

The Land Stewardship



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

33 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter

Volume 33

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Taking a closer look at the land around us via a BioBlitz (page 7).

Photo by Molly DeVore

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

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 Dean Harrington, Alan Hoffman, Loretta Jaus, Sr. Kathleen Mary Kiemen, Chad Kingstrom, Jody Lenz, Vince Ready, Juliet Tomkins, Sue Wika

STAFF

Southeastern Minnesota

180 E. Main St., P.O. Box 130, Lewiston, MN 55952; phone: 507-523-3366; fax: 2729; e-mail: lspe@landstewardshipproject.org
 Karen Benson, Cree Bradley,
 Dori Eder, Doug Nopar, Johanna Rupprecht, Karen Stettler, Caroline van Schaik

Western Minnesota

301 State Rd., Suite 2, Montevideo, MN 56265; phone: 320-269-2105; fax: 2190; e-mail: lsptest@landstewardshipproject.org
 Amy Bacigalupo, Andrew Marcum, Robin Moore, Richard Ness, Rebecca White, Terry VanDerPol

Twin Cities/Policy

821 East 35th St., Suite 200
 Minneapolis, MN 55407;
 phone: 612-722-6377; fax: 6474;
 e-mail: info@landstewardshipproject.org
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Suppressing a 2-Way Conversation

By Brian DeVore

Sometimes one has to lose something to gain an appreciation for just how valuable an asset it was. That thought came to mind during the last hearing of the 48-year-old Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Citizens' Board, which was held June 23 in Saint Paul.

It was the last hearing because just a few weeks prior to that Minnesota lawmakers decided to eliminate this critical channel for citizens to provide input on controversial large-scale developments in the state. Pro-corporate agriculture interests such as the AgriGrowth Council had long been critical of the board's ability to provide oversight to the permitting of projects that have the potential to cause major environmental damage in rural areas.

But the last straw came in August 2014 when the Citizens' Board voted to require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for an 8,850-cow dairy proposed for Stevens County. As we've reported in the *Land Stewardship Letter*, documentation provided by state agencies, as well as local citizens, made it clear this dairy posed the risk of causing irreversible damage to the water, air and general environment in the area. And because it would have been one of several mega-dairies existing in that part of the state, the Baker Dairy, as it was called, would have contributed to a major negative cumulative impact in the community. Both the potential for "irreversible damage" and "cumulative impacts" are key triggers for ordering an EIS.

The ordering of an EIS for Baker Dairy upset some powerful interests in the state and set in motion a series of attacks on the Citizens' Board, which resulted in the Legislature eliminating it through a closed door conference committee process. (The bill containing the provision was initially vetoed by Gov. Mark Dayton, but was revived during the special session.)

It was clear from the beginning that getting rid of a key forum for providing public input on all of the scientific and regulatory documentation that goes into deciding whether a permit should be issued was a bad

idea. As Land Stewardship Project member Kathy DeBuhr said during a Minnesota Environmental Partnership press conference outside the MPCA headquarters on June 23, "The elimination of the Citizens' Board is a really horrible, bad idea. One that should appall all Minnesota citizens—metro and rural."

DeBuhr should know—if it wasn't for the Citizens' Board, Baker Dairy and its



LSP members (left to right) Stephanie Henriksen, Kathy DeBuhr and Don Pylkkanen were among the last people to testify in front of the MPCA Citizens' Board before it adjourned after 48 years of working to protect Minnesota's environment. (LSP Photo)

millions of gallons of liquid manure would be sitting within a mile of her farm. The Citizens' Board rarely overruled MPCA staff recommendations when it came to permitting projects, but when it did, it was for good reason. For example, in 2005 the Board ordered an EIS for a proposed tire burning plant in southeastern Minnesota, a project that would have caused major air quality problems in a beautiful part of the state where family-sized farms and recreation-based businesses predominate. In another important decision, the board denied the reissuing of a permit for Excel Dairy in northwestern Minnesota after it was declared a public health nuisance.

But observing the Citizens' Board in action during a long—9 a.m. to 7 p.m.—day made it clear that even when it doesn't overrule MPCA staff recommendations, it plays a crucial role in adding a human element to all the scientific information that goes into a permit application. Humans, after all, have to live next to these projects.

The Citizens' Board also added an important dose of transparency to the process—MPCA staff had to justify their recommendations in a public forum. This not only verified why certain decisions were made, but helped researchers from different disciplines become more aware of each other's findings, and thus any conflicts that might arise in the big picture. Such an open way of doing business is sorely lacking in government these days.

"We always operated in a transparent process," said Citizens' Board member and southeastern Minnesota farmer Jim Riddle at the June 23 press conference. "Which is the opposite way the board was eliminated—in the dark of night by legislators serving corporate interests."

The board's transparent method of operation was on full display at its last hearing.

On the agenda was a proposal to put in a wastewater treatment facility in the tiny community of Afton, which sits on the banks of the St. Croix River. There's a lot at stake with this proposal. The facility would be near homes in the nearby communities of

Citizens' Board, see page 4...

What's on Your Mind?

The *Land Stewardship Letter* welcomes letters and commentaries related to the issues we cover. Submissions can be sent to: Brian DeVore, 821 E. 35th St., Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407; e-mail: bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.

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

Lake St. Croix Beach and St. Mary's Point, and has the potential to negatively impact everything from groundwater and a trout stream to an American Indian burial mound site called Rattlesnake Effigy.

As a result, local citizens had requested that an EIS be conducted before Afton officials were given a green light on the project. MPCA staff working on the project had recommended no EIS be conducted. But during the June 23 hearing, the seven members of the Citizens' Board present made it clear that they had a lot of questions about this proposed project.

As local citizens, experts and MPCA staff testified before the board throughout the day, they were grilled about the short-term and long-term impacts of such a project, as well as possible waste disposal options. Geology, archeology, chemistry and even environmental justice issues were all gone over with a fine-toothed comb. Even big picture questions like, "Should we be encouraging development in a floodplain in the first place?" were brought up.

It became clear as the proceedings wore on that the members of this volunteer board had done their homework and were well-acquainted with every mind-numbing report, chart or test result that had been filed as part of the project proposal. (By the way, along with MPCA commissioner John Linc Stine, the board membership consisted of two farmers, a physician and others who represented various aspects of Minnesota society).

One role served by the board was to take all that scientific jargon and translate it in a way that the general public could understand. During one part of the hearing where

terms like "sand substrate" and "hydrology" were being thrown around, Jim Riddle asked an MPCA expert how long it would take sewage effluent from the proposed project's drainage field to reach the water table 36 feet below ground. The answer: about 6.5 days.

"That's pretty fast," quipped Riddle.

"Yes it is," answered the MPCA hydrologist, adding that he felt confident the sand and bacteria in the soil would clean up the effluent before it contaminated the water table.

But the board also served the role of allowing citizens potentially impacted by a proposed project to have their say. At another point during the hearing, a resident of St. Croix Beach told the board that the proposed project basically was shipping the sewage of a more affluent Afton community to the borders of his town, which is populated by more low-income residents. Such environmental justice issues are just as important to consider as whether a project has a big enough drainage field to deal with all its waste.

At the end of the day, the Citizens' Board voted 6-1 not to order an EIS for the sewage project, in effect giving it the go-ahead. Before letting them off the hook, board members did insist that MPCA staff make more of an effort to reach out to the American Indian community in Minnesota to discuss possible impacts to Rattlesnake Effigy. They also pushed them to refer to new groundwater mapping of the area that's being developed by the Minnesota Geological Survey.

The decision not to pursue an EIS was obviously a disappointment for the citizens who have expressed misgivings about this project. But, for better or worse, their concerns were given a public hearing. No

matter what the final decision handed down, a society always benefits from an open, public discussion about the future impact of a major project.

"Your involvement obviously improves the process, no matter how the vote goes," the Izaak Walton League's Don Arnosti told the board after the vote.

Before the final adjournment of the almost five-decade board, several LSP members were given an opportunity to testify about what the body meant to them and how important it is to keep communication channels open between agencies like the MPCA and average citizens.

Citizen Input (Partially) Revived

Such a two-way conversation was partially reopened on Aug. 4 when Gov. Dayton announced that he would use his Executive Authority to create a Governor's Citizens Committee to "fill in" for the Citizens' Board (see page 9). This new body will not have the authority to approve or reject permits, but it will provide recommendations to the MPCA commissioner when the agency is considering major developments.

That's an important first step toward possibly restoring in full the role the Citizens' Board served for almost five decades. Doing so will take constant public pressure. As the crowd of farmers and other concerned citizens that stuck around for the board's last meeting attested to, they may have eliminated the Citizens' Board, but they didn't eliminate the citizens.

"...we are not going away," dairy farmer and LSP member James Kanne told the *Star Tribune* newspaper that day. □

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.

10% ...

...That's the percentage of the 911 million acres of farmland in the contiguous U.S. that will change ownership during the next five years, according to the USDA's latest rental survey. That means 91.5 million acres could technically become available for beginning farmers. However, this same survey found that only 21 millions acres will be sold to a non-relative during the next five years. Landowners are increasingly locking up farmland through the use of trusts to make sure it stays in the family or remains a good "future investment," according to the survey.

U.S. farmers are renting 353.8 million acres of farmland, and 80 percent of that land is owned by non-farming landlords. In 2014, all farmland landlords combined received \$31.2 billion in rental income while incurring \$9.2 billion in expenses. Given that the vast majority of those landlords are non-farming, there's a real risk of much of that rental income leaving the immediate communities the farmland resides in, since a lot of those landowners are likely to live elsewhere.

Bottom line: Lack of access to farmland is already one of the biggest barriers beginning farmers face, and the situation is slated to get even bleaker in the near future. And based on the amount of money changing hands in the rental market, anyone in a rural community who cares about economically viable Main Streets should be concerned.

The results of the "2014 Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL)" survey are at www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/TOTAL. See pages 16-20 for information on how the Land Stewardship Project is helping transition farmland on to the next generation.

Myth Buster Box

An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

→ Myth: Tallgrass Prairies & Livestock Don't Mix

→ Fact:

Native tallgrass prairies are some of the most threatened ecosystems in North America.

In fact, thanks to plowing, overgrazing and development, over the past 100 years or so only one-tenth of 1 percent of the original tallgrass prairie remains. In Iowa and Minnesota alone, tallgrass prairies have declined by 99.9 and 99.6 percent, respectively. With the prairies have gone many of the ecological services they provide. For example, grassland bird species have shown steeper, more consistent, and geographically more widespread declines than any other group of North American birds, and one of the factors in global climate change is that all that carbon once stored under grasslands is now in the atmosphere, wreaking havoc.

So it's no wonder conservationists have been extremely protective about what remains of the once great "sea of grass." Over the past several decades, one key strategy for saving prairie remnants was to exclude cattle and other livestock. The reasoning was simple: cattle eat and stomp the grasses and forbs that make for a healthy prairie, so why inflict such damage on an already beleaguered resource?

But it's become evident in recent years that removing all disturbance from a natural grassland can actually have a detrimental effect. In pre-European settlement times, bison and wildfires controlled woody invasives and recharged the nutrient cycle, providing a key tool for maintaining the long-term viability of prairie ecosystems. When such disturbance is lacking, invasive species such as sumac, cedar, buckthorn and Siberian elm can quickly take over. That patch of ground may not be growing corn or soybeans, but for all intents and purposes, it's no longer a healthy perennial grassland.

That's why increasingly conservationists are welcoming cattle and other livestock onto native prairies as a way to keep invasives under control and to recharge the nutrient cycle. What they've found is that allowing livestock to rotationally graze for short periods (a few weeks) interspersed

with long rest periods (a year or more) can greatly increase the ecological health of a grassland. Studies in numerous states show that so-called "conservation grazing" can as much as double plant diversity in an area. Habitat experts in western Minnesota have observed how grazing has increased native plant communities by knocking back not only woody species like sumac, but cool season grasses like Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome. Such invasives tend to blanket the land with a homogeneous cover, which limits the habitat diversity wildlife require.

A study published in the July 15 edition of *Nature Communications* was based on data collected from 64 grassland sites in 13 countries. What scientists found was that when grasslands are exposed to commercial fertilizers, native grassland species decline, while invasives, which are well-adapted to utilizing excessive applications of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus, increase. What the multi-country study also showed was that in certain cases, exposing a grassland to grazing increased the presence of native species. It turns out grazing helps cut back on the kinds of plants with big leaves that tend to shade out native grasses and forbs, which can be quite light-hungry (take a look at how much shade sumac produces in a grassland sometime).

Such research is bolstering the argument to allow livestock to graze in a controlled manner on wildlife refuges and other kinds of nature preserves as a way to increase native plant health. As previous issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* have described, conservation grazing in places like west-central Minnesota is producing healthier habitat while providing livestock producers a chance to rest their home pastures. In Iowa, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture is studying the effects of grazing native plants on farms as well as in places like the Whiterock Conservancy, a land trust that is attempting to balance working agricultural lands with conservation along the Raccoon River in the central part of the state. Preliminary results are encouraging—one thing livestock producers are finding is that hot weather-loving prairie plants help extend the grazing season through those warm months when traditional cool season pasture grasses

slow their growth or go dormant altogether.

What must be kept in mind when considering the grazing of native prairie is that cattle cannot be simply turned out and allowed to graze at will. As has been proven on rangelands out West, overgrazing can be just as big a detriment to a grassland as no grazing at all. Moving livestock through grasslands in a controlled rotation is key—something that's increasingly possible thanks to innovations like lightweight portable fencing and watering systems. Some land managers are even experimenting with a tool called "patch-burn grazing," which uses a combination of fire and cattle to recharge green growth.

"The key is to hit it and rest it," says Greg Hoch, a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources prairie habitat ecologist. "That's how these prairies evolved with the bison."

→ More Information

- The July 15 *Nature Communications* paper on fertilizing and grazing grasslands is at www.nature.com/naturecommunications. It's titled, "Plant species' origin predicts dominance and response to nutrient enrichment and herbivores in global grasslands."

- Iowa State University has developed a publication called, "Grazing Native Plants in Iowa: Processes and Experiences." It's available at www.leopold.iastate.edu/grazing-native-plants, or by calling 515-294-5247.

- The *Land Stewardship Letter's* two-part series on using grazing to improve natural landscapes ran in the No. 1 and No. 2, 2014, editions of the magazine. See www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/landstewardshipletter, or call 612-722-6377 for a copy.

→ More Myth Busters

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



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LSP News

LSP Member-Farmers Recognized by U of M

Each year, local University of Minnesota Extension committees choose Farm Families of the Year for their “demonstrated commitment to enhancing and supporting agriculture.” Several Land Stewardship Project farmer-members were recently recognized in their respective counties as Farm Families of the Year.

• **Anoka County: Bruce Bacon**—Bacon’s Garden Farme has been certified organic since 1977, and production includes culinary herbs and specialty leaf greens. It includes 25 acres of restored prairie plantings. Over the years, Garden Farme has hosted field days and workshops related to permaculture and agroecology. Bacon also offers internships through the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture.

