are covered, ways of connecting with landowners who may have acres to rent or sell are discussed, and resources available through government agencies and nonprofits to help launch

Farmer-to-Farmer, see page 19...

Give it a Listen

LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast episode 331 features direct-marketing expert and farmer Ryan Pesch talking about key questions farmers need to ask before getting into direct marketing: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-331-reality-check.

On episode 332, Beverly Dougherty talks about how the Real Food Hub is out to prove that connecting local farmers and local eaters makes sense nutritionally and financially — and is just plain fun: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-332-real-food-real-impact.

Sara George provides insights into the barriers, and opportunities, involved with connecting farmers and institutional buyers on episode 335: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-335-bumping-elbows.

and support one's farm business dream are shared. Finally, such workshops consist of a panel of farmers who have utilized creative strategies for accessing that most valuable of ag resources: farmland.

But the 2024 version of the "Land Access: Are You Ready?" workshop, which was held on an overcast Saturday in April at a church in Northfield, Minn., had a different twist: it was presented in Spanish. According to the latest U.S. Census of Agriculture, only 754 Minnesota farmers identified themselves as Latino or Hispanic; over 114,000 identified as white. Spanish-speaking people have long been part of the agricultural economy, serving as seasonal produce harvesters, employees of livestock operations, or workers in food processing facilities.

The past few years, LSP's Farm Beginnings course (see page 26) has seen an uptick in enrollment on the part of Latinos, and organizations like the Latino Economic Development Center are seeing an increase in demand for their farmer-related resources. But, just as other beginning farmers have discovered, getting training on the basics of raising crops, produce, or livestock isn't enough — access to land is a major barrier. That's why LSP has been holding land access workshops and otherwise attempting to connect landowners and prospective farmers.

At this particular workshop, which was made up of an even mix of men and women of varying ages — some were in their 20s while others were well into their 60s — the excitement around farming was palpable. Alondra Cano, a Farm Beginnings graduate who, after taking this workshop in 2023, bought a farm in western Wisconsin, had the participants share a little about their background and what brought them to the workshop. They had traveled from as far away as northeastern Wisconsin and west-central Minnesota. Many had come from agrarian backgrounds in their home countries and had worked in agriculture here. They were interested in raising vegetables and fruit, as well as livestock. One woman wanted to open a restaurant featuring local food.

After LSP organizer Karen Stettler led them through the values-goals exercise, she said, "Your values are your compass. They are your true north." When people

were asked to share back what some of their values and goals were, they spoke about things like producing healthy food for the community and introducing children to a way of life not centered around technology and consumerism. Later, Lee Crawford, who directs the farm loan division of the Minnesota office of the USDA's Farm Service Agency, spoke about the beginning farmer loans available through his agency. "That values-goals exercise Karen went through is very important," he said at one point. "We don't want to set you up to fail."

Aaron Blyth of the Latino Economic Development Center took participants through financial basics like registering a farm as a business, filing a Schedule F for taxes, and separating personal and business accounting. After each presentation, Cano facilitated question-and-answer sessions. How do taxes differ for a business filing? How do you ac-



Participants in LSP's "Land Access: Are You Ready?" workshop took part in a "values-goals" exercise. "Latinos are more than hard workers — we are also smart," says farmer Rodrigo Cala. "Why not own our own businesses?" (LSP Photo)

curately project expenses at a time of rising inflation? How does one take that first step toward finding farmland?

After lunch, Cala shared his own farming journey. He grew up in Mexico and in 1998 had the opportunity to work in a horseshoe factory in New York. One day, while shopping for vegetables for Mexican dishes, he realized the quality was bad and that there was an opportunity to grow good produce. Cala got farming experience through Big River Farms' incubator program in Marine on St. Croix, Minn., and eventually he purchased a farm near Turtle Lake in western Wisconsin that had been abandoned since 1940. Over time, Cala Farm has built up a thriving wholesale vegetable business that became certified organic in 2011.

He also works as a consultant for the Latino Economic Development Center and travels the country helping prospective farm-

ers get started. He asks Latinos like himself the same question: "If they are the people who do the work, why aren't they the people who have the opportunity to handle their own businesses?"

Cala shared what his first purchases as a farmer were — computer, tiller, greenhouse, tractor, truck — and described his decision-making process for determining which enterprises are viable, and which he should drop. He also made it clear that although the demand for Latino foods is growing, marketing can still be a big frustration; in one case a major restaurant chain cut the price it was paying Cala for peppers once it was able to capitalize on the good public relations that came with saying it was "buying from local farmers." Farmers sometimes think raising a good product is enough, but in fact they need to prioritize where that product will be sold.

"You can be a really good farmer, but if you can't sell it, don't have the initiative to sell it, then it doesn't matter how good of a farmer you are," said Cala, adding that, "If I was able to do it, you can too."

The crowd applauded that last statement and asked questions about the availability of Spanish-speaking organic inspectors and ways of getting together to market collaboratively and add value to their products via processing. After the workshop, some of the prospective farmers lingered in the church parking lot under a sky that threatened rain, where they continued talking to each other about all things agriculture. □

For more information on accessing farmland, see landstewardshipproject.org/beginning-farmer-resources or contact Karen Stettler (stettler@landstewardshipproject.org) or Robin Moore (rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org).

Give it a Listen

On *Ear to the Ground* podcast episode 340, Farm Beginnings graduate Alondra Cano talks about an LSP interview project she did with Latino farmers and prospective farmers where they talked about the challenges, as well as opportunities, they see in entrepreneurial agriculture: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-340-entrepreneurial-equity.

Silvopasturing's Silver Lining

The Ecological, Economic & Humane Promise of Mixing Trees, Grass & Animals

By Brian DeVore

Tom Hunter walks across a ridge-top hay field drenched in a July sun and enters the cool shade of a mixed hardwood forest on his farm in southeastern Minnesota's Driftless Region. He passes a few beef cattle grazing amongst the trees, and heads toward a giant bur oak, pulling a tape measurer out of his pocket and stretching it around the trunk. It clocks in at nine-feet, two-inches; Hunter estimates this woodland giant is around two centuries old. Another tree on the property germinated when Thomas Jefferson was President.

Impressive.

But he also points out some recently opened up patches of ground at the feet of the big hardwoods. Those low-lying areas of grasses and forbs, Hunter makes clear, play a key role in keeping the sky-scraping oaks healthy. They could also help keep his 240-acre farm economically viable. The sun-soaked overstory of the oaks may catch one's attention first, but what happens lower down matters as well.

Hunter's Tangled Bank Farm is in the midst of a multi-year project that's attempting to strike a balance between reclaiming oak savanna habitat while creating more grazing land for his Shorthorn cow-calf herd. The result he is shooting for is a version of something called "silvopasturing" — in effect growing trees and livestock on the same piece of land.

There are dozens of permutations of

silvopasturing, but the end goal is the same: create a habitat that combines trees and grass, livestock and grazing. Striking such a balancing act could provide multiple benefits for the human and ecological community: silvopasturing not only offers farmers a way to make a viable living on marginal farmland, but supports wildlife habitat, builds soil health, and cleans water, all while sequestering carbon. And as Midwestern weather becomes more extreme, it's the kind of land use that may become an increasingly attractive alternative to the corn-soybean duo-culture. In other words, silvopastur-



In an example of silvopasture by subtraction, Tom Hunter stands with his cattle herd in a recently cleared-out portion of his farm's woodland. "I just want to get the ecological processes in place," he says. (LSP Photo)

ing may be the epitome of working lands conservation.

"It wants to be productive," says Hunter, gesturing toward a spot where his herd is grazing a newly opened woodland. "But in order for that to happen, it needs to be utilized by animals. And it will put a lot of carbon into the soil, so I think that's a win-win situation. I just want to get the ecological processes in place."

An Old Concept

Silvopasturing falls under the general land use category of "agroforestry," which encompasses alley cropping (planting crops between rows of trees), riparian buffers, windbreaks, and forest farming (growing high-value crops like mushrooms or ginseng under a forest canopy). Jenn Ripp, an agroforestry educator for the nonprofit Savanna Institute in Wisconsin, says agroforestry in one form or another has been practiced around the world for thousands of years, and traditionally agriculture and forests were intermingled in North America, with Native Americans practicing various forms of this system. However, during the past several decades monocropping of corn and soybeans, for example, has resulted in the removal of vast swaths of trees in the Midwest.

But Gary Wyatt, a University of Minnesota Extension educator who specializes in forestry management, says he's been getting more inquiries in recent years about reintegrating woodland habitat and farmland via silvopasturing.

"We're seeing increased involvement, increased interest, particularly on land that's not tillable," he says.

Each summer and fall, there are numerous field days on farms in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois where blending silvopasturing with everything from fruit and nut production to pollinator and wildlife habitat restoration is featured. Livestock raised under such systems range from beef and dairy cattle to goats and sheep, even pigs. The size of the farms utilizing various forms of silvopasturing or agroforestry in general range from a few acres to 1,000

acres and more. Wyatt says most of the people who approach him about establishing silvopasturing are smaller farmers who have a few acres they are hoping to get economic value out of. It can be of particular interest to beginning farmers who can't afford prime cropping ground, and are farming what's considered "marginal" land — too steep,

Silvopasture, see page 21...

wet, infertile, or otherwise unable to produce consistent yields of row crops.

That has environmental scientists and natural resource professionals excited: silvopasturing can provide an economic incentive to preserve, and bring back, wooded habitat, and that comes with a plethora of benefits. A deep-rooted grassland habitat can sequester significant carbon, helping mitigate climate change and making the land more resilient in the face of extreme weather. But when trees are added to the mix, the sequestration rates skyrocket. According to Project Drawdown, pastures with trees sequester five to 10 times more carbon when compared to their treeless counterparts. (It should be noted that such a carbon sequestration benefit relates to adding trees to the landscape; when a silvopasturing set-up involves thinning out trees, there may be an initial release of carbon as the system gets established.)

The sequestration continues basically until a tree dies, but even when it's cut, it stores carbon in the form of lumber. That's one reason Project Drawdown rates silvopasturing and alley cropping as among its top 10 most effective ways to sequester carbon and help mitigate climate change. In addition, groups like the Xerces Society are helping farmers establish silvopasturing systems in the Driftless Region of southeastern Minnesota and southwestern Wisconsin as a way to support pollinator insect habitat.