• **McLeod County: Laura Frerichs and Adam Cullip**—Frerichs and Cullip’s Loon Organics farm grows certified organic produce for a 200-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise. Excess produce is given to the local food shelf

through the Harvest for the Hungry program. Frerichs and Cullip are frequent presenters in LSP’s Farm Beginnings course (*see page 21*), and have hosted numerous field days and workshops over the years.

• **Meeker County: Joan and Nick Olson**—The Olsons’ Prairie Drifter Farm markets certified organic produce through a 200-member CSA enterprise, as well as to food co-ops and restaurants. Excess produce is given to the Harvest for the Hungry program as well as Catholic Charities in St. Cloud, Minn. Nick is a former organizer for LSP’s Farm Beginnings Program, and Prairie Drifter hosts numerous field days.

• **Wabasha County: Jack and Marge Warthesen**—The Warthesen farm raises livestock, field crops and produce. The Warthesens have long mentored beginning farmers and utilize numerous innovative conservation practices, such as managed rotational grazing. Among other groups, the Warthesens are involved with LSP’s Plainview Land Access Committee. □

Rick Morris Joins LSP Staff

Rick Morris has joined the Land Stewardship Project’s staff as an assistant in the Membership and Individual Giving Program.

Morris has a bachelor’s degree in theology from Wheaton College and a master’s in divinity from the Princeton Theological Seminary. He has worked as an organizer for Community Action Network and as a development associate for LifeTies, Inc. Morris has also worked on farms in New Jersey and Japan.

At LSP, Morris is based out of the Minneapolis office where he assists with day-to-day processing of memberships and coordinates the Member-to-Member membership drive. He also helped organize this year’s LSP Twin Cities Summer Potluck Cookout and Celebration (*see page 8*). Morris can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or rmorris@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Rick Morris

Frac Sand Mining: A Sign of the Times in SE Minnesota

Signs like this one pictured on the Bob and Marilyn Christie farm near St. Charles have been popping up all across southeastern Minnesota’s Winona County this summer and fall. This county has been heavily targeted by frac sand mining proposals, but residents are fighting this exploitation of their communities for corporate profit, and opposition continues to grow.

Land Stewardship Project members and other residents are working to pass a county ban on any new frac sand mines or facilities.

“We’re doing this for our grandchildren, for future generations, so that hopefully they won’t have to fight these battles,” says Bob Christie.

If you live in Winona County and would like to put up a



yard sign and take part in this campaign, contact LSP organizer Johanna Rupprecht at 507-523-3366 or jrupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org. (Photo by Johanna Rupprecht)

Blitzing the Prairie Biome

Volunteers joined naturalists for a fun, intense 24-hour biological “scavenger hunt” during the 2015 Simon Lake BioBlitz on July 10-11. The event, which was sponsored by the Land Stewardship Project, the Chippewa River Watershed Project and Clean Up the River Environment, was held at a prairie preserve called Sheep Berry Fen in west-central Minnesota’s Pope County. This event was a follow-up to a BioBlitz that was held in the same area in July 2014. A “BioBlitz” is a biological survey in which volunteers work with naturalists to record as many living plant and animal species as possible within a designated area and time. This survey provides a rough snapshot of the species in the area and will serve as a baseline for future monitoring of conservation efforts in the area, including rotational grazing. This BioBlitz was an initiative of the Chippewa 10% Project (*see page 27*). A recent LSP *Ear to the Ground* podcast features a report on the 2015 BioBlitz: www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/753. (Photos by Molly DeVore) □





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LSP News

2015 LSP Twin Cities Cookout

Over 200 people enjoyed locally produced food and music during the 2015 edition of the Land Stewardship Project's Twin Cities Potluck Cookout on July 30.

This year's event, which was held in the yard next to LSP's Minneapolis office, featured music by the Brass Messengers, brats and burgers from LSP member-farms Hidden Stream Farm and Farm on Wheels, a vegetarian dish from Tempeh Tantrum and local beer and cider from Sociable Cider Werks, Insight Brewing, Summit Brewing and Grand Rounds Brewpub. There was also a homemade pie raffle, a silent auction and games for kids.

Thanks to everyone who volunteered their time, silent auction items, food and beverages to make this a great event. (LSP Photos) ☐



More Public Input on Environmental Permits Possible

Dayton Uses Executive Authority to Partially Revive the MPCA Citizens' Board

By Bobby King

Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton announced on Aug. 4 that he would use his Executive Authority to create a Governor's Citizens Committee to fill in for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Citizens' Board. Earlier this year, despite a huge outpouring of opposition from citizens across the state, the Minnesota Legislature abolished the 48-year-old Citizens' Board.

"As regulators make decisions and enforce our state's environmental protection laws, Minnesota citizens need and deserve a seat at the table," said Gov. Dayton, who made the announcement at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP). MEP is a coalition of over 70 environmental and conservation organizations, including the Land Stewardship Project. "I am proud to sign this Executive Order today and look forward to appointing a group of qualified, committed citizen leaders to carry out this important work," he added.

The Committee will provide recommendations and advise the MPCA commissioner in four main areas, including:

- Reviewing scoping and adequacy

of environmental review documents, including environmental assessment worksheets and environmental impact statements.

- Issuance, reissuance, modification, or revocation of certain permits.
- Adoption or revision of agency rules.
- Requests for a variance from an agency rule.

LSP member and Renville County dairy farmer James Kanne was present for the announcement.

"Governor Dayton knows that rural people want and deserve a say on controversial projects that will impact their community," said Kanne. "We want decisions made in public by a citizens' board that isn't beholden to corporate special interests."

The legislation to abolish the Citizens' Board was among the most controversial of the legislative session. The language was inserted into the Agriculture and Environment Budget Bill by the conference committee chairs in the last hours of the regular legislative session, thus avoiding meaningful public hearings.

After a public outcry, Dayton vetoed the

• • •
"We want decisions made in public by a citizens' board that isn't beholden to corporate special interests."

— LSP farmer-member
James Kanne
• • •

bill and called for removal of this provision and other significant rollbacks on environmental protection during the Legislature's special session. The bill initially stalled in the Senate with a strong majority of DFL Senators voting against it. In the end, Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk was forced to line-up Republican votes to secure passage of the bill during the special session.

The public anger over this issue was apparent just two weeks later on June 23 at the last meeting of the MPCA Citizens' Board (see page 3). Over 100 citizens, farmers, legislators and members of environmental and conservation organizations staged a rally and press conference at the MPCA headquarters in Saint Paul.

LSP member Kathy DeBuhr of Chokio attended the June 23 rally as well as testified several times at the capitol on the importance of the Citizens' Board to rural Minnesotans. Along with her neighbors, she had successfully appealed to the MPCA Citizens' Board to order an in-depth environmental review on a massive 8,850-cow factory farm dairy in Stevens County.

"I traveled to the state capitol many times from Chokio to tell the Legislature why the Citizens' Board is important for rural people and that it gives us the chance to have our concerns heard," said DeBuhr. "Governor Dayton gets it. He's listening to rural people and I am very grateful for his actions."

Governor Dayton also stated during the MEP meeting that he wants to work to restore the statutory authority of the Citizens' Board during a future legislative session, in effect giving back its ability to approve or reject permits on major developments.

Dayton took questions and addressed a wide range of topics at the MEP meeting, including issues related to water quality and agriculture, as well as frac sand mining. The Governor's full remarks are available on the *UpTake*: www.theuptake.org. The video is called, "Dayton Puts Citizens Panel Back In Environmental Policy Decisions." □

LSP organizer Bobby King can be reached at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org. See page 3 for a related commentary.



LSP member Kathy DeBuhr spoke to the media outside the MPCA headquarters before the last meeting of the Citizens' Board. (LSP Photo)

Federally Subsidized Crop Insurance

Survey Respondents Call for Crop Insurance Reform

By Kaitlyn O'Connor

A recent survey conducted by the Land Stewardship Project shows strong support in the countryside for reforming the biggest federal farm program in the nation. During the spring of 2015, LSP's Policy and Organizing Program sent a survey out to about 12,000 farmers to gather broad feedback on crop insurance reform. The survey was part of a larger campaign related to the federally subsidized crop insurance program.

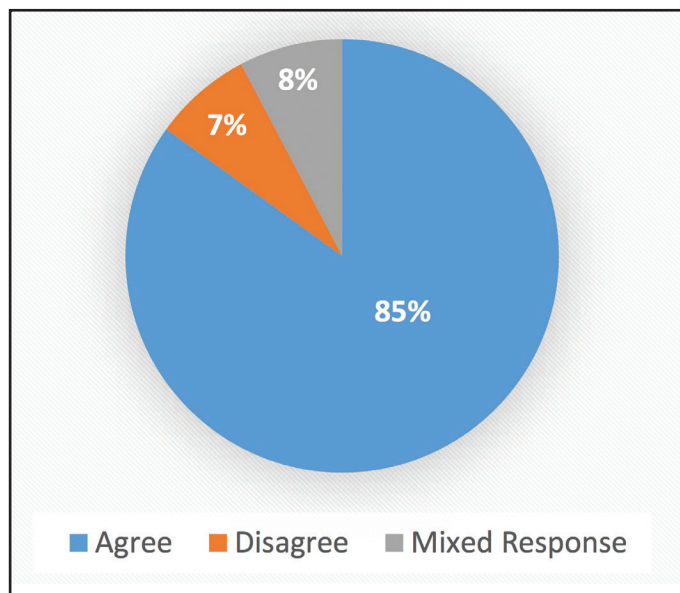
Starting in 2014, LSP undertook an extensive examination of the impacts of crop insurance, which in recent years has grown to be the biggest government-subsidized agriculture program in the United States. Launched in 1938 as a basic safety net for farmers, crop insurance is now a major source of income for some of the largest insurance corporations in the country. It is also a key driver of the concentration of farmland ownership.

LSP staff and members combed through government statistics, pored over county-level data and interviewed farmers throughout Minnesota. The result was a series of white papers published last fall on the problems associated with the current make-up and implementation of crop insurance. That series, which also included reform recommendations, received nationwide media attention.

The white papers reported that:

→ Federally subsidized crop insurance virtually guarantees large profits for corporate insurance companies, whose interests powerfully shape the program.

→ Among farmers, the vast majority of the financial benefits of crop insurance are captured by a



Eighty-five percent of survey respondents agreed that crop insurance should be reformed in three key areas. (Source: "Land Stewardship Project Crop Insurance Reform Survey Report," August 2015)

small minority of producers. The largest crop operations receive the lion's share of crop insurance premium subsidies and insurance payouts.

→ Crop insurance's structure and administration puts beginning farmers at a severe disadvantage by inflating rental rates and land prices and placing them in a position of being viewed by lenders

"We should limit the crop insurance benefits that go to the largest operations. Acreage limit? Payment limit? I think crop insurance is largely responsible for the huge increases in land prices, rent values and mega-farms, which makes it difficult for modest-sized farms."

— a written response to LSP's crop insurance survey

"Farmers should know how much insurance corporations are profiting."

— a written response to LSP's crop insurance survey

as "high risk" producers.

→ Crop insurance is a major vehicle for using public funds to concentrate agricultural wealth in this country. This consolidation increases economic and environmental risk faced by many agricultural communities by decreasing access to land, degrading rural housing and farm infrastructure, and causing long-term damage to our soil, water and wildlife.

In short, a program that started out simply as a way for farmers to ride out the droughts, floods, pest infestations and other hardships nature tosses their way has quietly been transformed into one of the biggest drivers of how crop farming is carried out in this country. The result is bad news for our communities, the land, our economy and our country.

The Survey

We saw the 2015 survey as a way to follow-up the white papers with input from farmers who are interested in conservation. Using a list of farmers enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program, we sent surveys to 35 states in three regions: 1) Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota and South Dakota; 2) Indiana and Illinois; and 3) Arkansas, Alabama and Georgia. The vast majority of respondents came from Minnesota and Wisconsin.

In total, LSP received 760 surveys back. Of those, 671, or 85 percent, of CSP farmers agreed with a survey question about the need for reform in three key areas:

- 1) Putting in place corporate accountability and transparency.
- 2) Ensuring the program does not consolidate agricultural land and wealth into the largest operations.
- 3) Eliminating barriers beginning farmers face.

Crop Insurance, see page 11...

A small portion, 8 percent, had mixed responses — agreeing with some points but not others. And an even smaller portion, 7 percent, disagreed with LSP's analysis that the insurance program is in need of reform.

It is important to note that this is not a scientific survey, given the small sample taken and lack of randomization. However, it provides a valuable indication of just how strongly farmers feel about the need to return this increasingly influential program to its roots—as a safety net, not a way to farm environmentally sensitive acres while consolidating landholdings and pushing beginning farmers out of the picture.

LSP is interested in your thoughts on crop insurance reform. We will be discuss-

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“The current system is manifestly unfair and serves to ensure that the mega-farms will only increase in size and influence at the expense of the rest. We need to do all we can to increase the number of farmers on our land. This is yet another example of industry ‘capture’ of a program originally designed with good intent.”

— a written response to
LSP's crop
insurance survey

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ing the issue during upcoming federal policy organizing meetings this winter in various locations around Minnesota. Invitations to participate will be sent out in the upcoming months.

I would also welcome one-to-one conversations with anyone concerned about this issue. For more information on LSP's crop insurance reform work, including our “How a Safety Net Became a Farm Policy Disaster” white papers, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/cropinsurance, or contact me at 612-722-6377, koconnor@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Kaitlyn O'Connor is an LSP Policy Program organizer.

Affordable Healthcare for All

Healthy Farmers-Healthy Land

A Sustainable Agriculture Requires Sustainable Practitioners

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Land Stewardship Project believes that good healthcare is a human right: everyone should be in and no one left out. Unfortunately, unaffordable healthcare in this country is impeding the development of having more farmers on the land raising crops and livestock sustainably as they seek off-farm jobs just to secure insurance. However, programs such as Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare, which are available through MNsure, do offer opportunities for Minnesota farmers like Bryan Simon who are seeking to balance care of the land, profitability and a good quality of life. As this profile below shows, supporting and strengthening such initiatives isn't just good for individual farmers—it's good for the land and our communities.

For more information on LSP's **Affordable Healthcare for All** work, see www.landstewardshipproject.org, or contact LSP organizer Paul Sobocinski at 507-342-2323 or sobopaul@redred.com.

By Stephanie Porter

Bryan Simon has a vision: a food and farming system that restores native landscapes while sustainably producing food. And he's making it a reality.

Simon is pursuing that vision with the help of Ryan Heinen, his best friend since seventh grade. They both grew up on their respective grandparents' farms in Minnesota. The love of the land they developed growing up on farms and going on wilderness exploration trips launched them into careers in conservation. After a few years of working around the country for the Nature Conservancy, U.S. Park Service and other agencies, the two young farmers decided to return to their roots. In 2013, they started renting 195 acres of land near the western Minnesota

community of Barrett.

Although conservation is their background, they are not seeking to create a landscape that appears pristine and untouched. Farming is their passion — and they believe it can be done in a way that provides healthy food for local communities without compromising soil fertility, water quality, air quality, wildlife habitat or rural vitality.

That's why Bryan and Ryan are farming in a much different way than they knew growing up. Lakeside Prairie Farm (www.lakesideprairiefarm.com) is using rotational grazing and prescribed burns to transform former cropland into natural landscapes that are based on healthy ecosystems. With over 70 species of native plant species in the pastures and landscapes varying from prairie to wetlands to woodland savannah, the farm provides habitat for a wealth of wildlife while filtering water and restoring fertility to

the soil.

Those ecosystems are at the same time feeding grass-fed beef and pastured pigs, which graze and forage throughout the prairie and woodlands. The Heinen and Simon families sell their pork and beef, along with chemical-free vegetables and grains, to local community members and businesses directly off the farm and through Local Harvest Market, an online marketplace based in Alexandria, Minn.

The first three seasons have been heavily labor-intensive. From removing buckthorn and other invasive species to managing the vegetable gardens, building fences and rotating the animals, Bryan easily puts in 80 hours of work every week, and Ryan works 40 hours on the farm in addition to his full time job with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. Ryan's wife Barbara and Bryan's wife Jessie also work on the farm in addition to teaching at local public schools.

But the two families are committed to achieving their vision — and, now in their third season, they're already seeing some changes. “I've identified more than 75 species of birds out here already,” says Bryan. “The diversity is really returning — the prairie flowers are coming in, and all of that supports the pollinators.”

He adds that amphibians and waterfowl are telltale signs that water quality is improving, and as the perennial crops get more established, they will have enough high quality forage to last the cattle herd all year-round.

Healthy Farmers, see page 12...

...Healthy Farmers, from page 11

Narrow Margins

However, as with any new farming venture, the first few years mean a lot of work with little return. For now, the Simons are raising their two kids on Jessie's income as a teacher. All of the money the farm earns goes back into the operation, with little left over for basic needs like healthcare. Although Jessie's health insurance is covered by the school district, a family plan would cost them an additional \$1,000 per month — an expense that is "just not doable" unless Bryan gets another job, he says. For many years, Bryan simply went without insurance, but with their 2-year-old son Charlie and 7-month-old daughter Annella, the risks were too great.

Last year, Bryan enrolled in MNsure, the state's health insurance exchange. Not sure what to expect, he found that he and his kids were eligible for Medical Assistance (MA), which provides low-cost healthcare to families making less than 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Line — about \$33,000 for a family of four. With only a modest co-pay for doctors' visits, the Simons' health coverage is affordable.

"Without MA I don't know if I'd be able to farm full time, not the way I'm doing it now," Bryan says.

If he hadn't found affordable coverage through the exchange, Bryan would have had to get a part-time job in town to cover the cost of insurance, which would have threatened the farm's viability.

"As it is, there's too much to do here and not enough labor," he says.

Being on MA is by no means part of



Jessie and Bryan Simon, shown here with their son Charlie and daughter Annella, along with farming partners Barbara and Ryan Heinen. (Contributed Photo)

Bryan's long-term business plan. As their farm grows and they expand their business, the two families hope to begin earning more income. But during the early stages of starting a business — a period characterized by high risk and instability — MA provides an important safety net and makes innovation more economically viable. Changing farm policy and purchasing local food are two ways to support beginning farmers — ensuring that the people doing the farming have access to affordable healthcare is just one more way.

Having access to health insurance allows Bryan to ultimately be a better citizen, he says — instead of getting a job he hates just to get insurance, he can follow his values and work hard to create a sustainable farming operation. That is good news for more than the Simon family. The community as a whole will benefit from the cleaner water, healthier soil, increased biodiversity and healthy food that Bryan's farming system produces. "To farm without compromising water, air, land, biodiversity and rural communities — to do it takes a lot more effort," says Bryan. "But this is work I love and am committed to doing." □

LSP Policy Program organizer
Stephanie Porter can be reached
at 612-722-6377 or stephaniep@landstewardshipproject.org.

Providing Citizens a Proactive Voice in MN Healthcare

By Paul Sobocinski

With the close of the 2015 state legislative session, the Minnesota House and Senate created the Minnesota Health Care Financing Task Force. This task force will advise the Legislature and the Governor on strategies to increase access and improve the quality of healthcare for Minnesotans.

The task force is chaired by Lucinda Jeson, Minnesota Commissioner of Health and Human services. Elected as co-chair of the task force at its first meeting in August was Sahra Noor, who is with People's Center Health Services.

Governor Mark Dayton appointed 11 members to the task force, with another 14 appointments filled by the Senate Majority Leader and Minority Leader, as well as the

Speaker of the House and Minority Leader of the House. Also serving on the task force is the Commissioner of Health, Ed Elhinger; Commissioner of Commerce, Mike Rothman; and the CEO of MNsure, Allison O'Toole.

Sahra Noor's election as co-chair is a good start for making sure the task force represents the interests of citizens. Other key members to this task force that will help guarantee citizens have a proactive voice for improving Minnesota's healthcare delivery system include Liz Doyle of TakeAction Minnesota, Monica Hurtado of Voices for Racial Justice, Rosemary Roach of the Minnesota Nurses Association, and Phil Cryan with SEIU Healthcare Minnesota. Insurance company representatives on the task force are from Medica and Blue Cross Blue Shield, as well as the network provider Allina Health. For a complete list

of all members of the task force go to www.mn.gov/dhs/hcftf. This website also has detailed information about the task force's purpose and goals.

The future of government supported healthcare — Medicaid, MinnesotaCare and MNsure — will be a key point of discussion for the task force. Legislators from both the Republican and DFL parties are represented on the task force. Last session, Republican leaders favored dropping MNsure in favor of a federal exchange and also wanted to fundamentally change MinnesotaCare (they even considered legislation to eliminate it). While the Land Stewardship Project, ISA-IAH, TakeAction and others were successful in stopping the Legislature from eliminating MinnesotaCare, the deal that was struck between the House and Senate will result in

Task Force, see page 13...

huge increases in costs for MinnesotaCare enrollees. On a more positive note, the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* newspaper reported in late July that some key legislators are pushing for federal waivers to address coverage “cliffs”—situations where people with small income gains move from comprehensive coverage in MinnesotaCare to private plans with large deductibles. When this happens, people can find themselves with unafford-

able medical bills even though they have health insurance coverage. According to Families USA, a special report issued in May showed that one out of four people is likely to skip care when having to deal with high deductibles.

As the Minnesota Health Care Financing Task Force starts to dig into the work of preparing its report to the Legislature and the Governor by Jan. 16, we hope it will take this as an opportunity to move Minnesota forward toward a healthcare system that includes all. Simply labeling Minnesotans

“consumers” or “customers” is not how we should be talking about healthcare. The value of human life and people’s health should be a priority in any discussion involving medical care. □

LSP Policy Program organizer Paul Sobocinski works on healthcare issues. He can be reached at 507-342-2323 or sobopaul@redred.com. More on LSP’s healthcare work is at the Affordable Healthcare for All page at www.landstewardshipproject.org.

A Fair Food & Farming System for All

Fighting Wage Theft in Farm Country

When Land Stewardship Project member Josefina Perez telephoned LSP organizer Doug Nopar earlier this year, she was upset. Two recent immigrants from Mexico had left their jobs at a dairy farm near the southeastern Minnesota community of Lewiston, and their former employer was refusing to pay them wages they had earned. In fact, the dairy farmer had simply sent one of the workers a text message: “We don’t pay last check if you quit.” It turns out the farmer had implemented a labor policy that if employees quit without giving 14 days notice, they don’t get their last paycheck. Such a policy is a blatant example of “wage theft” and is illegal.

Such a refusal to pay for work done fires up the normally good-natured 60-something grandmother.

“I feel angry,” Perez said on a recent afternoon while sitting in her tidy home on a side street in St. Charles, Minn. “Because I know everybody came like me to gain money to support their family. In the United States, I hear about the fight for human rights. What happened with the immigrants? They are human. They work. That’s the reason I feel angry, I feel frustrated.”

Over the years Perez has turned that anger (and a good dose of mothering instinct) into a passion for helping the growing group of Latino migrants who are settling in southeastern Minnesota communities like St. Charles, Dover, Lewiston and Stockton. She serves as a key connection between immigrant workers who feel they’ve been treated badly by their employers, but aren’t sure where to turn, and members of the larger community who can help navigate the rules and regulations of fair labor practices. In recent years, one of those key connections for Perez has been Nopar, who has long worked

on racial justice and immigrant rights issues.

“Most of the cases of wage theft and unfair labor practices involving immigrant workers that I’ve heard of in the past number of years have come through Josefina,” said Nopar.

In the most recent case, Nopar and Perez were able to work with the dairy farmer



Josefina Perez, speaking about how she feels when she hears about cases of wage theft: “I feel angry. Because I know everybody came like me to gain money to support their family.” (LSP Photo)

in question and get the workers paid. But cases of wage theft aren’t always brought to a happy conclusion. Perez and Nopar say it is a growing problem in the area, particularly when it comes to new immigrants who are confused about what rights they are owed under basic labor law. Many also feel vulnerable because of the instability of their immigrant documentation, a situation employers are all too willing to exploit.

“The owners of the businesses think, ‘It’s okay, I pay \$7 per hour because you don’t

have papers. And then I don’t need you anymore, so don’t come back tomorrow,’” Perez said. “So the workers say, ‘Okay, can you pay me my money?’ And the employer says, ‘No.’”

Perez said unfortunately such cases are increasingly common as migrant workers who struggle with language barriers are put at the mercy of employers who “make their own rules” when it comes to labor law. Perez rattles off numerous examples of wage theft she has heard of right in the St. Charles area: paying below minimum wage, not paying for overtime, charging employees for accidental damage to equipment—even employers punching a time card for the employee, denying the latter even the most basic control over their work day.

Unfortunately wage theft—essentially

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“In the United States, I hear about the fight for human rights. What happened with the immigrants? They are human. They work.”

—Josefina Perez

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any non-payment or under payment of wages owed—is a growing problem across the country as low-wage jobs come to predominate in many areas. Nationally, wage theft costs employees \$30 billion annually, according to a 2014 Economic Policy Institute Report. Although there are no specific figures available for Minnesota, the Iowa Policy Project estimates that in that state the practice results in unpaid wages of over \$11 million per week. And wage theft affects low-wage and immigrant workers disproportionately, say labor advocates.

Wage theft occurs in just about every

Wage Theft, see page 14...

...Wage Theft, from page 13

sector of industry where low pay predominates—meatpacking, food service and construction, to name a few. And as the scale of livestock and crop production operations has increased dramatically, so too has the reliance on low-wage jobs, many of which are filled by new immigrants. As a result, there are increasing reports of farm owners engaging in wage theft, both inadvertently and knowingly.

In 2012, milk producer Daley Farms of Lewiston was ordered by the Minnesota Appeals Court to pay \$86,385 in overtime wages it owed employees. At about the same time, crop producer Hader Farms of Zumbrota, Minn., was also found guilty of wage theft. In September, it was revealed that federal authorities were investigating a 500-acre vegetable farm near Foley, Minn., for allegedly bringing in workers with false papers from the Dominican Republic, forcing them to pay illegal fees and threatening to send them home if they complained about their pay.

“Wage theft can encompass many laws enforced by both state and federal law,” said James Honerman, communications director for the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry. “For example, many agricultural entities are exempt from the federal requirement to pay overtime after 40 hours in a week. However, under state law farms are required to pay hourly employees overtime for all hours worked over 48 in a week.”

In February, a bill was introduced at the Minnesota Legislature that would, among other things, increase penalties for wage theft from double to triple the amount owed the employee and would impose criminal penalties on employers who willfully or repeatedly violate the law. The bill did not advance, but it helped raise awareness about the problem.

Good for the Community

The way Perez sees it, treating workers fairly and with respect helps improve the community for everyone, no matter where they are originally from or how long they’ve lived in the area. Born in Guadalarjara, Mexico’s second biggest city, Perez emigrated to the U.S. when she was 33. In 1990, she and

her husband Federico and their four children found their way to St. Charles for the same reason many people move to a community: in search of economic opportunity. Perez herself worked at North Star Foods, a St. Charles meat processor, until 1998, when she began experiencing health problems that were eventually diagnosed as fibromyalgia.

“I did every job they had at North Star, so I know everything,” she said with a laugh. “I liked that job.”

She also likes living in a rural community, despite the fact that she’s a self-described “city girl” from Mexico. Perez said longtime residents helped out the many Latinos

who were thrown out of work in 2009 when North Star suffered a devastating fire and was never rebuilt (more than 200 people lost their jobs as a result, many of them Mexican immigrants).

“The people are very nice because they support all the families,” she said. However, smooth relationships within the community of around 3,700 people aren’t always the norm as the Mexican immigrant population has grown from just a handful of people to over 300 in the past 25 years. Perez recounts examples of local police following around family members and friends “for no reason.” She’s not shy about going to City Hall and filing complaints.

“They don’t mess with Josefina,” Nopar said with a laugh.

Despite some friction, there’s no doubt this is where Perez calls home. She’s pleased that her four adult children live in the community (two live on the same block as she and her husband do).

“You always worry,” she said of her children. And one thing she worries about is making sure they and others in the community are paid fairly and have access to the basics like affordable healthcare.

Communication is Key

On a recent afternoon, she and Nopar talked about why it is important for an organization like LSP to be involved with such issues as fighting wage theft in the immigrant community. Perez said working with LSP is important because the group has connections with farming and rural communities. She thinks one way to deal with the problem of wage theft would be to hold meetings involving workers and farmers. At

LSP Trip to Mexico in March

The Land Stewardship Project is working with Witness for Peace to organize a trip from Minnesota to Mexico in March as part of ongoing efforts to educate members about racial justice and human rights, particularly as they relate to the food and agriculture system.

The proposed trip would fly into Mexico City, and then participants would travel to the states of Morelos and Oaxaca to engage in discussion with farmers and rural residents. Participants will learn about the impacts of U.S. policy on local economies and how it relates to racial justice, immigrant rights and a fair and just food system all the way north to Minnesota.

“In order for LSP members to effectively engage in rural community discussion and public policy debate related to these issues, there is an ongoing need for us to learn from and build bridges with the immigrant community both here in the U.S. and across the border,” says LSP organizer Doug Nopar.

For more information on LSP’s proposed “Roots of Agriculture and Immigration—the Minnesota-Mexico Connections” trip, contact Nopar at 507-523-3366 or dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org.

such meetings, both sides could be informed about what the rules are, and resources could be provided for getting more information.

“And get it on paper,” she said, making it clear that many times verbal agreements are misunderstood or simply forgotten.

Nopar said it has become clear that there can truly never be a sustainable food and farming system unless workers at all levels are treated fairly. And besides, he said, Perez is right when she says such fairness makes for a better community for everyone, no matter what their background.

“We’re working for care of the land and good, healthy food coming from that land, and this is part of that,” he said. □

Examples of Wage Theft

- Failure to provide a final paycheck after employee’s resignation or dismissal.
- Failure to pay for all hours worked.
- Docking of worker wages for damage to farm equipment or buildings.
- Failure to inform injured workers of their right to workers’ compensation.
- Personnel policies that are not in compliance with the law.

Opportunities/Resources

LSP Township Manual

Protecting Your Township from Unwanted Development, produced by the Land Stewardship Project's Policy and Organizing Program, provides guidance on using the Minnesota Interim Ordinance and other tools in the Municipal Planning law.