Ecologists are particularly intrigued by the potential of silvopasturing to restore the oak savanna habitat that once covered an estimated 50 million acres in a band stretching along the eastern edge of the Great Plains from Texas into southern Canada. At best, 30,000 acres of the habitat remains in the Midwest today, and much of it is in the Driftless Region of southeastern Minnesota, southwestern Wisconsin, and northeastern Iowa. Most of that savanna remnant is on land too steep or otherwise marginal to grow row crops on consistently.

This type of habitat, which is in effect the transition between prairie and woodland and consists of anywhere from 10% to 50% canopy cover set up in a mosaic-like pattern, requires the regular disturbances provided by fire and grazing to remain viable; otherwise, brushy species such as buckthorn take

over in a kind of “green glacier” manner.

Silvopasturing & Grazing

Natural resource professionals have traditionally been opposed to mixing livestock and trees — and for good reason. Animals can do major damage to woodland habitat via overgrazing, soil compaction, and the stripping of tree bark.

“Beef cows can be very destructive when it comes to trees,” says Eric Mousel, a University of Minnesota beef systems management specialist who works with livestock producers that want to graze woodland habitat. “It's not *if* they're going to destroy something — it's how long it will take.”

But adaptive grazing and other forms of rotational grazing allow farmers to control how animals like cattle are utilizing a woodland, and research out of places like the University of Missouri and Cornell University is showing it can be done sustainably.

“I think a lot of foresters have seen a



Zach Knutson, who raises beef cattle near Zumbrota in southeastern Minnesota, is putting in place a silvopasture by addition system on his family's land by planting trees in rows on former crop ground. (LSP Photo)

‘turn them loose and overgrazing’ type of situation. But now the walls are coming down on the idea that you don't mix agriculture and forestry,” says Wyatt. “It's a timing thing — this is not just releasing livestock into the woodlands for the summer.”

Recent innovations in portable electric fencing and distributed watering systems have made silvopasturing in an ecologically and economically sustainable manner even more viable. “If you're going to have a successful silvopasture system, you're going to have to be very good with temporary fencing,” says Mousel.

Livestock producers are even experi-

menting with utilizing “fenceless” grazing systems that employ global positioning technology, collars, and a smart phone application to control the movement of livestock. Such a system can be particularly useful in rugged terrain where it's difficult to erect even portable fencing.

Rotational grazing and silvopasturing are so interlinked, in fact, that Wisconsin researchers, writing in a 2023 *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* journal article, concluded that, “One important barrier to adoption of silvopasture is that the majority of livestock farms do not practice rotational stocking, a necessary management tool for silvopasture in the Midwest.”

Silvopasturing is also intimately connected to building soil health. This system protects the ground from intense sunlight while introducing nutrients in the form of manure and urine. Trees can also draw nutrients and minerals from deep within the soil profile up to the surface. Because a mix of cool and warm season grasses can thrive in a silvopastured system, it can provide more consistent grazing throughout the season.

Add-Subtract

In general, silvopasturing takes on two forms: silvopasturing by addition, which consists of planting trees in an open field and establishing grasses and forbs amongst them, or silvopasture by subtraction — in effect removing smaller trees and invasives to open up spots beneath existing trees, allowing sunlight to pour in and support forage growth.

Tyler Carlson has made both silvopasturing by addition and subtraction an integral part of his grazing-based livestock

farm near Sauk Centre, in central Minnesota. As part of a silvopasture by addition strategy, 12 years ago he planted Norway and red pine in an open pasture. Today, the trees are 12-to-16-feet tall.

For 10 years, he fenced the trees off completely to protect them from livestock damage, but these days he grazes beef cattle and sheep amongst the trees now that they are big enough to sustain a little nibbling. The trees are actually established enough to throw a significant shadow, providing a cooling effect for livestock and impacting

Silvopasture, see page 22...

...Silvopasture, from page 21

what forages grow near them. In the winter, the trees provide a windbreak from the frigid winds.

“They’re getting to where they’re really starting to function as a silvopasture,” says the farmer.

Carlson, who does silvopasture education for the Sustainable Farming Association, is also using tree thinning to intermingle livestock and woodland. He has a 25-acre patch of mixed hardwoods he’s gradually chipping away at by removing the box elder and ironwood, creating a space for the bur oaks, some 200-years-old, to thrive, and opening up the canopy enough to allow grasses and forbs to grow. His cattle can now graze in the established woodland on the hottest days of summer.

“I would say the subtraction method is far more difficult,” says Carlson. “Silvopasture by addition is fairly straightforward — you plant trees in straight rows, slap a fence around them and keep the livestock off them.”

The Cooling Effect

To be a truly climate-smart farming practice, a system has to help mitigate the problem by sequestering carbon and reducing emissions, for example, as well as make a farm more resilient in the face of the extreme weather that’s already a reality. Silvopasturing’s ability to help with the latter is becoming increasingly evident. As extreme heat spells brought on by climate change have proliferated, massive livestock die-offs throughout the Midwest have increased. U.S. beef and dairy cattle losses from heat stress already average \$1.26 billion annually, according to researchers at Ohio State University and the University of Illinois. In July 2023, as the world recorded its hottest month ever, hundreds of cattle died in Iowa alone from extreme heat and humidity.

Unfortunately, 2023 was not an anomaly — as the planet warms, livestock deaths will jump precipitously, according to *Open Veterinary Journal*. The ideal temperature for beef and dairy cows ranges between 44 and 77 degrees Fahrenheit; above that, milk production and fertility drop. Some farmers have turned to portable artificial shelters to provide shade. But trees on a grazing landscape provide a superior cooling effect compared to barns and other artificial shelters

because of the effect of evapotranspiration, better ventilation, and reduced reflection of the sun’s rays from the ground.

“It felt like you had walked into a refrigerator,” recalls Carlson of a time during a heat spell when he rotated his cows into the wooded part of his farm. As the mix of sun and shade shifts during the day, the livestock tend to move on their own to stay where it’s cool, reducing mobbing, overgrazing, and soil compaction. “The cows, they couldn’t be happier,” adds the farmer.

Tom Hunter also likes how the cooling effect provided by silvopasturing creates a more humane grazing habitat for his herd.

“They always look good when they’re in the woods,” he says. “They’re just relaxed and their hair coats shine — it’s just good for them.”

Dendrology Dollars

Despite its advantages when it comes to long-term resiliency, there are big reasons silvopasturing isn’t more prevalent in the Midwest. One is federal farm policy, which encourages, almost to the exclusion of everything else, the planting of commodity

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“It felt like you had walked into a refrigerator. The cows, they couldn’t be happier.”

— Silvopasturing farmer Tyler Carlson

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crops like corn and soybeans (*see page 10*).

And with row crops, if a drought or flooding wipes a planting out, a farmer can come back next year, or even later in the season, to try again. Federally subsidized crop insurance’s bias toward annual commodity crops makes gambling on perennials like trees risky.

“The trouble is with tree crops it just takes time,” says the U of M’s Wyatt. “It’s not like corn and beans — with trees, you don’t see income until down the road.”

The other big barrier, and this dovetails with the policy issue, is that silvopasturing, and agroforestry in general, require long-term access to acres, something that’s becoming more difficult as farmland prices skyrocket and multi-year leases become rarer.

“The root of a lot of these problems is trying to think about farming and agriculture on a multi-year scale,” says the Savanna Institute’s Jenn Ripp

Carlson says that a silvopasturing by subtraction system can start producing viable grazing land within a year or two. Silvopasture by addition can be on a much longer return on investment schedule. In Carlson’s case, those pines he planted in that open

field a dozen years ago are just now paying for themselves by providing shade for the animals and grasses.

Omar de Kok-Mercado, who raises goats using silvopasturing in southwestern Wisconsin, says five to seven years, or even 10 years, is a good average period to keep in mind when expecting a return on a new planting of trees in such a system. That return could be in the form of shade, or it could be via production of fruit or chestnuts. Products like walnuts are a 20-to-30-year investment, but the ultimate pay-out can be significant. The journal *Ecological Applications* reported in 2018 on a study showing that in the Midwest, alley cropping involving black walnuts was 17% more profitable than a duo-culture of corn and soybeans. The study showed that such profitability was not only possible on marginal land not suited for high corn yields — it could make money on prime ground as well.

But university extension educators as well as natural resource agency technicians are used to helping farmers with the intricacies of raising row-crops profitably; agroforestry is a whole other beast. De

Kok-Mercado recalls that when he was trying to set up a silvopasturing system in an Iowa county that supposedly had an agroforestry plan in place, the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service didn’t know whether to send a grazing specialist or a forester to his farm. “They sent out both, and then they both pointed at each other and said, ‘This is your plan,’” he recalls with a laugh. “So I think there’s a little bit of confusion on how to meld the two.”

Carlson says an Excel-based decision-making tool he’s helping develop estimates that silvopasture by subtraction can be done for \$1,500 to \$3,000 an acre. To add trees to a farm can vary widely in cost, depending on what kinds of species are planted. It cost Carlson around \$120 to buy 500 pine trees he got from the state nursery, and they were planted in three days using a mechanical planter. With labor and everything else figured in, the total cost was around \$500 to \$600 per acre, he estimates. But a planted acre of a fruit tree like apples or a nut producer like chestnuts will likely be an order of magnitude more, given their higher value and the need for maintenance measures such as tree-tubing.

The good news is that there are more cost-share funds than ever available through government natural resource agencies looking to support climate-friendly farming systems.

Tom Hunter’s reclamation project

Silvopasture, see page 23...

involves chain-sawing, forest mowing, burning, and grazing on 31 acres. He estimates the cost is around \$2,500 per acre.

That \$2,500 is “almost like buying the land again,” says the farmer.

Funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Service is helping cover around 75% of the cost through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and Hunter has benefited from volunteer labor provided by a group called Prairie Enthusiasts. The farmer also received government cost-share money to set up fencing and watering systems. One expense Hunter has avoided thus far is grass seeding — he’s allowing forage species to naturally come back on their own.

Enterprise Mooching

Farmers are also finding ways to use their current enterprises to “subsidize” silvopasturing’s set-up while trees get established and grow. Hannah Breckbill and Emily Fagan are utilizing such a strategy on Humble Hands Harvest, a 22-acre worker-owned cooperative farm near Decorah in northeastern Iowa. Their main source of income is the two acres of organic vegetables they raise for a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

enterprise, as well as sell through a farmers’ market, a local food co-op, and to restaurants. They also sell lamb meat.

The farm is in the Driftless Region, less than a mile from the Upper Iowa River, and not surprisingly, it’s extremely hilly — the two acres devoted to vegetables are about the only flat land present.

“When we came onto this farm, there was basically no topsoil to be seen,” recalls Breckbill. “We’ve been converting our vegetable field to no-till, and we’ve been applying a lot of compost, and it is just so wonderful to see the amount of change we can make in the soil with that kind of intensive care for it.”

The farmers see perennials as another way to give back to the soil. “It’s calling for trees,” Fagan says of the land.

So, almost as soon as they moved onto this former corn ground in 2017, Breckbill and Fagan began looking for ways to integrate agroforestry onto the land. In 2018, they began planting chestnuts and hazelnuts on a few acres; they’ve also established a small fruit orchard. The farmers planted the trees in rows, allowing space in-between for grazing their sheep herd. Eventually, the trees will not only be producing nuts and fruit that can be marketed, but will provide shade for the livestock.

Fagan and Breckbill are excited about the potentially diverse revenue streams agroforestry can add to their farm. But they also know such a system is a long-term invest-

ment. It will take years before they have viable product to sell, and even more years before the trees are big enough to provide shade for their sheep, and thus paying for themselves as natural sources of livestock cooling. In the meantime, they are, as they admit, “mooching” income off their thriving vegetable enterprise to help pay for the establishment of the agroforestry enterprise and to provide consistent income in general. The farmers are bringing in an enterprise that is all about long-term delayed gratification, which can be tough for someone who raises an annual cash crop like vegetables, which produces results within months of those seeds being planted.

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Hannah Breckbill moves fencing for her sheep herd so they can graze around the trees she has planted on Humble Hands Harvest. “I just think about how many more trees could be on the landscape if we had a different system of land ownership and who gets to own land, and what’s supported by policy,” says Breckbill. (LSP Photo)

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Silvopasture, see page 24...

...Silvopasture, from page 23

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Silvo Geography

How much Midwestern farmland has the potential to be silvopastured? The U of M's Gary Wyatt estimates half-a-million acres of woodland is grazed or has the potential to be grazed in Minnesota alone. Grazier Omar de Kok-Mercado thinks the potential extends well beyond the rugged terrain of the Driftless Region. After all, besides grazing goats in such a system, he has worked as an agroforestry technical service provider for the Savanna Institute, where he helped farms of all sizes establish silvopasturing systems.

"You're probably asking the wrong guy, because for me, I'd say 100% of acres are viable acres for agroforestry," he says, only half-joking. In reality, various studies have shown that up to 25% of farmed acres could be viably converted to something other than row crops. Perennial systems based on agroforestry could play a key role in such a transition, says de Kok-Mercado.

The U.S. Census of Agriculture doesn't ask farmers about the use of "agroforestry" specifically, but it does ask if they've used key features related to this system such as silvopasturing, riparian buffers, alley cropping, windbreaks, and forest farming. The latest Census reported that 32,717, or 1.72%, of farmers in this country were using one or more of these practices. That figure has consistently gone up since 2012, when .13% of farmers reported using an agroforestry practice. According to the 2023 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll, of the 972 farmers who responded, 24% reported that they owned at least one acre of woodland, and 46% who had woodland said they had implemented some sort of "management" on those acres. Of the respondents with woodland on their farms, 29% said they were grazing it.

When looking for guidance on how a landscape changer like silvopasturing can be integrated into a monocultural landscape, de Kok-Mercado considers another hat he wore in the past. For four years, he worked as the project coordinator for a research initiative at Iowa State University that is integrating strips of prairie into corn and soybean fields to control runoff and provide pollinator and wildlife habitat.

"It's been great to use prairie strips as a proxy for perennial agriculture on the whole," he says. "Because if you can do it with prairie, you can pretty much do it with anything. If folks want to do prairie strips, I tell them do savanna strips — add another 30-foot strip to the prairie but add trees to the middle of that."

View from the Sky

Tom Hunter, who raised corn and soybeans in Illinois before buying his southeastern Minnesota farm in 2010, knows well the draw of going for the short-term gain of annual crops.

"I'm too much of an old-fashioned farmer to plant trees in my nice, good cropland," says Hunter, who raises hay on his treeless acres.

But there is something about making trees part of a working landscape that motivates him to take the long view of the land's potential. He began the restoration project in fall of 2021 and has already seen some native grasses come back, and even a few native orchids. The goal is to eliminate, or at least control, species such as buckthorn, red cedar, and honeysuckle, and in the process get as much sunlight to the forest floor as possible, allowing grasses and forbs to thrive in the dappled shade provided by trees such as oaks. He estimates that this "silvopasture by subtraction" endeavor will add about 25 acres of grazing, which would be a roughly 30% increase in land that produces forages.

Adding grazing acres fits nicely with Hunter's production system, which is based on producing 100% grass-fed, organic beef.

Silvopasturing & Grazing Resources

→ LSP's Grazing and Soil Health" web page: landstewardship-project.org/grazing-soil-health

→ Savanna Institute: savannainstitute.org

→ Sustainable Farming Association agroforestry/silvopasture web page: sfa-mn.org/agroforestry-silvopasture

If native cool season and warm season grasses can get established, that would diversify his grazing to the point where he has forage throughout the growing season, even in the deepest summer.

But it's not only practical considerations that are prompting the farmer to adopt silvopasturing. He has an aerial photo from around 1938 showing his farm's hillsides opened up to the point where one can see individual oak trees. That the landscape could look so different less than 100 years ago impresses Hunter.

As he walks through the woods and the burgeoning oak savanna habitat, the farmer points out butternut and walnut trees, along with the oaks. There's even a wild plum tree and a double-trunked apple tree. Unfortunately, invasives like buckthorn and honeysuckle also like the opened up canopy as well, making it clear that follow-up practices like intensive mob grazing will be needed to keep them in check. At one point he stands in the middle of a purple patch of bee balm. There's also Queen Anne's lace, also known as wild carrot.

"I've had a lot of people ask me, 'Oh, do you do cover crops?' And I'm like, 'No, because cover crops mainly follow row crops,'" says the farmer. "Or I could say, 'Yes! 100% of the time.' In a sense, it's all cover crop." □

Tree Talk

Check out LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast to hear the stories of farmers who are adopting various forms of silvopasturing in the Upper Midwest: landstewardshipproject.org/series/ear-to-the-ground.

- ✓ Episode 329: **Weather Whiplash** (Tyler Carlson)
- ✓ Episode 311: **Mooching Means More** (Hannah Breckbill & Emily Fagan)
- ✓ Episode 303: **Silvo Savvy** (Tom Hunter)
- ✓ Episode 302: **Thinking Like a Tree** (Abbie Baldwin & Mitch Hawes)
- ✓ Episode 280: **Maximum vs. Optimal** (Zach Knutson)
- ✓ Episode 262: **A Silvo Secondary Enterprise** (Rachel Henderson)
- ✓ Episode 261: **Pigs, Pastures & Pollinators** (Dayna Burtness)

On-Farm Composting Research Wraps Up

A research project involving a cutting-edge composting system has yielded mixed results on farms in Minnesota and Wisconsin: the Johnson-Su Bioreactor created diverse fungal and bacterial populations, but did not consistently reach the temperatures needed to kill pathogens.

Inspired by the work of microbiologist Elaine Ingham, farmers and others the Land Stewardship Project has been working with through the Soil Builders' Network have been investigating how they can use composting to build the kind of soil biome that is self-sustaining and not reliant on a constant supply of chemical inputs.

In 2020, LSP received funding from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to conduct research into the Johnson-Su system on four Minnesota farms and one Wisconsin farm. The Johnson-Su system, which was developed by molecular biologist and research scientist David Johnson, along with his wife Hui-Chun Su, is based on a static aerobic (compost that is not turned and air exchanges evenly throughout the pile) type of composting that takes place in a simple, stack-like structure for 12-18 months. The bioreactor stacks LSP set up on the five farms were constructed of wire mesh, landscape fabric, and PVC piping. They were approximately five-feet-high and 12 and-a-half feet around.

This lack of disturbance allows fungi networks to form, create symbiosis, and maintain a healthy community. Typical large-scale commercial windrow-based composting processes are often designed and operated for speed and maximum product flow, which can result in a product that's not as "mature" and full of complex fungal communities. When done successfully, Johnson-Su compost has complex fungal communities and a balance of healthy bacteria, nematodes, and protozoa that can be used as potting soil and made into a "tea" to apply on row crops as a type of inoculant for sparking biological activity.

One of the benefits of the Johnson-Su Bioreactor is that it is scalable — it can be set up in a small space and constructed

for under \$50. Unlike large-scale windrow composting systems, it does not require a compost turner or other specialty equipment.

This system has mostly been used in warmer climates such as New Mexico, where it has shown potential for increasing positive biological activity in soils on cropping operations. LSP wanted to study whether such a system could be used in the colder climate of the Upper Midwest; of particular interest is whether freezing tempera-



In 2021, LSP staff and members helped set up a pair of Johnson-Su composting stacks on the Ruth and Jon Jovaag crop and livestock farm near Austin, Minn. (LSP Photo)

tures stymie the kind of biological activity needed to spawn and sustain healthy fungal and bacterial activity.

During the summers of 2021 and 2022, bioreactors were set up on the five participating farms: a dairy operation, two vegetable enterprises, and two that produce a mix of crops and livestock. One goal of this project was to study different recipes that consist of materials which are available on farms in the Upper Midwest. The original recipe developed by Johnson and Su in New Mexico is composed of one-third leaf litter, one-third dried cow manure, and one-third wood chips. Participants in the LSP research project tried to create recipes with a similar carbon-to-nitrogen ratio. Some of the farmers' recipes utilized livestock bedding packs, hay, straw, animal manure, and old potting

soil, for example

LSP staff worked with the five participating farms to build bioreactors, dismantle them, and send samples off to be laboratory tested for fungal and bacterial activity. Samples from the bioreactors were compared to compost created by three large-scale commercial operations utilizing conventional methods involving the frequent turning of materials. Each farm had two reactors erected each year (each stack was created with a different mix of materials), making for 20 replications during the two-year study.