It's online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/libraryresources/publications. Free paper copies are available by calling 612-722-6377, or e-mailing bking@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Riparian Grazing

The Land Stewardship Project has developed a fact sheet on riparian grazing and a "Trout-fishing with Livestock" summary of how a farm in southeastern Minnesota's Root River watershed is showing that managed grazing can improve fish habitat while providing the livestock producer economic benefits. The resources are available at www.landstewardshipproject.org on the **Root River: Promise of Pasture** page. Paper copies are available from Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. □

LSP in the News

The Land Stewardship Project and its members have been in the news lately. Here's a selection of stories and broadcasts that have run:

→ On June 12, LSP executive director George Boody appeared on *Minnesota Public Radio's* Friday Roundtable, where the discussion centered on avian flu and agricultural trade issues, among other

things: <http://bit.ly/1FdIZ7w>.

→ On June 24, *Star Tribune* columnist Jon Tevlin reported on LSP members' reactions to the elimination of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Citizens' Board: <http://strib.mn/1OastOj>.

→ On July 4, the *Star Tribune* ran "The Minnesota prairie: To blitz it is to know it," a commentary on the Simon Lake BioBlitz (see page 7), which was co-sponsored by LSP: <http://strib.mn/1CkNfqs>.

→ The July 18 edition of the *West Central Tribune* featured an article about the Simon Lake BioBlitz (see page 7): www.wctrib.com/life/3800011-outdoors-simon-lake-bio-blitz.

→ On Aug. 6, *Agri News* featured an article about LSP's Cover Crop Network in southeastern Minnesota: <http://bit.ly/1FI17a7>.

→ The September-October issue of the *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer* described the work of the Chippewa 10% Project to balance clean water and farm profitability: <http://bit.ly/1LHToxm>.

→ In a Sept. 5 *Rochester Post Bulletin* article on the frac sand industry, LSP organizer Johanna Rupprecht talked about the need to be proactive on controlling mining and processing efforts in southeastern Minnesota: <http://bit.ly/1PHJRro>.

Check www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/mediarelations/lspinthenews for more media coverage of LSP's work. □

An Earful About Food & Community

The Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast (www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast) frequently features conversations with farmers and others who are working to create a food system that is not only sustainable but good for our communities and the people who live in them. Here is a selection of podcasts related to community based food systems:

• **Episode 159** — LSP and Hope Community work to bring racial equity to the Minneapolis Park System's urban ag initiative.

• **Episode 150** — A community food co-op in a farm town rises from the rubble and begins its next chapter.

• **Episode 133** — How "Trially Supported Agriculture" could help a Native American community attain food sovereignty.

• **Episode 130** — An LSP member-farm helps spawn a CSA movement in China.

• **Episode 127** — Farmer Tony Schultz talks about how Community Supported Agriculture can revitalize our food system and rural communities.

• **Episode 119** — A community garden in a low-income neighborhood helps Denise Crews manage her Type 2 diabetes.

• **Episode 111** — A small town banker talks about the role sustainable farms can play in a community's economy.

• **Episode 108** — A closed diner serves as the epicenter of a rural community's efforts to make local food an economic driver.

• **Episode 79** — A small rural school experiments with buying local, sustainable food.

• **Episode 77** — Ken Meter maps a healthier food system.

• **Episode 76** — A farmer describes his farm-to-school experience (part 2 of 2).

• **Episode 75** — A farm-to-school checklist (part 1 of 2).

• **Episode 69** — A rural healthcare facility works to source its food locally.

• **Episode 55** — Serving locally-produced food in a rural cafe. □

Get Your LSP Cap Today

Show your support for the Land Stewardship Project with an official LSP cap. LSP's baseball-style cap is union made in the U.S. of high quality 100-percent cotton. It comes in black with LSP's green and white embroidered logo featured on the front. A fabric strap and brass clip on the back make this a one-size-fits-all cap. The price is \$15.

Caps are available in LSP's offices in Minneapolis (612-722-6377), Lewiston (507-523-3366) or Montevideo (320-269-2105). They can be ordered online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/store.



Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

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

Farmland Available

◆ Susan VanGorden has for sale a 40-acre certified organic farm in *east-central Minnesota*. There are 11 tillable acres enclosed by an eight-foot high deer fence, as well as a drilled well, small creek and woods/lowland. There is a commercial kitchen with an 8 x 15 walk-in freezer, a packing shed with a walk-in cooler, and a barn with bunkhouse and office. There are also three 3,000-square-foot hoop houses, an 860-square-foot heated greenhouse, other outbuildings and a house. The asking price is \$350,000. Contact: Susan VanGorden, 612-309-5537, vangorden2@gmail.com.

◆ Greg Price has for sale 360 acres of certified organic farmland in *northwestern Minnesota*. Approximately 220 acres is under irrigation and currently rented—the 2015 crop was kidney beans. It includes 20+ acres of fenced pasture. The property is on a dead end road and bordered by Two Inlets State Forest; the home overlooks 60 acres of wetlands. There are two insulated shops, a 40 x 50 machine shed, a chicken coop and a 2010 three-bedroom home. Price is willing to sell all or part, with or without home. Contact: Greg Price, 48plyhemi@gmail.com.

◆ An 8-acre farm is for sale in *central Minnesota, near Staples*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it includes established gardens, pasture, a partially open pole barn with insulated rooms/office area, outbuildings such as a chicken coop and hoop house, and a house. There is also an apple orchard, as well as perennial plantings of raspberry, grape, rhubarb, asparagus and more. There is also a retreat house/guest house. The asking price is \$175,000. Contact: Kent Scheer, kentscheer@outlook.com.

◆ Don Roberts and Joni Cash have for sale a 40-acre farm in *western Wisconsin's Dunn County (25 miles north of Menomonie)*. They have been using the farm to grow vegetables (primarily garlic) and the land has not been sprayed. It includes 20 acres of woods, the original barn with workshop, a 25 x 50 greenhouse, a 12 x 60 hoop house and a walk-in cooler. There is a house and an established farm community in the neighborhood. Contact: Don Roberts or Joni Cash, Don-ottercreek@chibardun.com.

net, 715-658-1074.

◆ The Wedge Food Co-op has for sale 126 certified organic acres of tillable farmland near *Northfield, Minn., south of the Twin Cities*. The farm includes an 80,000 square-foot greenhouse, a 52 x 100 new four-season pack shed, a 40 x 60 potting shed and a 48 x 100 new heated shop. There are two wells, two septic systems and a house. The asking price is \$1.5 million. Contact: Randy Kubes, 952-445-9110.

◆ Amy Field has for sale 30 acres of farmland in *River Falls, Wis., east of the Twin Cities*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it includes fenced pasture, several outbuildings and a recently remodeled house. The asking price is \$335,000. Contact: Amy Field, 715-307-7317, or Kathryn, 715-307-7346.

◆ Barry Drazkowski has for sale 30 acres of farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin's Buffalo County (near Fountain City)*. The land includes a partially collapsed pole building; there is no house. The land would be available in January. The asking price is \$3,500 per acre. Contact: Barry Drazkowski, 608-687-9532, bdrazkow@gmail.com.

◆ Tera Wells has for sale 20 acres of farmland in *western Wisconsin's Dunn County*. The land includes pasture and it has not been sprayed for 20 years. There is an orchard with five apple trees, three pear trees and a chestnut crab. There is a barn, plus three other small buildings and a house. The asking price is \$85,000. Contact: Tera Wells, 612-990-9785, tera0113@gmail.com.

◆ David has for sale 40 acres of farmland in *northeastern Wisconsin near Sturgeon Bay*. The land has not been sprayed for several years and it includes pasture, 3/4 acre of boundary woodland, a 2,200-square-foot hoop pvc greenhouse and a house. The asking price is \$200,000. Contact: David, jones.hobbie@yahoo.com, 920-365-6919.

Seeking Farmland

◆ Alexander Wurzer is seeking to buy 200+ acres of farmland in *Minnesota*. Land with pasture and a dairy barn is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Alexander Wurzer, 320-224-8956.

◆ Dan Schaaf is seeking to buy 20 acres of farmland in *eastern Minnesota or western*

Wisconsin. Land with forest, a pack shed, a hoop house and a house is preferred. Contact: Dan Schaaf, 608-250-0838, schaaf0925@gmail.com.

◆ Theresa May is seeking to buy 15+ acres of farmland in *Minnesota*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a house and is away from busy highways is preferred. Contact: Theresa May, 612-345-1537.

◆ Karl Faivre is seeking to buy 20+ acres of farmland in *northern Illinois*. Land with pasture, hog barns, cattle barns, cropland and water is preferred. He is willing to do a long-term contract with landowner (cash rent or share lease). Contact: Karl Faivre, Karlfaivre@aol.com, 815-762-7454.

◆ Bonnie is seeking to rent farmland in *Washington County, near Minnesota's Twin Cities*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a house is preferred; a greenhouse would be good, but is not a necessity. She is an experienced horticulturist who grows perennials for pollinators. Bonnie can pay \$1,200 per month. Contact Bonnie, 651-283-1217.

◆ Ralph Reeson is seeking to purchase 8-40 acres of farmland in the *Driftless Region of Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a minimum of 2-acres tillable for a hoop house, a garden and hay is preferred. Contact: Ralph Reeson, 608-393-6109, 608-414-1789, Pskogen@live.com.

◆ Kristina Prawdzik is seeking to buy 3-10 tillable acres of farmland in *Scott County, near Minnesota's Twin Cities*. Land that has not been sprayed recently or is certified organic is preferred. Contact: Kristina Prawdzik, 612-964-8667, kristinaprawdzik@yahoo.com.

◆ Michael Skoff is seeking to rent 80 acres of farmland in *southeastern Minnesota's Winona County (Utica area)*. Land with pasture and a hog barn/lot is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Michael Skoff, 651-247-3572; madmudder48@gmail.com.

◆ Micah Thompson is seeking to buy 5-20 acres of farmland *within 120 miles of*

Clearinghouse, see page 17...

Minnesota's Twin Cities. Land suitable for an orchard with rolling hills is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Micah Thompson, micahdthompson@gmail.com.

◆ Paul Windler is seeking to buy 40-180 acres of tillable farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin*. He would prefer land that has no foreseeable development potential; one building site would be good, but not required. Windler can pay cash. Contact: Paul Windler, pwind@att.net, 414-425-5282.

◆ Bobby Arndt is seeking to rent 1-5 acres of farmland in the *Twin Cities, Minn., area*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has pasture and access to potable water is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Bobby Arndt, bobbyarndt@gmail.com.

◆ Midwestern BioAg is seeking to rent 40-160 tillable acres of farmland *within 70 miles of Madison, Wis.* The biological farming consulting and fertilizer company is seeking a farm that it can conduct soil health fertility trials on. The ideal land would be less than 6 percent slope and have large blocks of the same soil type. Poor quality soil is preferred (less than 150 bushels per acre corn ground, for example). A minimum of a five-year lease is preferred; Midwest BioAg is also open to purchasing land. Contact: Bill Petersen, bill.petersen@midwesternbioag.com.

◆ Amy Fenn and Andy Gricevich are seeking to purchase 80-120 acres of farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin's Crawford or Vernon County*. They recently completed the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course and are now starting a diverse farm centered on multi-species grazing. Fenn and Gricevich would prefer land that

has not been sprayed for several years and that has a mix of pasture and forest with no existing structures. They would like to purchase the initial farm outright with the additional possibility for future expansion through a lease-to-own arrangement on adjoining parcels. Contact: Amy Fenn, greenvioletamy@gmail.com.

Seeking Farmer

◆ Lyndell Knapp is seeking a farmer to join a 22-acre operation in *southwestern Wisconsin's Sauk County*. Lyndell is looking for someone to buy into this produce, herb, certified kitchen and free-range chicken operation. The cost is \$39,000 and the arrangement is 50/50 shares for five years—after that the new farmer can take over complete ownership. Contact: Lyndell Knapp, 608-986-2207.

◆ Ken Raspotnik is seeking a farmer to join his livestock and vegetable operation in *northwestern Wisconsin's Bayfield County*. Raspotnik's farm is 300 acres and raises organic beef cattle on grass. He also raises and trains horses to ride and drive. There is land available for vegetable production and the cattle operation could be expanded. Contact: Ken Raspotnik, Ken@raspotnikfarm.com.

◆ Kevin Fulton is seeking a farmer to join his operation in *central Nebraska's Sherman County (near Litchfield)*. Fulton Farms is a holistically managed organic grazing operation. It primarily raises cattle and sheep along with some organic crops, but Fulton is planning to build additional complementary enterprises. Contact: Kevin Fulton, fultonfarms@hotmail.com.

◆ Zephyr Valley Community Cooperative in *southeastern Minnesota* is seeking an aspiring farmer/farm family interested in using the co-op's land and existing infrastructure to get started in farming. Infrastructure available for renting includes a packing shed, a 30 x

90 hoop house with water and electricity, a barn, a tractor and 1-6 acres of certified organic gardening/growing space. There is the potential for livestock grazing, orchards and pastured poultry, as well as an opportunity to learn about organic dairy farming from a Zephyr member. Contact: Theresa (theresazeman@gmail.com, 507-330-2151) or Greg (gregandjeanne74@gmail.com, 507-450-1530).

◆ Resilient Northern Habitats is seeking to sell a 40-acre parcel of land to an existing farm business with multiple years of experience growing organic crops and/or animals. The land is in *northwestern Wisconsin's Polk County*, and approximately 25 acres is tillable, with the balance in pasture. Corn and alfalfa are currently growing on the land. The owners will help with shared equipment and marketing of wholesale products; potential to eventually sell through the Hungry Turtle Farmers Co-op (there is a thriving local foods movement in the area). A lease-to-own or outright purchase arrangement is available. Contact: Peter Henry, pfhenry1960@hotmail.com, 715-268-6893.

◆ Delta Garden Farm is seeking a farmer/farm family to work its 580-acre operation in *Michigan's Upper Peninsula (50+ miles east of Escanaba in Delta County)*. The farm includes cattle (beef and breeding), eggs, hay/grain, an orchard, a vineyard, a berry plot, vegetables and maple trees for syrup. A base pay is available, with an incentive bonus based on producing positive financial results. Contact: DeltaGardenFarm@gmail.com.

◆ Dennis Blazing is seeking someone to farm his 160-acre farm organically. It is currently conventional and is in *southeastern Minnesota's Olmsted County*. Contact: Dennis Blazing, dblazing@gmail.com.

MDA Funding Available for Farmers

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has grants available through the Agricultural Growth, Research and Innovation Program (AGRI). These grants, as well as scholarships and cost share funds, are available for livestock development, value added business and market development, farm-to-school, research, and renewable energy.

Grants are awarded to farmers, agricultural businesses, schools, researchers and county fairs. Grant eligibility is specific to each program.

Here are the latest grant deadlines:

- **Crop Research Grants:** Nov. 20
- **Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grants:** Dec. 15
- **Livestock Investment Grants:** Dec. 18
- **Minnesota Transition to Organic Cost Share:** Feb. 14
- **Value Added Grants:** March
- **Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification Cost Share:** May 15
- **Beginning Farmer Farm Business Management Scholarships:** June 30

For more information, see www.mda.state.mn.us, or contact David Weinand at david.weinand@state.mn.us, 651-201-6646 or 651-201-6500. □

Kiva Zip Loans

KIVA-Zip is a web-based micro-lending organization that utilizes crowd-funding to finance small businesses and small farmers. Details and application information can be found at <https://zip.kiva.org/about>.