Overall, the Johnson-Su system on the five farms resulted in compost that had greater diversity of fungal and bacterial species when compared to the industrial samples. Protozoa and nematode populations were consistently higher in the bioreactor samples. That's good news in terms of creating an inoculant that can spawn biological activity. However, the farmers had difficulty striking upon recipes that consistently created compost that reached high enough sustained temperatures to meet

the National Organic Composting Standard, which is critical when attempting to reduce the level of pathogens present. Managing moisture levels in a way that kept the stacks from going anaerobic was a challenge, reported the farmers. In addition, adding too much manure to the stacks tended to reduce oxygen levels, and allowing the mix of ingredients to freeze over the winter may have had a detrimental impact, particularly when it came to the worms that had been added to aid in the breaking down of material.

The project highlighted the need for more research into what adjustments to recipe mixes and management techniques will produce the most consistent results. For web links to a video and podcasts describing the research and its results, see the sidebar above. □

Johnson-Su: Look & Listen

For a complete summary of LSP's Johnson-Su composting research, check out these videos:

- Short version: bit.ly/3JkGmLc
- Long version: bit.ly/4aC1ngh

LSP also has available numerous resources on the Johnson-Su system at landstewardshipproject.org/soil-health/microbiology. A slideshow describing how to set up a Johnson-Su Bioreactor is at landstewardshipproject.org/johnson-su-bioreactor-set-up. There are four LSP *Ear to the Ground* podcasts — episodes 297, 292, 271, and 266 — featuring farmers and researchers who are working with the Johnson-Su system. The podcasts are available at landstewardshipproject.org/series/ear-to-the-ground.

FB Course Accepting Applications for 2024-2025

Beginning and prospective farmers are invited to apply to the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course, a training program that focuses on the goal setting, marketing, and financial skills needed to establish a successful farm business. The next class will run from November 2024 through March 2025.

The deadline for applications is Sept. 1. The cost of the class is \$1,000 for up to two participants per farm. Early bird applications submitted by Aug. 1 will receive a \$100 discount if you are accepted into the class. Scholarships will be available. For more details and to apply, see landstewardshipproject.org/farm-beginnings-class.

Reach out with any specific questions by contacting LSP's Annelie Livingston-Anderson at annelie@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-400-6350, or Whitney Terrill at wterill@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-400-6346.

Is Farming for You?

By the way, if you're trying to figure out if farming is the right career path for you, take part in LSP's Farm Dreams Visioning Exercise at landstewardshipproject.org/farm-dreams-workshop. □

Farm Beginnings Guiding Principles

The Land Stewardship Project is a member of the Farm Beginnings Collaborative, a coalition of community-based groups that offers the Farm Beginnings course in several states. The Farm Beginnings Collaborative adheres to the following principles for the course:

→ **Farmer-led:** Class participants will hear from regional farmers about their farms and how they've implemented goal setting, marketing, and financial management practices.

→ **Community Based:** Because LSP is best able to provide resources and connections in this area, applicants from Minnesota, western Wisconsin, and northern Iowa will be given priority. If you are located elsewhere, check out the Farm Beginnings Collaborative website at farmbeginningscollaborative.org to see if there is an organization near you offering Farm Beginnings.

→ **Racial Equity:** We acknowledge the historical and ongoing racial inequities and oppression in agriculture towards farmers and communities of color. We commit to furthering our own understanding of this issue and support farmers we interact with to do the same. We commit to using the power and influence we have across our organization to build more inclusive and equitable agricultural systems and implement changes that make it possible for more farmers of color to be successful.

→ **Focused on Sustainable Agriculture:** All Farm Beginnings participants are encouraged to create a farm plan that is economically, socially, and ecologically sustainable.

Final Exams: Sharing a Few Thoughts About Farming

Farm Beginnings Presentations are a Time to Share Insights, Dreams, Concerns...& Ask More Questions

On the cusp of springtime, after a winter of classes that include presentations on everything from goalsetting and holistic business planning to innovative marketing and alternative sources of credit, a typical Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings course culminates in a special series of discussions led by the students themselves. It's time for all that planning and dreaming to pay off.

Over a roughly 10-minute period, each course participant is given a chance to share their farm plan and how the course has influenced it. They lay out their values, describe a "holistic vision," and present the results of what's called a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. It's a chance to not only talk about short-term and long-term goals, but to be a little vulnerable and lay out in front of fellow cohort members questions that are still up in the air: Own or rent land? How much debt is okay? Direct or wholesale markets?

Urban or rural location? What start-up costs haven't we thought of? How many enterprises are too many and how does one winnow them down?

The presentations are also an opportunity for classmates to ask questions, provide advice, share resources, and, in general, begin utilizing a tool that is a cornerstone of regenerative farming systems: farmer-to-farmer education. And just as importantly, presentation time is also a chance to provide each other words of encouragement and support — something that's particularly important for folks who are considering a profession that is often considered by society in general as a bad career move: farming on a moderate or small scale in a manner that puts sustainability first. The 2024 presentations, which took place over two separate evenings in March and which were facilitated by LSP organizers (and farmers) Whitney Terrill and Annelie Livingston-Anderson, featured Farm Beginnings participants that represent-

ed a broad range of backgrounds. Presenters ranged in age from their 20s into their 60s and were working jobs in areas such as education, healthcare, and nonprofit advocacy. Some grew up on conventional crop and livestock farms, while others were lifelong residents of urban or suburban areas. Many had already worked for other farmers to get real-world experience. At least one immigrated from Kenya.

There was a range in terms of where folks were at in their farming trajectory as well. There were students who already owned land and had a few years of production and marketing experience under their belts. The majority, however, did not have access to land and were still in the dreaming phase of their farming careers. Enterprises that were discussed included everything from vegetables and cut flowers to chicken, beef,

Presentations, see page 27...

and pork production. Some presenters were bursting with excitement about taking that next step into a farming career, while others made it clear that the course had helped them make some hard decisions and were thinking of scaling back their aspirations, or even dropping completely the dream of making a living in production agriculture.

Perhaps the most consistent thread run-

ning through the presentations was when it came to the listing of values. "This was one of my favorite activities in the class; it defined what we're about and what we believe in," said one young man, referring to the values exercise. Words that repeatedly appeared on different presenter's values lists included sustainability, stewardship, family, faith, justice, balance, and community. The hot topic of conversation during presentations, as well as between them, was land access, and whether there were alternatives

to the conventional model of going into extreme debt to own a piece of real estate.

Below are a few quotes gleaned from the farmers and prospective farmers during last March's presentations. Taken as a whole, they provide insights into the hopes, dreams, and fears Farm Beginnings participants bring to the course, and how they feel just a little bit better equipped to take advantage of the opportunities, as well as tackle the challenges, associated with farming today. □

"What success means to us is the community trusts us and we're providing high quality food and caring for the land, living with passion but not completely obsessed."

"I do feel there are a lot of opportunities out there."

"Where we live, it's a sea of corn and soybeans and commercial hog barns. People don't really think of vegetable farming as real farming — it's more of a hobby to them."

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"In 13 months I will be debt-free for the first time in my adult life, so I am not eager to jump back into debt."

"Land cost is the thing that keeps coming back to battle us. That's going to be our biggest thing to overcome in the next few years."

"We're excited about alternative ownership models. The dream is to liberate the land so that no one has to go into debt for 30 years in order to be able to farm there."

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"With stability, we're talking a lot about financial, emotional, relational, and physical stability."

"Without the family, the farm doesn't run, and I'm not just talking about labor, either. It's the core, and without the farm being strong, the family struggles too."

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"We bought our farm in April of last year — got our crop in, worked the soil — and then it didn't rain for basically two months. So that was interesting. Great way to start."

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"Long term, I think I'm just trying to live my best Anishinaabe life and find farming as a way to have the life that I want for myself and to keep going with my role in the community. I'm trying to scale-up how to get our ancestral seeds back to more Native people."

"I started out thinking I needed to own land; I have become way more open-minded about what land access can be."

"I'm from Kenya and I grew up in the country. I feel really connected to earth, I like working with dirt. I feel alive just making things grow."

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"I'm really trying to figure out how I can build onto the existing regenerative practices that my uncle started, and also keep going on with the local food and community impact that we've been able to have."

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"We also like the idea that humans don't have to be bad for the planet, that we can actually be a positive force."

"Conventional farming seems like you're just putting a Band-Aid on stuff, whereas with organic we're trying to actually fix the problem, not just covering it back up."

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"My main take-away from this class was this might not be the time to expand our CSA, considering our time resources and financial resources."

"How do we become competitive so that we make sure this is a successful business, but also make it so what we're offering is approachable for all communities?"

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"It's difficult to sell our premium pork in a packing house town."

"I want this to be a place of rural opportunity, because I was a rural kid, and with corn and soybeans surrounding us, there wasn't much opportunity."

"I've changed a lot since we started this class back in November."

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The Fifth ‘R’

A ‘Generational Urban Farmer’ Looks to Build Community Resilience

By Brian DeVore

On a warm, overcast day in early fall, a low line of shrubby trees blocks the view of a seemingly empty lot on Penn Avenue, a busy thoroughfare in the Willard-Hay Neighborhood of North Minneapolis. A television with a cracked screen lays in some weeds at the edge of the lot, a reminder that if you don’t do something positive with a blank spot in the urban map it will be used for something not quite so positive. But on this day Queen Frye is proving that not only is this piece of ground between two houses not empty, but it’s also the home of something that’s benefiting her as well as the community at large.

“We have Swiss chard, cauliflower, purple cabbage, cucumbers, sage, collard greens, banana peppers, basil, lavender, mustard greens, kale, Brussels sprouts, and cantaloupe,” the energetic 39-year-old says as she provides a tour of the riot of growth taking place.

As a Black woman living in an urban setting, Frye is well aware that she doesn’t fit the “Old MacDonald” farmer stereotype of being a white man residing in a rural area. But she also knows that she grew up valuing raising her own fresh vegetables, creating a family legacy built on healthy eating and self-sufficiency. Now, thanks to her exposure to goal setting and holistic planning through the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings course, Frye says she’s prepared to take her personal passion for food and farming to the next level and help build resiliency in the wider community.

“How can this garden space be a place of peace, be a place of building community, restoring relationship, sharing art, helping with our food system in North Minneapolis?” Frye asks while showing a freshly-picked pepper to Gustavo, a neighbor across the fence who’s in the midst of replacing his roof.

Family Legacy

Frye calls herself a “generational urban farmer” — when she was a little girl in Boston, she helped her grandmother, Gertrude “Trudy” Fernandez, work a plot in a community garden. “She never talked about things like we talk about with garden-



Queen Frye picking vegetables on a city lot in North Minneapolis. “You know there are people who are just growing food — they don’t have to deal with the *and*, the *but*, the *however*, the *furthermore*,” she says. (LSP Photo)

ing today, about it being revolutionary and sustainable — it was just part of our life,” recalls Frye of her grandmother.

After Frye’s family moved to Minneapolis in 1989, they continued that gardening legacy. Every time they’d move, one of the first tasks was to dig up a rectangular plot in the backyard to raise vegetables in. Frye’s mother, Anna Frye, along with aunts, continued that tradition after the grandmother passed away. Frye, in turn, has passed on the gardening bug to her teenaged daughter and son. “Wherever we lived, we always had a garden,” she says.

After her mother passed away, Frye felt

the need to preserve the relationship between land and food production she inherited from her family. So, in 2019, she and her partner, Michael Kuykindall, started R. Roots Garden (rootsgarden.org), a nonprofit that’s growing vegetables at various locations, including on this empty city lot and at a school in the community. R. Roots is based on the idea that everyone deserves access to fresh, healthy food. That mission takes on a special resonance in an area like North Minneapolis, where fast food restaurants and convenience stores dominate the food landscape.

“Yeah, maybe we don’t need fried chicken 10 different ways in one mile stretch,” Frye says with a laugh.

She’s also committed to teaching others how to raise food in an urban area on a limited income. That’s why R. Roots does community educational outreach and has partnered with the City of Minneapolis’s Step Up program to work with interns.

Today, R. Roots is raising an impressive amount of vegetables on small plots of land, despite numerous challenges. For example, Frye laughs at the time she planted a vegetable plot and suddenly realized she had no access to water. She drove to a local Aldi grocery store and bought gallon jugs of water to do some emergency irrigation. Other challenges include lack of financial resources, inconsistent access to land, social upheaval in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in South Minneapolis, and serious health issues on the part of Frye. The vegetables produced by the urban farming operation are distributed locally and Frye is constantly in search of ways to improve not only how she raises food, but how she sets up a system that engages others in gardening and healthy eating. Over the years, she’s enrolled in numerous classes, including the University of Minnesota’s Master Gardener program.

Farm Beginnings

So perhaps it’s not surprising that during the winter of 2022-2023, she and Kuykindall enrolled in LSP’s Farm Beginnings course. For the past quarter-century, Farm Beginnings (see page 26) has been offering training that focuses on the goal setting, marketing, and financial skills needed to establish a successful farm business. Through the class, LSP organizers introduce students to holistic business planning. In addition, established farmers, as well as experts on farm financing, marketing, and other topics, give in-

Roots, see page 29...

depth presentations.

Frye, who has worked in the accounting profession, says Farm Beginnings not only supported her as she strategized how to structure R. Roots Garden as an entity that will be sustainable in the long term from an economic and quality-of-life point of view, but helped her see ways of making the enterprise a bigger part of the community. The class also helped Frye connect with other farmers who are interested in producing food in a way that's good for their neighbors and the land.

Frye says one of the things that prompted her to take Farm Beginnings was that she was becoming increasingly aware, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of George Floyd, of all the conversations taking place around food justice and the role farming could play in building more resilient urban communities. She started meeting with other urban farmers and realized she wasn't the only one thinking about the bigger role food production could play in the community.

"Hearing people in a group actually talking about it, I was like, this really just isn't a me thing—there are people who are seeing the same things I'm seeing in the neighborhood and want to do something differently."

The farmer-to-farmer information model that is at the core of Farm Beginnings relieves the stress that can come when one is sitting through a presentation given by an accredited expert — someone Frye describes as "Mister PhD."

"In Farm Beginnings, we're learning from each other," she says. "You have that feeling of, 'They don't even have a degree and they're doing this?' You relax your shoulders a little bit."

Frye says Farm Beginnings, and the extra deeper dive into holistic planning she took as part of the course, came at a time when she was trying to strike a healthy work-life balance. Health problems had made it clear that she would need such a balance if this is something she is going to pursue in the long term.

Frye remembers one farmer-presenter who talked about the additional elements needed in farming that go beyond just agronomic or business acumen — a farmer's

physical and mental health is just as key as fertile soil if the operation is to thrive in the long term. "It was almost like talking about having realistic boundaries set for yourself when it comes to business and when it comes to your personal life, because she really touched on when you are a farmer, you *are* your own business," recalls Frye.

The urban farmer thinks a lot about how to make what she's doing resonate with others in a kind of create-your-own adventure sort of way. Even the name of her enterprise, R. Roots Garden, has that quality to it.

"'R' is for whatever 'R' word you have related to the garden — like how it makes



Frye discussing her holistic plan during a Farm Beginnings class. "You relax your shoulders a little bit" when learning from other farmers, she says. (LSP Photo)

you feel," she says while sitting at a picnic table at the edge of the Penn Avenue plot. "It could be 'rest,' it could be 'relaxation,' it could be 'redemption,' it could be 'redesigning.'" She asks me, "Does any 'R' word resonate with you?"

"Resilience?"

"Yeah," says Frye.

Always Another 'And'

To Black people in America, agriculture has long been associated with slavery, or in more recent years, discrimination on the part of the USDA and other government agencies, as well as lending institutions.

A century ago, there were an estimated one million Black farmers in the U.S. Systemic racism, unfair USDA policies, discrimination on the part of lenders, and land title disputes, along with general economic challenges in agriculture, have combined to whittle that number down to less than 42,000 Black farmers, owning less

Give it a Listen

LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast episode 328 features Queen Frye talking about how she just wants to raise food, even if she doesn't resemble a certain Scottish farmer: landstewardshipproject.org/podcast/ear-to-the-ground-no-328-urban-ag-oasis.

than 1% of the country's farmland. Farms with at least one producer reporting as Black decreased by 13% between 2017 and 2022, nearly double the percentage of overall farm loss, according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture. (The Ag Census reports that 95 farmers in Minnesota identify as Black.) Part of the decimation of people of color involved in agriculture as full-fledged entrepreneurial farmers can be traced to the stress injected into the system by racism — institutional and the day-to-day interactions that take place in a community.

Frye acknowledges that it can be exhausting to, as a Black person, not be able to just focus on farming. "It gets challenging sometimes because you know there are people who are just growing food — they don't have to deal with the *and*, the *but*, the *however*, the *furthermore*," she says.

Frye says she's not going to allow such barriers to get in the way of her passion for farming and thirst for knowledge. She has gotten used to being the youngest person, as well as the only Black person, in the classes and workshops she signs up for. "I've learned to be comfortable in those

spaces and be like, 'I'm here to participate and receive information.' And if somebody in that classroom doesn't want me to be there, they're going to have to get up and leave, but I'm staying," the farmer says.

And while she stays, her plans call for increasing the farm's education and community outreach capacity, and adding infrastructure such as toolsheds and a packing shed. And always, always, doing something positive with an empty city lot. The pressure is on, in a good way. R. Roots gained access to the plot on Penn Avenue in 2019 when a property owner put out the word that he was "looking for somebody to do something good on this land." Frye gave the owner a presentation about her plans and he agreed to allow her to grow food there — temporarily; he made it clear his long-term plans included developing the lot.

The farmer's response? "Well, I hope that we grow our garden so well that you do not want to develop there." □

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland in the Midwest? Or are you an established farmer/landowner in the Midwest who is seeking a beginning farmer to purchase or rent your land, or to work with in a partnership/employee situation? Then consider having your information circulated via the Land Stewardship Project's *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse*. To fill out an online form and for more information, see landstewardshipproject.org/farmland-clearinghouse. You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Karen Stettler at stettler@landstewardshipproject.org, or by calling her at 612-767-9885. Below are a few recent listings. For the latest listings, see landstewardshipproject.org/farmland-clearinghouse.

Farmland Available

◆ Melissa Driscoll is seeking to sell a 7-acre certified organic vegetable farm in *southeastern Minnesota* to a farmer of color by fall/winter of 2025. She prefers to sell to farmers dedicated to sustainable agriculture. She grows on about 2.5 of the 7 acres and sells primarily wholesale. Buildings include: three-bedroom house in good shape; old 60 x 33 barn with metal siding and roof and including a new heated vegetable pack shed, unheated haymow used for storage and to cure garlic, and ground-level unheated equipment storage; 12 x 20 foot passive solar heated greenhouse with cement floor attached to pack shed; granary building with metal roof used for storage; and two hoop-houses. Egg-mobile can be included or sold separately. Pesto business will be sold separately. Located between the Twin Cities and Rochester. Product sales are \$45,000 a year currently. Prefer to sell to folks who want to make money farming, not homesteaders. Price is \$350,000 or more. Contact: Melissa Driscoll, 612-584-8091, m.driscoll66@yahoo.com.

◆ Nancy Lunzer is selling or renting 38 acres of land that has not been sprayed in *east-central Minnesota's Kanabec County*. There are rolling, wooded pastures with 18 tillable acres on a river. There is a barn with hayloft, garage, lean-to, and pole barn. There is no house but there is a well, electricity, a septic system, and fiber optic. Prefer vegetable farmer/small livestock. Contact: Nancy Lunzer, bearstreetranch@gmail.com.

◆ Willis Kleinjan is looking for a renter for his 200 certified organic acres in *Avon in central Minnesota*. He has 110 tillable acres and 100 pastured acres, which is fenced with ponds and fountains. There is no house available. Contact: Willis Kleinjan, 320-493-4320, w@ncef.us.

Seeking Farmland

◆ Sarah Tarver is seeking a minimum of 20 acres in *Minnesota* for a nonprofit animal rescue. Barns that are suitable for animals, a workshop and large buildings on site for housing an animal sanctuary are preferred. Contact: Sarah Tarver, rescuokla@gmail.com.

◆ Christina Ryan is seeking 25 acres of tillable/pastured land in *Wisconsin*. She would prefer organic or acres that have not been sprayed. No house is needed but ideally the farmland would be off the highway on a quiet road, and be a good place to raise a family. Contact: Christina Ryan, 503-913-8275, christinaryan1991@gmail.com.