For more information about these micro-loan opportunities, contact the Land Stewardship Project's Amy Bacigalupo at 320-269-2105 or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org. □

An Odd Acre of Opportunity

To the Walch family, a small plot of land was a hard-to-farm nuisance—for the Ballingers, it was the beginning of their farming dream.

When Devon and Ross Ballinger were looking to get their hands dirty raising vegetables on a commercial scale, they didn't need 1,000 acres of land. They didn't even require five acres. What they were seeking was just what Devon was looking at on a recent July morning in southeastern Minnesota: half-an-acre of rich soil within an easy drive of a farmers' market and a restaurant or two.

"We are the ultimate beginning farmers," she says while examining the thriving vegetables growing in the small plot, which is bordered by field corn. "All we needed was a chance to plant things, make a few mistakes, learn from it."

For the past three years, the Ballingers have been learning plenty from this garden, which is tucked away behind a windbreak on a 150-acre crop and livestock farm north of Rochester. Now that they are ready to take the next step and buy their own land, it's become clearer than ever just how invaluable this "starter garden" has been in terms of launching their agricultural careers. "Just this chance to have access to this small piece of land without a lot of capital investment has been crucial," says Devon. "I feel like we're really ready to invest in ourselves and invest in this farm enterprise."

Jerome Walch, who is checking on the garden with Devon on this particular day, is happy to hear that the Ballingers have reached that tipping point in their farming careers. After all, by allowing the young couple a chance to grow a few vegetables on the farm he and his wife Julie own, he feels he has made an investment of his own, not only in the future of food production, but the community itself.

"It hasn't really changed anything in what I'm doing on the rest of the farm, and it's given Devon and Ross just a great opportunity to get their hands in the dirt and try the things they've learned and draw on all



Jerome Walch and Devon Ballinger in the garden she and her husband Ross rent on the 150-acre Walch farm. "All this stuff goes full circle. Somebody gave us a break, and now Devon and Ross are getting a chance," says Jerome. (LSP Photo)

the infrastructure of people around here that are willing to help them out," says Jerome, 62. "I really believe there has to be a way to keep young people on the land."

The transition of farmland to the next generation and providing beginning farmers a step-up can take on many forms that go beyond simply passing land down to a family member. Sometimes a farming opportunity simply reveals itself in an out-of-the-way corner of real estate.

A Passion for Food Production

While living in the Twin Cities a few years ago, the Ballingers met Monica Walch at a local community garden. Even though neither Devon nor Ross came from farming backgrounds, they were passionate about producing food. After college they had worked on farms through the World

Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) program. The couple talked to Monica about their need to have access to a small plot of land so they could give food production on a moderate scale a try and figure out if farming was a viable career path for them. Monica, who owns Dinner on the Farm, which puts on local foods events on area farms, introduced them to her parents, Jerome and Julie.

After enjoying a meal together on the farm, the older and younger couples came to an agreement: the Ballingers could use a corner of a five-acre field that had always been hard to till with larger equipment but was close enough to the farmstead that it could be irrigated with a garden hose. Half-an-acre of land may not produce a profitable corn, soybean or even hay crop, but it would provide plenty of vegetable production so that the Ballingers could supply local markets on a small scale. In addition, it turns out there is an extra trailer home just a few hundred feet from the garden plot. The Ballingers moved into the trailer and began raising vegetables in 2013. They pay rent for the utilities and for incidentals such as fuel for their rototiller; in 2015 for the first time they paid rent on the land itself.

"Plus, we get all the vegetables we want, whenever we want them," Jerome says with a laugh.

The Walch farm produced certified organic milk up until 2012, when the family sold the herd because Jerome's knees and back were starting to give out. They now raise grass-fed beef, corn, small grains and hay, all certified organic.

It turns out a former dairy farm is a pretty good place to set up a vegetable operation. The milk house serves as an efficient facility for washing and packing vegetables, and there is room for a walk-in cooler the Ballingers built. The Walches also made available to the younger couple an all-terrain vehicle for hauling vegetables, as well as an old chicken coop for storing tools.

"I'm not a gardener—I'm a farmer on a larger scale than that," says Jerome. "So I can't help out a lot with actual gardening,

Odd Acre, see page 19...

but I can provide land and a few tools.”

The Walches also provide a less tangible, but critical resource: an understanding of what it takes to start farming from scratch, especially when, as the Ballingers are doing, herbicides and other chemicals are being avoided.

“Sometimes I feel Jerome just let us use this land to plant a lot of weeds,” Devon says with a laugh, pointing at a garden thick with growth, the wanted and unwanted alike.

Jerome reassures her that “every season is a different season. You can’t control every aspect of Mother Nature.”

The Walches also are supportive of a kind of agriculture that sells directly to local consumers, a far cry from the commodity system that dominates the rest of the food and farming landscape.

“I was told 10 years ago this whole local food movement was just a fad, but it isn’t going away,” says Jerome, adding that it will take small-scale operations on local farms to supply this growing market.

Next Steps

The Ballingers currently sell to two local farmers’ markets and one or two restaurants — it’s been a good entry into the business of food production, but is producing far from a fulltime income. Ross has his own videography company and Devon works part-time for Renewing the Countryside, which promotes sustainable rural development.

Their modest foray into farming has convinced the Ballingers that a fulltime farming career is something they want to pursue, and this past year they’ve been taking steps toward that goal. Last winter they took the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings course (see page 21) because they felt the need to “get serious on the business side of it,” says Devon, adding that, “As a result I’ve been looking at cash flow cost effectiveness more intensely than I did the first two years.”

Devon and Ross are both 30 and these days are thinking seriously about finding a permanent home for their budding farm enterprise, especially now that they are expecting a baby this fall. They’ve been searching for a farm, but it’s a challenge to find the right fit. They’d like to have at least 10 to 20 acres, with room for a small orchard and a couple acres of vegetables.

“There’s just not a lot of 20-acre parcels that come up for sale, and if they do, they’re really, really expensive,” says Devon, adding that they are probably going to seek out a USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) beginning farmer loan or an arrangement where

they would get a farm via contract for deed.

Devon says the search for a farm has been helped by a network they’ve developed since moving to the area—something they would lack if they had stayed in the Twin Cities.

“There’s really a good community out here,” she says. “People are keeping their ears open. We have people in our court that want to help us be in this community and

• • •

“We are the ultimate beginning farmers. All we needed was a chance to plant things, make a few mistakes, learn from it.”

— Devon Ballinger

• • •

to achieve our goals, so they’re constantly looking for us. We just keep putting the word out there and assume the right farm will pop up eventually.”

Full Circle

Jerome can empathize. After looking at “about 50 farms,” he and Julie finally found this one in 1980s. They were able to get it through a contract for deed arrangement from the owners, who wanted to see it continue as a family dairy operation, rather than just be bulldozed and plowed for more row crops.

“I don’t think either one of us forgot where we were in 1980 when we were looking for a place,” says Jerome. “All this stuff goes full circle. Somebody gave us a break, and now Devon and Ross are getting a chance.”

Give it a Listen

In episode 169 of LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast (www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/761), Devon Ballinger and Jerome Walch talk about how sharing a small corner of a farm is good for agriculture as well as the community.

But it isn’t just about providing a couple of beginners a break as a kind of “paying it forward” gesture—it’s also about supporting the wider community. While walking around his land, Jerome expresses how upset he is to witness an increasing number of farms in the area being bought up, the house and outbuildings bulldozed, and the fields made part of ever-bigger cropping operations.

“Over the years what we’ve seen here even in southeast Minnesota is we’re losing farm sites that three and four generations of people have put a lot of blood and sweat into building homes, barns and sheds,” he says. “Once they’re gone, they’re gone.”

Bulldozed farmsteads mean less local tax revenue and all that it supports in a community, says Jerome. Even worse, it means less people buying on Main Street and supporting schools, churches and all the other institutions that make a rural area strong.

Jerome concedes that not every farm is going to have an extra house available on the property, or that every farmer is going to want to share land with a beginner. But when there are opportunities to set aside even just a small odd plot, he feels it’s worth the extra work.

“I think about how many corners aren’t being used,” he says. “What’s an acre worth to you?” □

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

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

The *Toolkit* contains resources, links to services and practical calculation tables to help landowners establish a commonsense plan. It also features user-friendly resources on the economic, legal, governmental, agronomic, ecological and even social issues that must be considered in order to ensure a successful farm transition. It is rounded out with profiles of farmers who are in various stages of transitioning their enterprises to the next generation. An online version of the *Toolkit* is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/farmtransitionstoolkit; paper versions can be purchased by calling 800-909-6472.

On the Transition Track

3 Couples Take the First Steps Toward Passing on Their Farms

By Karen Stettler

Last winter the Land Stewardship Project held a two-part Farm Transition Planning Workshop for farm families thinking about that next step in their agricultural careers: passing on the land to a new generation. Topics included goal setting and financial planning, reports from other farm families in transition, legal and tax considerations of farm transitions, communication and intergenerational considerations.

While getting ready for the next series of farm transition planning workshops (*see sidebar*), I got in touch with a few of the participants from last season's workshop to get feedback on how relevant this educational program was for them. I contacted Donna and John Bedtke, dairy farmers who are in the process of transitioning their farm to their son; Kay and Steve Tessum, landowners who are in the process of transitioning their farm to their son and daughter; and Bill and Bonnie McMillin, dairy/beef farmers who are looking to transition their farm to a beginning farmer. I've included some of their thoughts here.

What did you learn from the workshop?

◆ Donna & John Bedtke

Feelings are important and we need to consider our values at the same time, as it is not all about the money. The workshop made us really think about the legacy we want to leave behind.

◆ Kay & Steve Tessum

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

Was it relevant to your situation?

◆ Bonnie & Bill McMillin

We have heard the importance of these same issues at many of the free lawyer-spon-

Farm Transition Workshop this Winter

The Land Stewardship Project is sponsoring another Farm Transition Planning Workshop series this winter for farmers thinking about next steps for their farms. The three all-day sessions—Dec. 5, Jan. 16 and Feb. 13—will cover goal setting and financial planning, and will include a panel discussion involving farm families in transition. There will also be presentations on legal and tax implications, communications styles and intergenerational considerations. This participatory workshop is designed with tools and time for families to take steps toward their farm transition plan. Please note that these three sessions are all considered one workshop, and participants must sign up for the December session in order to attend the ones being held in January and February.

The workshops will be held in Plainview, Minn. For more information, contact Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

sored workshops. This was the first time we ever sat down with other farmers looking at the transition process and tried to brainstorm solutions to whatever roadblocks we saw in our way. In our case we knew it was relevant because most of what was discussed at the workshop we had discussed somewhat between ourselves at home, but often we never really dug deep enough into the details.

◆ Donna & John Bedtke

We are in our late 50s and have five children. Some of the children are interested in farming, some are not, but all will be impacted by our decisions. We must keep in mind that equal and fair are not one and the same as we are making these decisions.

Did you apply what you learned?

◆ Bonnie & Bill McMillin

We did the financial worksheets and afterwards visited with our financial adviser and accountant. This gave us more confidence in the numbers we came up with. The

"The most important thing that the workshop did for us as a farming couple was open up the lines of communication with each other and our children. We now have a common vocabulary that we can use with each other."

information we learned also gave us some ideas on how to write up the contract when the time is right.

◆ Kay & Steve Tessum

The most important thing that the workshop did for us was open up the lines of communication with each other and our children. We now have a common vocabulary that we can use with each other. I liked the atmosphere of the workshop, in that it gave us a safe place to discuss our concerns and fears, and to talk with others who are facing the same situation, or have even completed the process. I liked the "don't make the same mistakes we made" attitude of those who were willing to share their experiences.

◆ Donna & John Bedtke

We keep in mind our difference of communication styles in the way we present ideas and/or changes we want to make. It has also helped in our everyday communication, as well. The younger generation has a different thought process and different goals than we do.

What else should potential participants know?

◆ Bonnie & Bill McMillin

It was a great feeling to connect with others who are dealing with the same issues.

◆ Donna & John Bedtke

We left with a realization that our best will be good enough. Expand your thinking. We get so stuck and caught up in our own thinking, not realizing there actually could be another way of thinking about things. There is no one-size-fits-all answer on how to transfer the farm to the next generation.

◆ Kay & Steve Tessum

We think a continuation of the workshop would be really helpful to all of us. It is so easy to just put it on the back burner and let time pass. □

LSP organizer Karen Stettler can be contacted at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

LSP's Farm Beginnings Accepting 2016-2017 Applications

Course Marks 19th Year of Training & Support

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course is accepting applications for its 2016-2017 class session. The early bird discount application deadline is Aug. 1; the final application deadline is Sept. 1.

Classes will be held somewhere in the Minnesota-western Wisconsin region, but exact locations have not yet been determined. In 2016, LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its 19th year of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is designed for people of all ages just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers looking to make changes in their operations. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial planning, enterprise planning, marketing and innovative production techniques.

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

tours, field days, workshops and access to an extensive farmer network. Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the area. The classes, which meet approximately twice-a-month beginning in the fall, run until March 2017, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 750 people have graduated from the Minnesota-Wisconsin region Farm Beginnings program. Graduates are involved in a wide-range of agricultural enterprises, including grass-based livestock, organic vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture and specialty products.

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

The Farm Beginnings class fee is \$1,500,

which covers one "farm unit"—either one farmer or two farming partners who are on the same farm. A \$200 deposit is required with an application and will be put towards the final fee. Payment plans are available, as well as a limited number of scholarships.

For application materials or more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org or call 507-523-3366. □

Is Farming in Your Future?

Farm Dreams is an entry level, four-hour, exploratory Land Stewardship Project workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether sustainable farming is the next step for them. This is a great workshop to attend if you are considering farming as a career and are not sure where to start. Farm Dreams is a good prerequisite for LSP's Farm Beginnings course (see *article on the left*).

LSP holds Farm Dreams workshops at various locations throughout the Minnesota-Wisconsin region during the year. For more information, see the **Farm Dreams** page at www.farmbeginnings.org. Details are also available by contacting LSP's Dori Eder at 612-578-4497 or dori@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Farm Beginnings graduates Derek and Carrie Redden hosted a July field day near Chokio in western Minnesota on converting conventionally farmed row cropped land to organic production. The Reddens talked about their plans to convert family land to organic dairy production and received input from experts and other local farmers. Discussions centered around everything from ways of building a certified organic milking herd to using cover crops (*pictured*) to convert row cropped fields to grazing. For more on the Reddens, see page 22. (LSP Photo)

Derek & Carrie Redden

A Confederacy of Consultants

It's field day time on this western Minnesota farm, and it's made clear from the outset that there will no main presenter, no expert from on-high telling it like it is or isn't, no PowerPoints produced by consultants. This is a field day where farmers learn from other farmers.