◆ Leron Giesting is seeking to buy 300 acres of pastured, tillable, and forested land in *Indiana*. He would like to find a retiring family farmer that wants to see their farm be taken care of and remain a farm. An ideal scenario would be to have a regenerative organic farm with water running through it on a dead end road; preferably in southeastern Indiana but also open to other options. Leron grew up on a family dairy farm and has wanted to find a farm on which to raise his own family. Contact: Leron Giesting, 812-363-4554, leron.giesting@gmail.com.

◆ Raini Wright is seeking to rent 2 pasture acres and a house in *Minnesota*. She can do some light maintenance and repairs. She has excellent credit and references. She has experience with tractors, seeding, baling hay, chopping stalks. She would need some outbuildings as a place to store hay for three mini horses, and needs room to store garage tools, a tractor, truck, etc. Raini has managed good relationships with landlords and is willing to barter/trade for farmers needing extra help. Contact: Raini Wright, 651-328-3809, rainermail@yahoo.com.

◆ Sam Fryer is seeking 10 acres of land to

rent or buy in *Minnesota*. He would need a house and ideally would like a stream or river on the land. They plan to raise mostly chickens, so any poultry barns would be great as well. Contact: Sam Fryer, 507-226-5161, fryersam9@gmail.com.

◆ Ilian DeCorte is seeking .5 to 2 acres of organic tillable land near *Minnesota's Twin Cities* for small-scale, no-till vegetable production. Ilian lives in southeastern Minneapolis so land in close proximity would be helpful. He would need access to water. A structure for wash-pack would be ideal, but not required. Contact: Ilian DeCorte, 310-307-9734, ilian.decorte@gmail.com.

Seeking Farmer

◆ Tim Welsh is seeking a farmer to join his 5th generation 500-acre family farm in the Driftless Region of *northeastern Iowa*. It currently produces conventional corn, soybeans, hay, oats, and Kernza. They rotationally graze dairy heifers and dry cows on perennial pasture May-October on a contract basis for a local dairy. They are planting cover crops and more Kernza to extend grazing and increase perennials, improving pastures and woodlands with agroforestry-silvopasture, and renovating prairies and oak savannas. The family is seeking to employ an experienced farmer and caretaker to live on the property with her/his family and work with them as landowners to create and implement a long-term management plan. The employment agreement is expected to begin in late summer or fall 2024, or the latest by March 2025, with an initial term of 1-2 years that will include an opportunity for a long-term profit-sharing or rental of the farm. Contact: Tim Welsh, 563-217-0950, tim@agrisource.co.th.

Resources for Retiring & Beginning Farmers

The Land Stewardship Project has various tools and support available to help beginning farmers, as well as retiring farmers and non-operating landowners, navigate the transition of land and other agricultural resources to the next generation. For details on publications, workshops, tax credits, and other Land Stewardship Project transition resources, see landstewardshipproject.org/land-transition-tools, or contact LSP's Karen Stettler at stettler@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-767-9885. □

What's Going on with CSA?

By Elizabeth Makarewicz

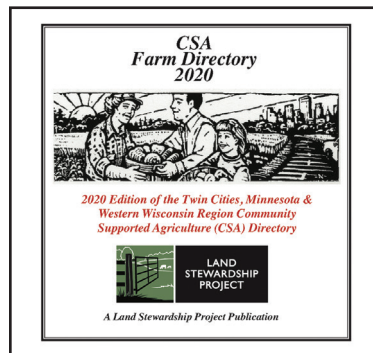
Regular visitors to the Land Stewardship Project's website may have noticed a significant change to the Community-Based Foods page. LSP decided this past winter to, for the first time in over 30 years, discontinue updating its directory of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms (landstewardshipproject.org/csa-farm-directory).

The main factors impacting the decision to end, or at least temporarily pause, updating the directory include declining web page traffic and directory listing submissions, growth of alternative directories such as Minnesota Grown, and a refocusing of LSP's community-based foods work on a regional campaign based in western Minnesota to connect institutions like schools, assisted living facilities, and food hubs to local producers (*see page 18*). While the CSA directory may have outlived its original purpose — to connect community members to farms in their area — the CSA movement remains a crucial piece of food and farming infrastructure that provides equity, transparency, and access. To learn more about the state of CSA within LSP's community and beyond, staff members conducted a survey of farmers previously listed in the directory, spoke with organizers and service providers who work closely with CSA farmers, and researched the history (and future) of the CSA movement. Following are a few key pieces gleaned from this research.

Origins of the Movement

As with many decentralized movements that seek to disrupt conventional power structures, CSA does not have a single origin story. Long overlooked in contemporary retellings of CSA history that center white, Eurocentric perspectives, the work of Booker T. Whatley, a Black horticulturist and agriculture professor from Tuskegee University in Alabama, is believed to have promoted the first iteration of CSA farming in the United States in the 1960s and 70s. Whatley's model proposed a subscription in which families paid farmers up front for a growing season's worth of access to farm products. As the Black farmers Whatley trained faced racism and discrimination within existing market channels available at

the time, his "Clientele Membership Club" sought to sidestep intermediaries and connect farmers directly with families. Around the same time, similar subscription-based models were springing up in Japan and Europe. Japan's Teikei system grew out of the long-standing cooperative economic systems central to Japanese life, and the European models were largely inspired by the writings of Rudolf Steiner, who stressed the interconnection of ecology and human culture. The model of CSA farming common throughout Minnesota and surrounding states is largely inspired by the European model, which was brought to the U.S. in the early 1980s.



LSP started publishing a regional CSA directory in the early 1990s.

A Challenging Endeavor

Despite decades of work to establish CSA as a viable option for small and medium-sized vegetable farmers, challenges remain. Of those surveyed by LSP, the top two challenges faced by CSA farmers are labor and financial viability. The slim profit margins common among CSA farmers make it difficult for farm owners to pay themselves, let alone employees, a livable wage. And even if farmers can offer a competitive wage, finding staff able to commit to a full growing season adds additional complexity.

CSA farmers manage an intricately coordinated schedule throughout the growing season to provide the variety, quality, and quantity needed to supply subscribers with their weekly or bi-weekly box. Several survey respondents reported that subscribers increasingly expect customization, especially as the online market of week-by-week subscription boxes expands. The long hours and scarce monetary reward often lead to burnout in the CSA farmer community.

Opportunity in Diversity

Liv Froehlich, the program director for FairShare CSA Coalition, a Madison, Wis.-based nonprofit that connects farmers and eaters through CSA, resonated with the trends LSP's survey unearthed. Many of the CSA farmers Froehlich works with at

FairShare face similar challenges, especially considering the unique circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Froehlich, eater interest in CSA farms was on a slow decline up until 2020, when CSA subscriptions spiked due to concerns over COVID exposure and supply chain disruptions. Since the peak of the pandemic, CSA subscriptions rates have returned to a steady decline.

Despite overall declining subscription rates, Froehlich sees opportunity within the CSA movement to connect farmers and eaters who have historically lacked access to fresh, locally grown vegetables. Central to FairShare's work is a cost-share program that subsidizes CSA shares for lower income community members. Investment in and demand for these subsidized shares is growing—Froehlich estimates thousands of households benefit from the cost-share program, which incorporates both subsidized CSA boxes and partnerships with community organizations to increase access to fresh, locally grown produce.

Wider System Changes Needed

The CSA movement, from its various origins, was founded to solve a very specific problem: how to share the burden of risk and the reward of the harvest more equitably among farmers and eaters. In the ensuing decades, the complexity of that problem has been uncovered. Within a political system that prioritizes cheap food, how do we ensure farmers earn a fair and dignified living?

And how do we begin to unravel centuries of structural racism to ensure every member of society has access to food that is healthy and culturally relevant? "I think sometimes individual farmers feel the need to address every one of those pieces, and that's just an impossible task for an individual farmer," says Froehlich. It takes an ecosystem of farmers, eaters, member-based organizations, government institutions, etc., to achieve a more just and sustainable food and farming system.

LSP will continue to work towards that goal, and CSA will likely be part of those efforts in some form or another. □

LSP membership support specialist Elizabeth Makarewicz has worked on CSA farms in Minnesota and Iowa. For more on LSP's community-based food systems work, see page 18.



Barons Money, Power, and the Corruption of America's Food Industry

By Austin Frerick
248 pages
Island Press
islandpress.org

Reviewed by Ken Meter

Austin Frerick has performed a remarkable service by poring through decades of documents to chronicle the rapid expansion of monopoly power in seven key U.S. food industries: grain, pork, beef processing, dairy, coffee, berries, and groceries. His book, *Barons: Money, Power, and the Corruption of America's Food*, summarizes the fruits of this research in an accessible account that is hitting the market at an opportune time; for several weeks it was ranked by Amazon as the number one agriculture and food policy book.

Frerick grew up in Iowa, held jobs with the Congressional Research Service and U.S. Department of the Treasury, and won rare positions as both a Fellow at Yale University and writer-in-residence for the Wisconsin Farmers Union. He is a disciplined researcher; the book includes 946 footnotes.

To me, the primary importance of *Barons* is that its publication shows that some academic circles are finally investigating monopoly power critically. The book also serves as a rallying point for discussions with the USDA under Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack (at least in the Biden era), which is at long last considering taking action to break up food monopolies.

Frerick personalizes his treatment by focusing on several corporate owners who foster the cancerous growth of monopoly power. He invites us to consider the single family that controls confinement hog operations in 50 of Iowa's 99 counties and hires 7,400 people. He tracks the global growth of Minnesota's Cargill. He notes that two Brazilian brothers provided 1,829 politicians with more than \$150 million in bribes, enabling public funds to be diverted into building the world's largest meat slaughtering company. Still, Frerick adds, "this book is less

about the specific barons themselves than about the conditions that facilitated their rise to power." He invites the reader to take action, writing: "As depressing as it is to acknowledge that we've chosen to build a food system dominated by a handful of barons, it's also freeing because it means that it's within our power to build it differently."

The monopolization of food industries did not happen because these barons are strictly "self-made" businessmen, nor was it merely the result of market forces. Rather, Frerick points out, these concentrations of wealth were lubricated by bipartisan public policy. He reminds us that it was Harry Truman's Agriculture Secretary, Ezra Benson, who first promulgated the admonition to farmers, "Get big or get out." The right-wing legal scholar whom Republicans attempted to install in the U. S. Supreme Court, Robert Bork, established legal arguments that favored monopolization by arguing that lower consumer prices justified the concentration of power. Economic scholars blindly followed his lead. Barack Obama allowed monopolies to flourish, while his Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, earned \$1 million annually working for the U.S. Dairy Export Council between terms.