"You are all consultants," Richard Ness tells the roughly 20 people who have gathered in the shade of a Stevens County farmstead on a Saturday afternoon in July.

In attendance are a few grass-based livestock producers, a couple that has been producing certified organic crops for over a decade and a half, a dairy scientist, at least one employee of an area farm, and a few neighbors who have experience with everything from cover cropping to livestock health to milling raw lumber. This is a perfect storm of gray matter, and the timing couldn't be better for the host farmers.

Derek and Carrie Redden are in the midst of transitioning some family land that has mostly been rented out for row crops during the past few decades into a grass-based organic dairy. Since graduating from the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course in 2011 (*see page 21*), the young couple—Derek is 32 and Carrie is 31—has been planning how to make this into a farm that can support them as well as their two children, Dorothy, 3, and Elvin, 2.

That's why Ness, a Farm Beginnings organizer, has set up this field day with a "farmer-to-farmer" structure to it. In a way, it's an extension of the way Farm Beginnings classes are designed, with farmers and other local agricultural professionals leading the sessions.

"At a typical field day you go to a farm where the owner is experienced and we're there to learn from them about how they do everything," says Ness.

Such field days have their merits, but at times they can stifle the generation of ideas from local farmers and others, some of whom may not have decades of farming under their belts, but have some good ideas

to share nevertheless. Farm Beginnings field days often consist of inviting a couple of veteran farmers, but they don't dominate the discussion.

"It isn't just those experienced farmers with the answers—everybody else that shows up, they've got ideas, they've seen things," says Ness. "We're all just kind of brainstorming and thinking, 'Well what are the options out here?'"



Derek and Carrie Redden are transitioning family land into an organic dairy operation. "Our goal for the farm is to support a family," says Carrie. (LSP Photo)

A Key Time

The Reddens, who are enrolled in LSP's Journeyman Course (*see sidebar on page 23*), have a lot on their plate now and during the next few years. Derek drives some 1,500 miles a week working as a regional field manager for a hog company. Carrie stays at home with their children. They moved onto this 320-acre farm three years ago after Derek's grandmother moved off. The farm has been in the Luikens family (Derek's maternal grandparents) since 1904, and since 1980 it had basically been rented out either

Give it a Listen

In episode 170 (www.landstewardshipproject.org/posts/765) of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, Richard Ness, along with Carrie and Derek Redden, discuss the role farmer-to-farmer learning plays during field days and workshops.

Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming



for corn/soybeans or to the federal government through the Conservation Reserve Program. They have already put half the crop ground into grass and are raising chickens, turkeys and beef cattle on pasture for direct sales to consumers.

When the young couple first told family members that they were interested in making a living on the farm, the response wasn't exactly positive. "They didn't envision a strong likelihood of success for us as beginning farmers, and encouraged us to go down a different path," says Carrie.

But eventually the Reddens were able to bring family around by talking about doing a different kind of agriculture than what dominates areas like this part of Minnesota—large cropping operations and massive CAFOs (one of the biggest dairies in the Midwest is a few miles from the Reddens' farm).

"The lack of support from family members seeing us go into agriculture came from what most of the public sees as farming—huge farms, millions and millions of dollars in equipment, thousands of acres to manage," says Derek. "And when we explained the type of agriculture that we were interested in and it wasn't that, then they started to listen to what we had to say."

As they explain at the start of the field day, the couple is in year one of a three-year transition to being certified organic. During the next two to three years they plan on building a lot of fence, constructing a dairy parlor and establishing a milking herd of 40 to 50 cows. While taking Farm Beginnings, dairy farming was the "last thing we said we wanted to do," recalls Carrie. But it's a kind of farming that provides a consistent paycheck, and right now there is a nationwide shortage of organic dairy products, which has kept the prices paid to farmers relatively high. In addition, Organic Valley, a major organic milk processor, already picks up milk from an experimental organic dairy herd at the University of Minnesota's West Central Research and Outreach Center 15 miles away. That means a market is already on hand for any organic milk they can produce.

Fresh Faces, see page 23...

"People said the worst part about dairy-ing is you have to be home all the time," says Derek. "Well, being home sounds pretty good to me right now."

A Brainstorming Session

During the field day, the Reddens talked about a major decision they need to make relatively soon: should they buy a certified organic dairy herd right off the bat, or transition conventional cows to organic? A discussion ensues: on the one hand having an organic herd right away means being able to benefit from premium milk prices, which is particularly important if feeding high priced organic feeds. On the other hand, certified organic milk cows are very hard to come by and are expensive. Brad Heins, a dairy scientist at the West Central Research and Outreach Center who works with the 170-cow organic dairy research herd, says one way to save money building the herd is to buy conventional, unbred heifers and transition them to organic over the next few years.

During the discussion about building a low-cost milking facility, Kent Solberg, a grass-based farmer who is the Reddens' Journeyperson mentor, suggests a New Zealand style herringbone parlor.

"It's the most labor efficient and cost effective," says Solberg, who is also a livestock and grazing specialist with the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.

The discussion turns to how to get on the milk truck hauling route, cattle breeds that do best on grass, ways to winter cattle outside, building soil health and transitioning feed crops like corn to organic production. On this last point, the Reddens are warned that going cold turkey on chemicals can be tricky. And it's a good idea to find markets that pay premiums for crops that are in transition to being organic.

"Those transition years are tough—do your homework," advises Susan Fitzgerald, who, along with her husband Mark, raises organic grains in nearby Hancock. "You want to build the soil and do that with diversity."

The group walks past a grove behind the farmstead to examine a former cornfield that's been planted to a cocktail mix of cover crops: forage peas, lentils, foxtail millet, forage oats, cowpea, clover, hairy vetch, forage radish, forage turnips and sunflowers.

"This was our best ground for producing corn and soybeans, so anybody we told that we wanted to graze it, thought we were crazy," concedes Derek.

They planted the mix in April to provide grazing for their 13-cow beef herd and to build soil health in preparation for eventually establishing a permanent pasture. It's waist high and threatening to get to the point where it won't be palatable for the cattle. As the cows graze a part of the field that's been penned off with portable fencing, the group talks about how many acres of graz-



During the July field day, Derek Redden talks about a cornfield he and Carrie have planted to cover crops as part of a long-term plan to make it a rotationally grazed pasture. (LSP Photo)

ing are needed per cow, ways of maintaining forage sources even through the hot summer months when cool season species go dormant and what to do when a cocktail mix like this gets ahead of the cattle's ability to

LSP's 2016-2017 Farm Beginnings Course

LSP is now accepting applications for its 2016-2017 Farm Beginnings course. The early bird discount deadline is Aug. 1; Sept. 1 is the final deadline. See page 21 for details.

Farm Beginnings Profiles

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

keep it grazed down. Several of the farmers make the point that even though the cattle are crushing many of the plants while grazing, it's actually a good thing.

"A lot of people would call this waste, but it helps feed the soil microbes," says Solberg. "And the only way to get that is with high-density, short-term grazing."

After the field day, the Reddens are excited about all the information that's been traded during the day. Derek says these kinds of discussions are part of their long term plan to take it slow and reduce risk.

"We're hoping that the more planning that we do, and the more we talk to people, the more we can hear what mistakes they made, and we won't have to make the mistakes on our own," he says.

A field day like this also reinforces a goal Carrie has had since she took Farm Beginnings and started networking with area farmers and experts.

"I hope that 10 years from now we can come back and do another field day and that we can be the experts, that we can be the ones that are looking at the new farmers and saying, 'You can do this. It's not a pipe dream and we want to help you,'" she says as their guests continue talking farming methods while eating a picnic lunch. "I know that we are going to want to help as many beginning farmers as we are able to because of all the people that have helped us along the way." □

LSP's Journeyperson Course Takes Farming to the Next Level

The Land Stewardship Project's two-year Journeyperson Course is designed to support people who have a few years of farm start-up and management under their belt and are working to take their operation to the next level. Participants get assistance moving their farming plans for-

ward through advanced financial planning and one-on-one advising, production assistance via mentorship with an experienced farmer, and guidance on balancing farm, family and personal needs. Participants who develop and execute a comprehensive financial plan are eligible to have their savings of up to \$2,400

matched to invest in a wealth-generating asset for their farm.

The deadline for the next course session is Oct. 1. For details, see the **Journeyperson** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers. You can also contact LSP's Richard Ness at 320-269-2105 or mess@landstewardshipproject.org.

Food Co-ops on Main Street

Member-Owned Food Sources Aren't Just for Urbanites

By Rebecca White

Minnesota, “the cooperative capital,” has more food co-ops per capita than any other state. The Twin Cities co-op scene has long been the envy of other metropolitan areas, and expansion continues. In addition, successful food co-ops in Rochester, Duluth, Saint Peter and Northfield provide healthy and local food choices to those relatively populous communities.

But how much do you know about Minnesota’s rural food co-op scene? Places like Virginia, Ortonville, Hackensack and Litchfield also boast long-running co-ops, and their relative impact on their small communities is outsized—especially in areas where good food options are not otherwise in plentiful supply.

The “typical” small and rural co-op in Minnesota has less than \$1 million (and some less than \$100,000) in sales annually. Most rely at least partly (and a few fully) on volunteers to staff the store and serve basic functions like ordering product and bookkeeping. Member-owner investment ranges from \$5 to \$200. Commitment runs deep—in many cases board members serve as volunteer clerks, unload the truck, make supply runs to local farms, refill bulk bins and wash the dishes. Some have been at it for 30 years or more.

In Bloomington last year at the Minnesota Food Co-op Board Conference, I convened a conversation among small and rural food co-ops. Of the 15 co-ops represented at the conference, seven participated in a wide-ranging conversation that covered social media tools, distribution issues, staff and volunteer concerns, and a host of other issues plaguing smaller co-ops in our state.

That got the attention of conference organizers and helped precipitate the formation of an organizational collaborative interested in strengthening small and rural co-ops in Minnesota and beyond. This year, on Nov. 7, rural co-op boards and staff will have the opportunity to attend a conference specifically focused on their needs. It is anticipated as a “kick-off” to a broader and deeper course of technical assistance, relationship-

building, and networking for smaller co-ops in the region.

The Land Stewardship Project sees food co-ops, and particularly rural food co-ops, as places where people can participate directly and democratically in their food system. In a cooperative, membership equals ownership, and the principles by which cooperatives are formed and function encourage community engagement, education about food and farming systems, and the development of sustainable communities.

A Local Food Foot-in-the-Door

Small co-ops also provide an avenue for beginning farmers to “get their feet wet” in wholesale marketing on a manageable scale. For example, Granary Co-op (Ortonville) member-owners and pastured pork producers Anne and Peter Schwagerl of Prairie Point Farm are in their second season of raising and marketing their non-GMO fed Berkshire-Yorkshire cross hogs from their farm near Browns Valley, Minn.

While marketing whole and half animals direct to consumers has been their main sales strategy, the Schwagerls jumped at the chance to start working with their food

co-op this fall (the Granary is 30 miles from Prairie Point Farm) as a way to increase sales and expose more local residents to their high-quality meat.

As Farm Beginnings graduates (see page 21), the Schwagerls were mentored by the VanDerPol family at Pastures A Plenty Farm, a pioneering sustainable pork operation based in Kerkhoven, Minn. Previously, co-op members, committed to offering pastured meats, made the three-hour round trip to Pastures A Plenty every month to re-supply the store. This fall, Prairie Point Farm and Granary Co-op staff are working to provide shoppers with an even more local source.

In the lead-up to November’s conference, I’ve been reaching out to staff and board members at the smaller co-ops across the state to learn more about their stores, their struggles and their successes. I also serve on the board at the Granary Food Co-op, and have heard several themes that resonate with my experience at that store: “What are the legal issues surrounding the use of volunteers?” “How do we access local and regional product given our limited staff and lack of access to distributors?” “How do we engage our community and recruit active and invested members and board members?” And sometimes simply, “Who will unlock the doors and run the store tomorrow?”

The input gathered from these co-op conversations is being reviewed by organizational partners like Northcountry Cooperative Foundation, Cooperative Development Services, CDS Consulting Co-op and Northcountry Cooperative Development Fund. We are using this input as a way to shape the agenda of the conference, and also to begin crafting a more comprehensive program of support that could be delivered via webinar, hands-on trainings provided at central locations, or individual technical assistance.

Strengthening rural food co-ops strengthens rural communities by providing people more direct avenues of engagement in and ownership of their food system, while providing beginning and established sustainable farmers with an accessible and enthusiastic market for their products.

Fostering relationships with rural co-ops and building a network among them is a promising avenue for creating landscape change in the food and farming systems of rural communities. □

Rebecca White works on community based food systems issues for LSP. She lives in rural Ortonville and can be contacted at 320-305-9685 or rwhite@landstewardshipproject.org.

Small Co-op Conference Nov. 7

“Small But Strong — Securing Your Food Co-op’s Future” is a one-day networking and training conference for board and staff of Upper Midwest food co-ops with sales under \$3 million. It will be held Saturday, Nov. 7, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minn. The fee is \$20 per person.

Workshops are being planned on the following topics:

- Strengthen your board of directors.
- Manage volunteers.
- Connect with members.
- Improve operations.
- Manage finances.

For more information, contact Tom Guettler at the Northcountry Cooperative Foundation, tom@northcountryfoundation.org or 651-307-5691.

Healthy Food, Healthy People, Healthy Communities

Gardeners for Hope Community in the Phillips Neighborhood of Minneapolis celebrated the 2015 season in August with an event (*right photo*) that featured food, stories and kids activities.

In addition, for several Sundays in a row from August through Oct. 4, the Four Sisters Farmers' Market (*bottom right photo*) provided fresh produce to residents in the Hope Community area. The market was a partnership of the Land Stewardship Project, the Native American Community Development Institute and Hope Community.

Since 2009, LSP has been working with Hope Community and other partners to build community power and capacity to shape a strong neighborhood-scale system that ensures reliable, affordable and equitable access to healthy food. LSP's work with Hope Community Garden is a key part of this initiative. Hope Community is a place-based community development organization that is entrenched in the Phillips Neighborhood, one of the most economically challenged and diverse neighborhoods in Minneapolis.

For more information on this initiative, contact LSP's Dylan Bradford Kesti at dylank@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377. (Photos by Bruce Silcox Photography, www.brucesilcoxphotography.com) □



A Slice of CBFS Support Via Eat for Equity



An Eat for Equity Pizza Party Picnic held in June helped raise money for the Land Stewardship Project's Community Based Food Systems Program work related to sustainable agriculture, beginning farmers and strong communities. The event, which was held at LSP's Twin Cities office in Minneapolis, featured wood-fired pizza by Wild Earth Pizza, green salad from the Bachelor Farmer, and fish from Northern Waters Smokehaus. There was also music by the Wailing Loons.