Frerick penetrates beneath the surface reality to show us where profits are made — often not by selling the actual commodities that are most visible. Thus, meat slaughtering firms profit more by selling byproducts such as hides, organs, and offal, than by selling meat. Driscoll's is essentially a genetics firm, Frerick argues, gaining its competitive advantage in berry sales by owning specific strains that survive shipping. Immense retailers such as Walmart gain dominance by selling shelf space to certain suppliers, and profiting from vast distribution networks.

My favorite chapter covers the grocery trade. Frerick estimates that Walmart collects \$27 billion of the nation's SNAP (food stamp) receipts — one-quarter of total benefits. He cites studies showing that taxpayers subsidize the firm by about \$5,000 per employee due to low-income tax credits and benefits for Medicaid, housing, energy, and food assistance that are intended to compensate for low wages. This is equal to one-fifth of the average Walmart worker's income, while the CEO earns \$25.7 million.

The book also discusses how Walmart seeks to "localize" its footprint by creating what it calls "Neighborhood Markets," and expanding its healthcare services.

Frerick travels to the birthplace of Walmart — Bentonville, Ark. — to remind us that the growth of this monopoly was built on low-wage labor that actually created poverty in the company's hometown. He notes that the firm opted to pull out of Germany rather than conform to that country's protections for workers and communities.

Barons is a solid introduction for those who are learning about monopolies for the first time, although Land Stewardship Project members who have been paying attention may find a few gaps in the analysis, especially when the book covers grain and meat monopolies. Frerick also succumbs to

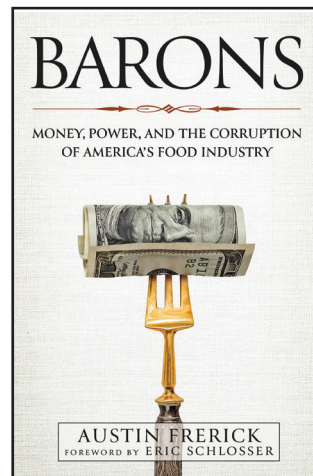
the academic convention that the work of older scholars is outdated, which means that the pioneering work of Walter Goldschmidt, Bill Hefferman, and Mary Hendrickson is listed only in footnotes, unmentioned in the text. This decision also suggests that monopolization began only recently, when in fact our society's diversion of public resources to subsidize the accumulation of capital by individuals who are already wealthy is a long-standing policy. This was a central core of the initial European settlement, the Golden Age at

the end of the nineteenth-century, and post-World War II economic expansion. Even the work of some newer experts is relegated to footnotes, such as Leah Douglas' exceptional reporting via the *Food and Environment Reporting Network* on COVID-19 outbreaks in meat processing plants. This has the unfortunate consequence of elevating Frerick's work above his predecessors.

Even more disappointing, for a writer with legislative experience, is that Frerick devotes only two pages to summarizing his policy recommendations. These seem to suggest solid courses of action, but specific policy detail would make *Barons* far more compelling.

Finally, Frerick's last page urges readers to "join me" in building community-based food systems. This rings hollow, since he has not demonstrated any familiarity with that emergent social movement. □

LSP member Ken Meter, one of the country's foremost food system analysts, is the author of Building Community Food Webs.



• • •
We've chosen to build a food system dominated by a handful of barons, but that means it's within our power to build it differently.
• • •

Perennial Ceremony Lessons & Gifts from a Dakota Garden

By Teresa Peterson
217 pages
University of Minnesota Press
upress.umn.edu

Reviewed by Gina Johnson

I had just sat down at my laptop after scrubbing the soil from my nails, having started lettuce, spinach, arugula, and radish seeds in pots I carefully placed to maximize their exposure to the late-March Denver sun. As I reviewed my notes and highlights to write this review of Teresa Peterson's book, *Perennial Ceremony: Lessons and Gifts from a Dakota Garden*, I spotted this quotation, which should resonate with anyone who raises and harvests food in places with frosty winters: "Now, we are ready for winter. Our family and friends will enjoy the abundant harvest of fruits and vegetables that will nourish our family through the cold and dark months ahead." Indeed. And the seeds I had just planted will nourish mine this spring.

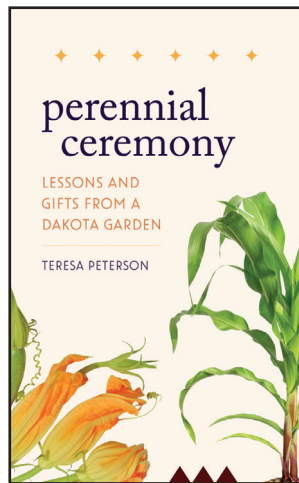
This graceful, garden-focused book is organized into four sections, themed by season. Rather than take the reader through each season chronologically, within each section the stories flow in a fluid timeline, which Peterson explains in her introduction. This style allows the reader to follow the author on her journey, knowing that learning in the garden is rarely linear. By organizing the book by season, the reader can follow the cyclical natural patterns of southwestern Minnesota, where Peterson, a Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota and citizen of the Upper Sioux Community, lives.

By sharing her writings outside of chronological time, the reader is welcomed into Peterson's life and memories. We read about a trip to Montana, but later in the book learn about the author's plan for the garden while preparing for the trip. Thus, we feel like we, her confidantes, are in the know and are reminiscing along with her. The book reads as a series of thoughtful journal entries from a gardener who is using the journal both to keep notes for future planning and to wrestle with challenging topics like climate change and colonial trauma that she mentally explores as she physically tends her garden.

The theme of ceremony is unsurprisingly strong in this book. We follow the author

through the months of COVID-19 lockdown and caution, when we all, willingly or not, focused inward and spent our time more isolated than usual. Her focus on the moment during the pandemic resonated with me, as I found myself in 2020 in a space where ritual became more important. Lockdown days merged in their sameness and observations became more intense. Peterson reminds us that ceremony is part of our daily and seasonal activities and that, by observing, we are intersecting with sacred rites and rituals. Keeping some of these rituals and observational skills post-pandemic allows us to bring forth positivity from a trying time.

Not only does this book take the reader along with a friend who is willing to share the journal of some challenging years, it provides knowledge for even those with experience growing and producing food. Gardening tips are sprinkled throughout the



book's prose in such a way that they flow with the story. And, if the reader is paying attention, she can glean gems from an experienced gardener. Recipes and descriptions of harvest and preservation are also included, focusing on each season in turn. It is a book one could read through for pleasure and then return to at each season for information. It also challenges the reader to think about one's place in the greater scheme of things, citing scientific writing

on agricultural practices and wrestling with capitalism's effects on our environment and colonialism's effects on our society. Because the book reads like the journal of a trusted friend, the challenges are set in perspective to the everyday things we can do to be more connected to the earth and the decisions we make that impact it.

A challenge with books focused on gardening with the seasons is that seasons look different in every part of the world. Peterson's gardening seasons in southwestern Minnesota may not match the seasons of the reader. In fact, her descriptions of climate change, including drought and increased heat, mean that the seasons she herself experiences may not be the same from year-to-year. She demonstrates to the reader how to observe one's own seasons by gracefully writing about her experiences. I

may not plant out my tomato seedlings here in Denver when she is planting hers in the Mni Sota (or Minnesota) River Valley, but she reminds me to observe and be thoughtful about my own timing and to be present in the moment at each stage of the gardening process.

I have lived in the Twin Cities and southeastern Minnesota; I have never lived or gardened in the southwestern portion of the state. Yet, through this book, I feel that I have experienced the four seasons there. Through Peterson's vivid prose I feel "fernweh," the German term that means having nostalgia for a place you have never been. Anyone who mindfully grows food understands a bit of Peterson's world, though her location and her cultural experiences may differ from ours. The perennial ceremony of tending the land connects us as humans to the earth.

As Peterson shares, "The gardens have been my place in between all the words, meetings, and work projects, the place where I am able to clear my brain, work through problems, and gain creative and sometimes just simple solutions."

Finding solutions in the perennial ceremony of gardening makes us well-rounded, happier people, and Peterson's book guides us there. □

Land Stewardship Project member Gina Johnson spent many hours volunteering in the former White Bear Lake office of LSP before moving to Colorado. She supplements her CSA and farmers' market purchases with produce she grows, harvests, and preserves.

Get Current With

LIVE  WIRE

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

Sounding Off

The Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast features over 330 conversations with the farmers, organizers, scientists, and other changemakers who are building a new farm and food system. To start listening, check them out on your favorite podcasting platform or go to landstewardshipproject.org/series/ear-to-the-ground. □



Member Profile: *Gina Aguilar*

A Snowbound Epiphany

By *Clara Sanders*

If you attended the Land Stewardship Project's Family Farm Breakfast and Lobby Day in March (*see page 8*), you probably remember a powerful speech by an LSP farmer-member holding a nine-month-old baby who was very interested in the microphone. That member was Gina Aguilar, who, along with her partner, Silvano, recently established Granja Las Aguilas in Amery, Wis. Gina first heard about LSP when someone referred her to the Farmland Clearinghouse (*see page 30*) on LSP's website, where people selling, renting, or looking for land can post opportunities. They started to get connected to other farmers in the area and learned about LSP's educational programs.

Gina and Silvano closed on their property in fall 2022, the same year they enrolled in LSP's Farm Beginnings course (*see page 26*). But the beginning of Gina's farming journey started much earlier.

After college, Gina was working as a community organizer to stop construction of I-69 through new terrain in southern Indiana. While she was living in Evansville, she read the book *Power Down*, by Richard Heinberg, which was a real eye-opener.

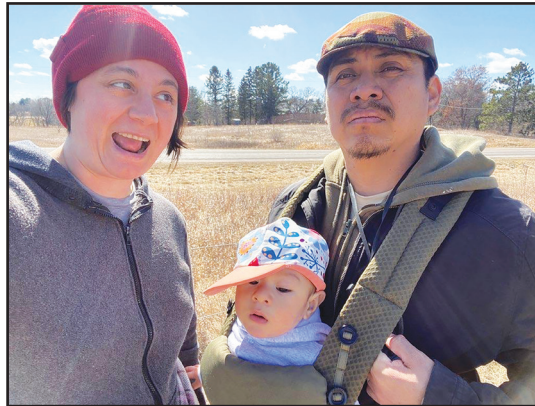
"Growing up in a suburban-type home in the cornfields of Indiana," Gina says, "I didn't really know how to grow my own food, or really to do much of anything. So many people grow up off the land, and unless you work in a trade, you don't know how to fix things, or do repairs — most of us don't even know how our water gets to us."