Eat for Equity raises money for local and international non-profit causes through meals of locally produced food. The group is active in Minneapolis, Boston, Portland, Madison, the Ozarks, Seattle, Phoenix, Connecticut, the Bay Area, and Washington, D.C. For more information on Eat for Equity, see <https://eatforequity.org>, or call 617-780-9824. (LSP Photo) □



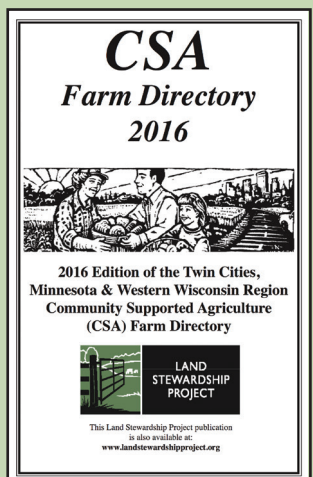
Farmers: Time to Sign-up for the 2016 CSA Directory

If you are a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmer operating in Minnesota or western Wisconsin, the Land Stewardship Project invites you to be listed in the 2016 edition of LSP's *Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory*.

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

The deadline for submitting listings is Monday, Jan. 11. The listing fee is \$22 for LSP members and \$37 for non-members. There is a 250-word limit for listings.

For information on getting listed, contact LSP's Brian DeVore at bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.



Soil Health Summer

LSP Events Highlight Continuous Living Cover

As a group of farmers walked up to a stretch of Zumbro River bottomland in southeastern Minnesota one day in late July, they gazed upon a cornfield with a split personality. On the left of an imaginary dividing line the plants were tall, green and thriving. On the right was a field of yellowed leaves and spindly stalks. “That side will make maybe 180 bushels per acre,” said the field’s owner, Loren Donovan, gesturing to the left. He then pointed at the struggling part of the field. “This side will make maybe 70 to 80.”

Donovan, who is a member of the Land Stewardship Project’s Cover Crops Network, was showing a field that is a prime example of how cover crops—those small grains, brassicas and other plants that can be grown around the edges of the regular growing season—can build natural fertility to make a plot of land more resilient in the face of severe weather. Cover crops are also proving to be a superior way to keep soil and chemical contaminants out of waterways.

In this case, Donovan had done an emergency planting of radish and Austrian peas in 2014 to cover the soil after part of his cornfield was flooded out. As participants saw during the July field day, the corn that was grown this year on the cover cropped part of the field benefited dramatically from the last-minute planting.

As these photos show, LSP was involved in numerous events that provided farmers and others opportunities to see firsthand the benefits, and discuss the challenges, of cover cropping and other techniques for building soil health.

For articles, podcasts and resources related to soil health, see the **Soil Health, Profits & Resiliency** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org. □



During an LSP Cover Crops Network field day in July, southeastern Minnesota farmer Curt Tvedt (*second from right*) explained how he planted soybeans into standing rye and then rolled the grain to kill it and allow the soybeans to grow. For more on LSP’s Cover Crops Network in southeastern Minnesota, contact Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. (LSP Photo)



LSP members and northeastern Iowa farmers Tom and Irene Frantzen hosted a workshop on integrating continuous living green cover crops into farming systems. Shown speaking (*far right*) at the August event is Richard Warner, director of Green Lands Blue Waters, of which LSP is a member organization. For more on Green Lands Blue Waters, see the Nov. 3-4 event on page 32. (Photo by Caroline van Schaik)



Southwestern Minnesota farmer Carmen Fernholz (*left*) described how University of Minnesota research conducted through the Forever Green initiative has in just a few years increased the kernel size of intermediate wheatgrass, a perennial forage/grain crop he is experimenting with. In late August, scientist Don Wyse (*second from right*) provided LSP members and staff a tour of the Forever Green test plots in St. Paul. For more on Forever Green, see the No. 1, 2015, *Land Stewardship Letter*. (LSP Photo)



North Dakota farmer Gabe Brown described how he combines cover cropping, mob grazing and no-till to build soil health. Brown’s Ranch was one stop on LSP’s “Soil Builders Road Trip” in August. For more on the initiative, contact LSP’s Richard Ness (320-269-2105, rness@landstewardshipproject.org) or Doug Nopar (507-523-3366, dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org). (Photo by Doug Nopar)

Hitting the Conservation Target

When it comes to making the ag landscape healthier, how much is enough?

By Brian DeVore

One day in 2007, a farmer walked into Paul Wymar's office in Montevideo, Minn., not far from where the Chippewa River drains into the Minnesota River. He had a question for Wymar, who at the time was a scientist for the Chippewa River Watershed Project: how much of the land in the single biggest tributary of the Minnesota basin would need to be converted from annual row crops like corn, soybeans and sugar beets to a year-round ground cover regime before water quality would improve significantly?

The answer was 10 percent. After poring over a dozen years worth of water monitoring data, Wymar was able to show that in the parts of the Chippewa River watershed where at least 34 percent of the land was covered in plants year-round, water quality was good enough to meet state standards for clarity and chemical contamination. As it turns out, on average 24 percent of the 1.3 million-acre watershed is covered in grass, hay, trees and other perennials, so adding another 10 percent overall would do the trick (extensive watershed modeling done in 2014 verified that figure).

A simple answer, but one that means little unless another very important question is dealt with: *which* 10 percent? The answer to that lies in an area of farmland conservation that works to identify which parts of a watershed would benefit the most from, for example, having more deep-rooted perennial grasses growing in place of annual row crops. Called "targeted" or "precision" conservation, it relies on combining high-tech satellite imagery with low-tech kitchen table conversations to identify those spots that provide the most ecological bang for the buck. Such a strategy is being utilized in the Chippewa River watershed today by the Land Stewardship Project and various other partners. If it's successful, it could serve as a model for providing farmers and other local residents the information and tools needed to protect water quality in a manner that is economically viable.

Punching Above its Weight

A study published in the February issue of the *Journal of the American Water Resources Association* outlined the limitations of traditional farmland

conservation strategies, which, through such agencies as the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, often consist of getting practices applied to as many acres as possible, regardless of the ultimate impact. The study looked at conservation practices in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and other states that make up the Upper Mississippi River-Ohio River Basin—the traditional Corn Belt—and found that applying water-friendly techniques such as cover cropping and reduced fertilizer applications across the entire region won't do enough to reach water quality goals.

But by targeting areas that are particularly vulnerable to runoff with a mix of intense conservation techniques—everything from utilizing wood chip bioreactors near tile drainage lines to restoring wetlands—nitrogen runoff in the Upper Mississippi-Ohio River Basin could be reduced by 45 percent. That percentage is the threshold the Envi-

ronmental Protection Agency has set for reducing the size of the "dead zone," an area in the Gulf of Mexico that's about the size of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. Nitrogen fertilizer and other nutrients escaping Midwestern farm fields are supercharging algal growth in the dead zone, sparking a chain reaction that reduces oxygen levels to the point where virtually no marine life can survive. That 45 percent reduction could be attained by converting as little as 1 percent of the basin's cropland to land uses that filter and hold nutrients, concluded the study.

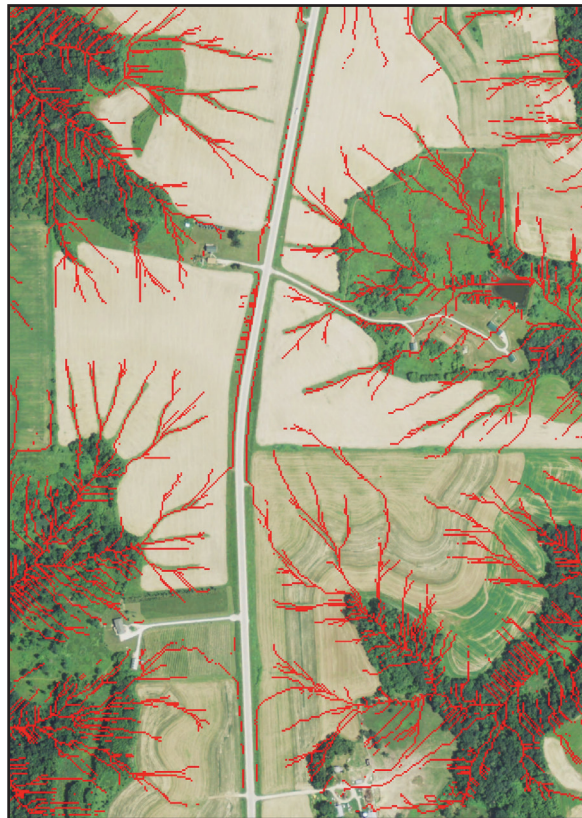
Such results could have a major impact on agricultural conservation policy. Over the years, conservation programs have been used to disperse payments to farmers and other landowners without actually looking at the actual impacts on the land, says Matt Liebman, an Iowa State University agronomist who occupies the Wallace Chair for Sustainable Agriculture.

"We often pay for practices rather than outcomes," he says. "It's not the best use of society's dollars. It's clear that random acts of conservation are a waste of money."

Despite decades of spreading conservation dollars across wide expanses of the landscape in the Midwest, the Gulf dead zone continues growing and nutrient pollution overall gets worse. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has found that nitrogen contamination is so bad in the southern half of the Gopher State that 27 percent of lakes and rivers are too polluted to be used for drinking water. Over 50,000 water samples and 35 years of monitoring data show that 70 percent of that nitrogen contamination in Minnesota is coming from crop fields.

That's why conservationists are increasingly looking at targeted conservation. Liebman knows personally how effective it can be to utilize a well-placed practice that has an outsized positive impact on the landscape. On a recent summer day he stood next to a strip of native prairie on the side of a hill otherwise planted to soybeans in central Iowa. The prairie "strips" were established at points in the sloping field where runoff was at its most intense, and thus was doing the most environmental damage. What he and other researchers have found is that planting a row-cropped field to just 10 percent of native prairie can reduce by as much as 95 percent the soil and fertilizer runoff that escapes the field.

Those results, which far exceeded expectations, have prompted over two-dozen farmers around Iowa to plant their own prairie strips. And now that the



This image from a Minnesota watershed, which was developed utilizing geographical information systems technology, uses red color to show where erosion caused by overland flow of water is most likely to occur. Such mapping can help pinpoint where conservation farming techniques will produce the biggest benefits. (Graphic by Steve Ewest, LSP)

Target, see page 28...

Continuous Living Cover

...Target, from page 27

innovation has left the test plot, farmers are putting their own creative spin on making the strips more effective, as well as economically viable. For example, one farmer in southwestern Iowa is grazing cattle on the prairie strips, providing cheap forage for his operation while reducing runoff.

Liebman sees prairie strips as one of many targeted innovations that can help farms keep water cleaner while providing wildlife habitat and other ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration. Grassed buffers along waterways, controlled drainage systems that allow water to percolate down into the soil profile gradually, and reconstructed wetlands are just some of the innovations now available.

"We have a portfolio of conservation practices," says Liebman.

But he cautions that while it's easy to get excited about such practices, they are only effective if they are targeted at environmental hotspots and become integrated into agricultural operations. That requires working with the land, and farmers, on an intense, local basis, something the Chippewa 10% Project is doing.

Not an Rx

Since it was launched in 2010, the goal of the Chippewa 10% Project has been to dovetail ecological health with the economic and practical needs of farmers and other landowners in the watershed. An initiative of the Chippewa River Watershed Project and the Land Stewardship Project, which are working with various other groups and agencies, Chippewa 10% is a model for making sure conservation practices produce real benefits. Such an approach is needed to grapple with one of the most vexing non-point water pollution issues out there: how to reduce the amount of nitrogen fertilizer leaving farm fields, causing problems all the way to the Gulf's dead zone.

Corn has a voracious appetite for nitrogen, and keeping this nutrient from becoming a pollutant is particularly tricky because of its ability to leach through the soil profile and find its way into water via often mysterious, unseen avenues. Traditional conservation efforts such as terraced hillsides, which have been effective at reducing soil erosion, don't always work when it comes to nitrogen runoff.

To get a handle on nitrogen pollution,

as well as erosion and other water quality problems, the Chippewa 10% Project is utilizing some of the most sophisticated land and water mapping technology available. Geographical information systems (GIS) use satellite data and a remote sensing technique that combines radar and light, called LiDAR, to provide a 3-D map of watersheds, showing everything from drainage patterns in fields and where excessive water runoff is most likely to occur, to where certain conservation practices and structures would produce the most benefit.

"Sometimes thinking about the whole watershed may be too big," says Steve Ewest, a GIS specialist with LSP. "We're trying

• • •
*"We often pay for practices
rather than outcomes. It's clear
that random acts of conservation
are a waste of money."*

— agronomist Matt Liebman
• • •

to bring this information to the field level. It's ground-truthing."

As he says this, he flashes through a series of colorful watershed maps from the Chippewa that show things like the "stream power index," which measures the erosive power of overland flow related to such factors as slope and how drainage from upstream feeds into the system. Using data gathered from projects that study the effectiveness of different conservation practices, Ewest can plug in how various land uses—cover cropping, grazing, diverse rotations—could impact those patterns positively. On this particular day, he's preparing these graphics for an upcoming meeting with a group of cover-cropping farmers in the watershed to get feedback on what kinds of maps would be the most useful for them when making planting decisions.

"We're trying to get away from prescriptive conservation practices and more toward helping farmers see options," says Ewest.

That's an important point when it comes to applying targeted conservation in the field: to be effective, it has to take into consideration the human element of a watershed. The authors of the February *Journal of the American Water Resources Association* paper utilized highly sophisticated watershed modeling science to reach their

conclusions. But it's telling that the paper also points out that farms are connected by water and nutrient flows, and not all pieces of land are created equal when it comes to the impact they can have on those flows. As a result, "cooperative conservation" between landowners in a watershed is key. "The watershed approach is critically dependent on successfully engaging landowners and local communities in decisions about the future of the place they call home," wrote the scientists.

Robin Moore, who coordinates the 10% Project, says that in the Chippewa watershed sophisticated watershed maps are helpful in figuring out where to focus efforts, but in order to develop the most effective targets possible, people must be integrated into the implementation of "3D visualizations" and "stream power indexes." Targeting a highly erosive field with a rotational grazing system or no-till cropping may work on paper, but what if the landowner doesn't have livestock or conservation tillage equipment?

That's why over the past few years Moore and LSP organizer Andy Marcum have done thousands of cold calls with landowners, agencies and natural resource experts in the Chippewa watershed, searching for issues they can work together on, as well as deciphering some of the major challenges to adopting innovative practices. Through follow-up interviews and outreach, they have found, for example, that cattle farmers in the upper reaches of the watershed are finding it hard to get access to enough grazing, while farmers in the lower reaches, where row crops dominate, find wet, cold soils get in the way of utilizing practices such as no-till cropping.

As a result, Moore and Marcum have developed farmer networks focused on cover cropping, grazing, soil-health monitoring and fertilizer management. One network engages women landowners, an increasingly important rural group. Field days and networking have helped farmers gain access to cost-share funds to establish, for example, cover cropping and grazing systems.