Around that same time, Gina was visiting a friend in Maine when a blizzard struck and they were stuck for three days. Her friend's roommate was a farmer and began crafting delicious meals from what they had stored in the basement — whole chickens, root vegetables, maple syrup, etc. — all food that they had grown and preserved.

"It was a life-changing experience for me," recalls Gina. "We had a house full of people and we didn't need to buy groceries for three days. The only time we left was to buy ketchup."

During that trip to Maine, she connected with others who hadn't grown up working the land but had learned to farm in their 20s. "It shocked me to learn that one could learn to grow one's own food, and learn that as an adult," says Gina.

Although Gina had to remain in Indiana while successfully defending a felony charge



"It shocked me to learn that one could learn to grow one's own food," says Gina Aguilar, shown here with her partner, Silvano, and their child, Rafael. (Photo courtesy of Gina Aguilar)

related to her community organizing, she eventually made it back to Maine, where she interned at three different farms. When she returned to the Midwest, Gina spent several seasons at Tillers International, where she ran a market garden and taught animal-powered tillage, gardening, and blacksmithing. From 2014 to 2016, Gina managed crews on two large organic farms, and in 2017, she moved to the Twin Cities to work.

"I was frustrated to step away from farming," Gina explains. "I wanted to be doing field work, but I didn't want to manage a project solo again. I also felt discouraged working for men my own age and with barely more experience farming, who had trouble trusting me when I advocated for the needs of the crew."

This kind of gender discrimination has pushed many women out of farming. But Gina is finally back at it again, this time with Silvano and baby Rafael. They are working to establish a farm that raises fruit, sheep,

and chickens. She hopes she can also eventually integrate animal-powered farming into Granja Las Aguilas. They have a pole barn on their property, which they look forward to transforming into a type of general store that will include farm produce as well as traditional Mexican and Asian groceries, which can be hard to find in rural areas.

Gina and Silvano are grateful for LSP's Farm Beginnings class, which helped them fill in the more amorphous parts of running a business, equipped them with templates, documents, and exercises to practice filling in details, and walked them through an enterprise budget — all key steps toward obtaining financing. The couple received a scholarship to cover the cost of the class, which was helpful, given that they were beginning to pay the mortgage on the land they bought in Wisconsin while wrapping up the lease on their apartment.

Gina knows the importance of new farmers getting a leg-up these days as communities seek a way to usher in a new generation. That's why she is passionate about empowering others who are ready to work the land. She served on the Emerging Farmers Task Force for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in 2020 and 2021, and is on LSP's Land Access Steering Committee.

Gina feels strongly that part of the work to get a new generation on the land needs to focus on public policy that addresses the U.S. government's historical implementation of laws meant to weaken Native culture and sovereignty, break the Black middle class, and punish civil rights activity. In order to confront this history of land theft, Gina sees LSP's work on policy that supports "emerging farmers" — Black, Indigenous and people of color, as well as women, queer and trans folks, people with disabilities, and veterans of the armed forces — more critical than ever.

"It is the least we can do in agricultural policy," she says. "And it is an obvious solution to the disappearance of farms in the United States today." □

LSP advancement organizer Clara Sanders can be reached at csanders@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-400-6340. For more on Granja Las Aguilas, see granjalasaguilas.bigcartel.com or [facebook.com/GranjaLasAguilas](https://www.facebook.com/GranjaLasAguilas).

Holiday Greetings



Regan LeBrun, age 9, of Lafayette, Minn., designed this holiday card for the Land Stewardship Project's end-of-year membership drive in 2023. Thank you, Regan!

Membership Questions?

If you have questions about your Land Stewardship Project membership, contact LSP's Clara Sanders at 612-400-6340 or csanders@landstewardshipproject.org. To renew, mail in the envelope included in this *Land Stewardship Letter*, or see landstewardshipproject.org/join.

New Address?

Has your address changed or do you anticipate moving in the next few months? Take a moment to update your address with LSP so that you can continue receiving the *Land Stewardship Letter*, event invitations, and other updates. To update your address, see landstewardshipproject.org/address. Make sure you use the same e-mail address you have on file with LSP so your data updates correctly.

Volunteer for LSP

It's a stone cold fact: the Land Stewardship Project literally could not fulfill its mission without volunteers. Volunteers help us do everything from stuff envelopes and make telephone calls to enter data and set up logistics for meetings. Remote opportunities are available.

To volunteer, fill out the form at landstewardshipproject.org/volunteer-for-lsp or contact Clara Sanders at csanders@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-400-6340.

Planned Giving to LSP

Since 1982, the Land Stewardship Project has been a leading advocate for family farms and sustainable agriculture. LSP is striving to create rural landscapes with more just and sustainable communities, healthy soil, and clean air and water. LSP's work for stewardship of the land begins with people. As a membership organization, LSP relies on the engagement, leadership, and support of its members to advance long-term care of the land, thriving family farms, and healthy rural communities.

Including the Land Stewardship Project in your estate creates a lasting gift that will help keep the land and people together for years to come. Legacy gifts of land, bequests, stock shares, a donor-advised fund, individual retirement account (IRA) distributions, or other planned gifts have a direct impact on the work and provide a lasting tribute to your values. If you have questions about making a planned gift to LSP, contact Josh Journey-Heinz by calling 612-400-6347 or via e-mail at jjourney-heinz@landstewardshipproject.org. □

In Memory & in Honor...

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

In Honor of Doug Nopar

◆ John Gabbert & Joyce Belgum

In Honor of Patty Wright & Mike Racette

◆ Jim Lovestar
◆ Erica Perl & George Socha

In Honor of Brian DeVore

◆ Ron Rengel

In Honor of Rob & Melissa Gordon

◆ Dale Hadler

In Memory of Sister Mary Tacheny

◆ Doug Nopar

In Honor of LSP's Farm Beginnings & Soil Health Teams in Memory of Howard & Wanda Hadler

◆ Dale Hadler

In Memory of Pat Walker

◆ Janet Heirigs

In Memory of Don Javurek

◆ Karen Javurek

In honor of the 16 School Sisters of Notre Dame celebrating their 40th, 50th, 60th, & 70th Jubilee

◆ Sister Kathleen Mary Kiemen

To donate to LSP in the name of someone, contact Clara Sanders at 612-400-6340 or csanders@landstewardshipproject.org. Donations can be made online at landstewardshipproject.org/join.



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Stewardship Calendar

- **JUNE 28-29 — LSP Driftless Grazing School**, Caledonia, Minn., landstewardshipproject.org/driftlessgrazing, Alex Romano, LSP, aromano@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-767-9880
- **JULY 13 — LSP-PFI Meat Cuts Workshop: From Carcass to Consumer**, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Spring Grove, Minn., bit.ly/LSPMeat, Alex Romano, LSP, aromano@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-767-9880
- **JULY 23 — LSP Policy Campaign Meeting on Animal Ag**, Zoom Online, bit.ly/2024LSPPolicy, Amanda Koehler, LSP, akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org,

- 612-400-6355
- **JULY 25 — LSP Twin Cities Cookout**, 5:30 p.m.-9 p.m., Minneapolis, Minn. (see sidebar below)
 - **AUG. 1 — Early Bird Discount Registration Deadline for 2024-2025 LSP Farm Beginnings Class** (see page 26)
 - **AUG. 27 — LSP Policy Campaign Meeting on Animal Ag** (see July 23)
 - **SEPT. 1 — Final Registration Deadline for 2024-2025 LSP Farm Beginnings Class** (see page 26)
 - **SEPT. 18 — LSP Policy Campaign Meeting on Land Access** (see July 23)
 - **SEPT. 24 — LSP Policy Campaign Meeting on Animal Ag** (see July 23)
 - **SEPT. 30 — Current Federal Farm Bill Expires** (see page 10)
 - **OCT. 16 — LSP Policy Campaign**

- Meeting on Land Access** (see July 23)
- **OCT. 22 — LSP Policy Campaign Meeting on Animal Ag** (see July 23)
- **NOVEMBER — First Class Session of 2024-2025 LSP Farm Beginnings Course** (see page 26)
- **NOV. 20 — LSP Policy Campaign Meeting on Land Access** (see July 23)
- **NOV. 26 — LSP Policy Campaign Meeting on Animal Ag** (see July 23)
- **MARCH — Last Class Session of 2024-2025 LSP Farm Beginnings Course** (see page 26)

Latest LSP Events:
landstewardshipproject.org/upcoming-events



‘High Time for Pie Time’ July 25

The 2024 Land Stewardship Project Twin Cities Cookout and Potluck will be held Thursday, July 25, from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m., in the yard of our office in South Minneapolis (821 East 35th Street). This year we are bringing back all the classic cookout favorites:

- ✓ The *best* potluck in the Twin Cities! LSP will provide burgers and brats sourced from member-farms, as well as grilled vegetarian protein; we ask that guests bring their favorite potluck dish to share.
- ✓ Pie and Art Raffle: This year we are enhancing an LSP favorite, the Pie Raffle, with the opportunity to win some locally-made art as well via an Art Raffle.
- ✓ An opportunity to hear from LSP members and staff about on-the-ground organizing and how you can get involved.

LSP’s legendary Pie Raffle will return for the 2024 cookout. (LSP Photo)

For details and to register, see bit.ly/2024Cookout or contact LSP’s Elizabeth Makarewicz at emakarewicz@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-722-6377. If you’d like to volunteer to help set-up, clean-up, sign-in participants, or manage various tables, see landstewardshipproject.org/volunteer-for-lsp or contact LSP’s Clara Sanders at csanders@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-400-6340.

Go Public With Your LSP Support

There are numerous fun ways you can show your support publicly for the Land Stewardship Project. LSP has available for purchase t-shirts, caps, window decals, bandanas, tote bags, 8 x 10 metal barn signs, and the classic “Let’s Stop Treating Our Soil Like Dirt” bumper stickers. Order any of these items today at landstewardshipproject.org/shop or by calling LSP at 612-722-6377.