"You have to put your resources into talking to *everybody* about what needs to be done," says Moore. "Without that you can't create a target to hit in the first place." □

*Future issues of the Land Stewardship Letter will examine how the Chippewa 10% Project is working with farmers and other landowners to target conservation in the watershed. For more on the Chippewa 10% Project, see the **Stewardship & Food** section at www.landstewardshipproject.org, or contact Robin Moore at 320-269-2105, rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org.*



The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey

Memories from the Farm of My Youth

By Alan Guebert
(with Mary Grace Foxwell)
2015; 152 pages

www.farmandfoodfile.com/the-land-of-milk-and-uncle-honey

Reviewed by Dana Jackson

Alan Guebert is well known to many Land Stewardship Project members through his nationally syndicated column, “The Food and Farm File,” which he has written since 1993. With his daughter’s encouragement and editorial assistance, Guebert has put together a collection of those columns in *The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey: Memories from the Farm of My Youth*. For this collection, he didn’t choose columns about agricultural policy or economics or hard-hitting analyses of industrial agriculture that many LSP readers find themselves quoting. The ones he selected tell stories of his life, especially his childhood, and many begin: “On the southern Illinois dairy farm of my youth...” Guebert’s daughter, Mary Grace Foxwell, tells us in the epilogue that readers long requested a collection of such columns, and she convinced her father to respond.

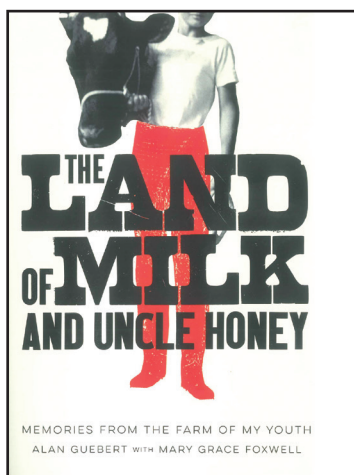
The book that resulted is both Guebert’s personal memoir and a tribute to hard work, which he expresses in the dedication:

“To all the Uncle Honeys, Jackies, and Howards now long gone in a forever gone era of hired men, dinner at noon, and plain, honest work. What they gave us didn’t cost a nickel; how they gave it was priceless.”

The “Uncle Honey” in the title of the book is a great uncle of the author who began working on the farm when Alan was eight-years-old. This easy going, sweet-natured, retired milkman had an “indifference to things mechanical” and regularly wrecked machinery and snagged and buried things with equipment. Comical stories about Uncle Honey’s “machine murdering skills” appear in several columns. Guebert says he regularly received letters from readers with stories of their own destructive “Uncle

Honeys,” but contends none could match his great uncle.

Two bachelor brothers were the hired men on this 720-acre farm, and they worked faithfully 51-weeks-a-year, with only parts of holidays off. Modern farm equipment wasn’t as large in those days, so field work took much longer. Guebert honors the hired men who taught him how to work, but his parents and five siblings all worked hard too (the kids were paid 50 cents an hour). They lived with a farm schedule based on milking 100 cows twice-a-day, a job that could not be delayed nor skipped. In the epilogue, Foxwell describes her father’s daily routine when she was growing up, including his disciplined schedule of research and writing while working from home as a columnist, which likely comes naturally to a guy who grew up on a dairy farm. I like to think that my three children learned responsibility and self-discipline when they took turns getting themselves up to milk our family cow Brownie every morning before going to school.



Guebert distinguishes the era of his growing up with the phrase “dinner at noon,” which was the norm for Midwest working people until the 1970s, and even now during harvest seasons on farms. In spite of five meals a day (breakfast, morning lunch, dinner, afternoon snack, supper) all prepared by his mother, sister and younger children, photos of Guebert family members in the book show them to be short and slender. Every day the hired men and family members on the farm ate meats from the freezer, vegetables from the garden and homemade fruit jams and desserts. The kids helped plant, tend, pick and can the vegetables until they were big enough “to wrestle a hay bale” and could be employed elsewhere on the farm.

Most of Guebert’s stories about “Indian Farm” in this book give us pictures of family farm life through his eyes as a young boy. He describes work days helping can peaches

or butcher hogs, playing baseball in the pasture and dodging cow patties, sledding down the sides of the levee protecting the farm from the Kaskaskia and Mississippi Rivers, seining fish out of the farm pond for the July 4th fish fries, and other fond memories.

Given Guebert’s reputation as a critic of industrial agriculture, one might expect him to acknowledge that his 720-acre family farm was a precursor to the industrial operations of today, in that 24D was heavily used to kill weeds, machinery was large-scale for the times, and his parents were managers, not owners. His grandfather, Uncle Honey and two other investors met yearly with his parents to review finances and plan the year. But Guebert doesn’t pass judgement. The farm was what it was.

This book will be dismissed by many as too nostalgic and sentimental about the era of family farms, and mostly, Guebert does paint them as the “good old days,” days grouped in the four parts of the book according to the farm work of each season: Spring (Plant), Summer (Grow), Fall (Harvest) and Winter (Eat). His assembled columns combine the theme of hard work on a family dairy farm with reflections on how work fit reliably into seasonal weather patterns, community and religious standards and the family’s holiday celebrations. Readers should be prepared for some repetition of background facts or descriptions in different places, because each piece in the book is not a separate chapter, but was once a “stand alone” column. And taken altogether, the selections do add up to a warm and fuzzy memoir.

That doesn’t mean that *The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey* is just a tired old treatise on the “work ethic” and a collection of sentimental family farm stories. It’s an entertaining, enjoyable read because of the writer’s storytelling skills and clever use of language. The challenge in writing a daily column is to include necessary details bolstered by vivid images and engaging metaphors while not going over the word limit. Guebert has that down pat, plus his humor and memorable concluding sentences in most columns have won him loyal readers.

If you aren’t reading a newspaper that runs columns by Guebert, you can purchase an e-mail subscription for \$20 at www.foodandfarmfile.com. After receiving a series of columns with insights on agricultural economic or policy issues, one may appear that begins: “On the southern Illinois dairy farm of my youth...” Read and enjoy. □

Dana Jackson, a former Land Stewardship Project associate director, co-edited the 2002 book, The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems (Island Press).

The Busy Days of Summer

By Amelia Shoptaugh

Summer 2015 was a busy time for the Land Stewardship Project as we ended the fiscal year in June and started a new one in July. I, along with Timothy Kenney, our director of finance and operations, worked hard to close the last fiscal year and prepare for the annual audit.

Another project here in the Twin Cities office has to do with our goal of producing “zero waste.” The No. 1, 2015, *Land*

Stewardship Letter described how LSP is partnering with Eureka Recycling to recycle food items and other organic materials. Such efforts to recycle organic material via compost took a major step forward recently when the City of Minneapolis launched its own organics recycling program.

While LSP very much supports Eureka’s efforts and partners with the firm for events, citywide organics pick-up will be a cost savings for us. In the coming year we’d like to explore options for zero waste in our other offices and ways to cut down our waste even

more in Minneapolis.

The end of summer also signals the start of a new year of Farm Beginnings classes. Karen Benson, the office manager in Lewiston, Minn., is helping the Farm Beginnings team prepare for the 2015-2016 class sessions and is working through applications and scholarships for prospective students. She has also been busy with several LSP events that have been held in southeastern Minnesota this summer on the issue of frac sand mining.

With so much activity going on at LSP, the administrative team always has plenty to keep us occupied. □

Amelia Shoptaugh, LSP’s operations manager, can be reached at amelias@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.



LAND
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PROJECT

Membership Update

Support LSP on Nov. 12th — Give to the Max Day

By Megan Smith

The Land Stewardship Project will be participating in GiveMN’s Give to the Max Day on Thursday, Nov. 12. This is an all-day online giving event that brings together nonprofit organizations across Minnesota.

LSP has participated in this day of giving since its launch in 2009. It has been a great way to connect with new members and raise money to support LSP’s work. Over the years, 160 people have become LSP members on Give to the Max Day and in 2014 we beat LSP’s previous record and raised \$19,958 during the 24-hour give-a-thon!

This year’s challenge will be to connect with even more people—folks that share

LSP’s values of stewardship, justice, health and democracy on the land, but maybe haven’t heard about our work yet. *That’s where you come in.*

Give to the Max Day is a great opportunity to let your

family and friends know about the Land Stewardship Project and invite them to join via <https://givemn.org/organization/Land-Stewardship-Project>.

Also keep an eye out for LSP on Facebook and Twitter on Nov. 12; we will have updates throughout the day and fun content for you to share.

I’m looking forward to another exciting Give to the Max Day on Nov. 12. With your help we can grow LSP’s membership and raise the money needed to continue the work of keeping the land and the people together. Ready. Set. Give!

If you have questions or would like more information about how to be involved with LSP’s Give to the Max Day efforts, contact me at 612-722-6377 or megans@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Megan Smith is a Land Stewardship Project membership assistant.

3 Easy Ways to Help LSP on Give to the Max Day

1. Send your friends a quick e-mail. Share with them why you are a member and provide them with the link to LSP’s GiveMN web page: <https://givemn.org/organization/Land-Stewardship-Project>.

2. Set up your own Give to the Max Day fundraiser for LSP. You can tap into your own network of family, friends and co-workers to help support LSP’s work. Simply go to GiveMN.org and click the “fundraise” button to get started.

3. Ask your Facebook friends to Join LSP. Facebook is an easy way to share LSP with lots of people you know. Here’s a sample message you could post on Give to the Max Day:
I’m a member of the Land Stewardship Project because it’s an organization dedicated to family farms, care of the land, healthy food and thriving rural communities. Today is Give to the Max Day and I hope you will take a moment to become an LSP member too. As a member, you’ll be joining thousands of others who are working together to change our farm and food system from the ground up. Thank you! (In the message, you can link to LSP’s GiveMN web page: <https://givemn.org/organization/Land-Stewardship-Project>.)

give
TO THE MAX
DAY 
NOV 12, 2015

Want to Support LSP with a Gift of Land?

The Land Stewardship Project's *Land and Stewardship Legacies* initiative provides a way for your family's legacy on the land to continue by using it to support LSP's work or to provide opportunities for a new generation of stewardship farmers. Through this initiative, LSP is able to accept gifts of farmland or other real estate from members or other friends of our organization.

For more information, call LSP executive director George Boody at 612-722-6377 or see www.landstewardshipproject.org/about/legacygiving.

In a new LSP video, members Dennis and Carol Johnson talk about how they used a gift of land to support what's important to them. The video is available on LSP's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/LSPNOW. A big thanks to LSP member Audrey Arner and the University of Minnesota-Morris for developing this video. □

Volunteers Fuel LSP's Work

A big thanks goes out to all of the volunteers that helped the Land Stewardship Project out in all aspects of our work during the past several months. LSP literally could not fulfill its mission without the hard work of our volunteers.

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

- **Montevideo, Minn.**— Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105, tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org.
- **Lewiston, Minn.** — Karen Benson, 507-523-3366, lpse@landstewardshipproject.org.
- **Minneapolis** — Megan Smith, 612-722-6377, megans@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Support LSP in Your Workplace

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

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

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

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

In Memory & in Honor...

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

In Memory of Kathryn Winterfeldt
◆ Darlene Heise

In Memory of Ralph G. Johnston
◆ Mary E. Miller

◆ *Sr. Mary Tacheny gave a gift to LSP in honor of her grandnephew on his wedding for the "SSND jubilarians"*

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

Give a Gift LSP Membership

Now someone who would enjoy becoming a member of the Land Stewardship Project? Give them a gift LSP membership. We can send a special card describing the gift, along with a new member packet. For details, call 612-722-6377 or see www.landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate. □

Get Current With LSP's

LIVE  WIRE

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



Volunteers welcomed LSP members and others who attended the Twin Cities Summer Potluck Cookout and Celebration on July 30. See page 8 for more photos of the event. (LSP Photo)





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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **NOV. 3-4—2015 Green Lands Blue Waters Conference**, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis, Contact: www.greenlandsbluewater.net; Richard Warner, 612-625-3709
→ **NOV. 6—LSP Farm Beginnings Class session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)

→ **NOV. 6-7—Women Food & Ag Network Annual Conference**, Davenport, Iowa. Contact: www.wfan.org/conference; Leigh Adcock, 515-450-3591, conference@wfan.org

→ **NOV. 7—Conference for Small Upper Midwest Food Co-ops**, Normandale College, Bloomington, Minn. (page 24)

→ **NOV. 7—SOIL: Holy Ground Wholly Alive (10th Annual Earth Conference)**, School Sisters of Notre Dame Center for Earth Spirituality & Rural Ministry, Mankato, Minn. Contact: Lisa Coons, 507-389-4272, lcoons@ssndcp.org

→ **NOV. 12—Give to the Max Day**. See page 30 for information on how to support the Land Stewardship Project all day

→ **NOV. 13-15—16th Fall Harvest Gathering for Women in Sustainable Ag**, Whalan, Minn. Contact: Bonnie Haugen, 507-421-7170; Laura Paine, 608-338-9039

→ **NOV. 21—LSP Farm Beginnings Class Session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)
→ **DEC. 3—LSP Farm Beginnings Class Session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)

→ **DEC. 3-4—2015 Midwest CSA Conference**, Eau Claire, Wis. Contact: www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com, 715-723-5561

→ **DEC. 5—LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Plainview, Minn. (page 20)
→ **DEC. 12—LSP Farm Beginnings Class session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)

→ **JAN. 8-9—Minnesota Organic Conference**, St. Cloud, Minn. Contact: www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/conference.aspx, 651-201-6012

→ **JAN. 9—LSP Farm Beginnings Class Session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)

→ **JAN. 14-16—24th Annual GrassWorks Grazing Conference**, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. Contact: Heather Flashinski, grassheather@hotmail.com, 715-289-4896, www.grassworks.org

→ **JAN. 16—LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Plainview, Minn. (must sign up for Dec. 5 session; see page 20)
→ **JAN. 21—LSP Farm Beginnings Class Session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)

→ **JAN. 21-23—2016 Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society Winter Conference**, Aberdeen, S. Dak. Contact: www.npsas.org, 605-229-4040

→ **JAN. 22-23—2016 Practical Farmers of Iowa Conference**, Ames, Iowa. Contact: <http://practicalfarmers.org>, 515-232-5661

→ **FEB. 6—LSP Farm Beginnings Class Session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)
→ **FEB. 13—LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Plainview, Minn. (must sign up for Dec. 5 session; see page 20)

→ **FEB. 13—Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Conference**, College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minn. Contact: www.sfa-mn.org/conference, 1-844-9-CALL-SFA, ext. 1

→ **FEB. 14-15—Minnesota Fruit & Vegetable Growers Annual Conference**, St. Cloud, Minn. Contact: www.mfvga.org, 763-434-0400

→ **FEB. 20—LSP Farm Beginnings Class session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)

→ **FEB. 25-27—MOSES Organic Farming Conference**, La Crosse, Wis. Contact: www.mosesorganic.org, 715-778-5775

→ **MARCH 8—2016 Session of the Minnesota state Legislature convenes**, St. Paul, Minn. Contact: Bobby King, LSP, bking@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-722-6377

→ **MARCH 12—LSP Farm Beginnings Class Session**, Amery, Wis. (page 21)

→ **MARCH or APRIL—11th Annual LSP Family Farm Breakfast & Day at the Capitol**, St. Paul, Minn. (details to be announced) Contact: Bobby King, LSP, bking@landstewardshipproject.org, 612-722-6377

→ **AUG. 1—Early Bird Application Deadline for 2016-2017 LSP Farm Beginnings Course** (page 21)

→ **SEPT. 1—Final Application Deadline for 2016-2017 LSP Farm Beginnings Course** (page 21)

→ **OCT. 1—LSP Journey person Course deadline** (page 23)

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