

# The Land Stewardship Letter

Keeping the Land and People Together



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## Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

Here are a few reasons to feel positive about the future of agriculture.



A group of Farm Beginnings participants gathered last year at the dairy farm of Roger and Michelle Benrud in southeast Minnesota. (LSP photo)

Where does the future of farming lie? The publishers of *Farm Futures* magazine are convinced a greater majority of our food will be raised by fewer, and larger, business entities, which will utilize government commodity programs, the Chicago Board of Trade and high-volume production of commodities like corn and soybeans to stay viable. They believe so strongly in this future that in October, after a five-year hiatus, the magazine was resurrected. An editor's column explained that with bigger farms getting bigger, the time is right to reintroduce a periodical that can help mega-producers undertake sound "farm and risk management."

On pages 10-18 of this issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, we lay out a different farming future. Here we are

profiling some of the graduates of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings™ program, an initiative that provides participants an opportunity to learn firsthand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. Farm Beginnings participants take part in a course that teaches goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and innovative farming techniques. Established farmers and other professionals present at the seminars, providing a strong foundation of resources and networks for those interested in farming. There are also opportunities to connect with established farmers through farm visits and one-on-one mentorships.

Farm Beginnings is in its eighth year, and has more than 185 graduates to its credit, 60 percent of whom are farming.

That makes it one of the most successful programs of its kind. Farm Beginnings has matured to the point where its graduates are now serving as instructors. And now, as we note on page 4, the Farm Beginnings model is being tried in Illinois, Missouri and Nebraska.

Many Farm Beginnings participants have little agricultural experience. Even more impressive are the ones who grew up on farms and are using Farm Beginnings to gain a fresh perspective. Old habits die hard, but as one graduate puts it: "You don't look at a mistake and call it a mistake, unless you don't learn anything."

Future *LSL*'s will feature other Farm Beginnings graduates. These profiles tell the stories of people who are making a go of it right here, right now. Taken as a whole, they also provide a glimpse at the future of sustainable family farming.

— Brian DeVore

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

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# Paul Homme: 1930-2004

Paul Homme, a former Land Stewardship Project Board member, suffered a fatal heart attack Oct. 6 on his farm near Granite Falls, Minn. He was 74.

Homme, along with his wife Ginger, had long been involved in environmental and sustainable agriculture issues. Before returning to his native Granite Falls to farm in 1976, Homme served in the U.S. Air Force for 21 years as a research virologist. With advanced degrees in veterinary medicine and microbiology, he used his scientific background to help in efforts to protect the environment in the region.

In the early 1980s, he helped launch MNFAIR (Minnesota Future Agricultural Interests Recognized) to protect the environment in the Upper Minnesota River Valley. The group worked successfully to prevent the storage of nuclear waste and the burning of PCBs in the region, among other things.

Homme's daughter, Kristin, said although her father was successful in his fights to protect the environment, he really didn't enjoy those battles, and said he preferred to do other things. One of those things was farming, something he was doing the very day he died.

"He viewed farmers as special," she said during Homme's memorial service. "He viewed farmers as stewards of the land."

Because of his love of farming, Homme served on LSP's Board of Directors from 1992 until 2000.

"Paul Homme was an active member of LSP and the epitome of what makes the organization strong," says Dana Jackson, who served with Homme on the Board before becoming LSP's Associate Director. "He listened well, and shared his considerable experience and knowledge when it was needed, all with a good sense of humor."

Homme was instrumental in getting LSP involved in fighting the spread of factory farms. In the mid-1990s, he worked with LSP members in western Minnesota's Renville County to set up a scientifically sound testing system for hydrogen sulfide emissions from factory

farms. The results from those tests later led to a first-of-its-kind state health standard for the toxic gas. That standard now serves as a national model.

"Paul insisted that LSP help local citizens organize against factory farms," says LSP Policy Program Director Mark Schultz. "He also used his scientific expertise to show environmental and health officials that these operations could have serious impacts on our communities."

In recent years, Homme had served as a Farm Beginnings mentor and was on a committee that awards interest-free livestock loans to beginning farmers. He was also a member of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Steering Committee, where he helped develop the language for the "Farm Results Index." This Index lay the groundwork for the recently implemented Conservation Security Program.

"Paul had the remarkable ability to not just think in terms of how he could farm

• • •  
*"He viewed farmers as special. He viewed farmers as stewards of the land."*  
• • •

the farm program, but to ask what kind of farm program will ultimately do best by the land, the quality of the river, and ultimately the beings whose livelihood and sustenance all depend upon it," says Audrey Arner, a western

Minnesota farmer and former LSP organizer who worked closely with Homme.

Homme's views on farm policy were formed by his own conversion to grass-based beef production when he was in his 60s. Seeing how well this system worked production-wise as well as environmentally convinced him that paying farmers to raise row crops to the exclusion of all other enterprises was not good for the land or communities. At the time of his death, Homme was farming in partnership with LSP organizer Terry VanDerPol.

Homme's son, Erik, speaking during the memorial service, said his father's conversion to grass farming was another example of his ability to keep an open mind throughout his life.

"He taught by example," said Erik. "He was well-educated but he continued to learn throughout his life." □

# Dick Broeker: 1942-2004

Land Stewardship Project member Dick Broeker died at his home in Lake City, Minn., on Oct. 26 of a heart attack. He was 62. Broeker had long been involved in promoting sustainable development and local foods. Broeker was a well-known figure in St. Paul, serving as a top aide to former Mayor George Latimer, and cofounding Taste of Minnesota as well as spearheading the development of the St. Paul Riverfront Corporation.

Broeker was known to LSP members in southeast Minnesota as the executive director of the Experiment in Rural Cooperation, which promotes sustainable development in agriculture, natural resources and tourism. He keynoted the 2004 annual meeting of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.

In recent years, Broeker and his wife Mary had moved to Lake City and established an organic orchard of 400 apple and cherry trees. He was the father of Jill (Broeker) O'Neill, a former LSP staffer who helped launch the Farm Beginnings program in southeast Minnesota. □

## Letters

### Inspired

I am sending along this small contribution to mark the beginning of my support of the Land Stewardship Project. In one week, I will graduate from college. I have studied agroecology and food systems issues. I want the Land Stewardship Project to know that its existence fills me with great hope. In return I want you to know that there are so many young people, myself included, who feel inspired to carry on with efforts to build a better working relationship between mankind and Planet Earth.

—Louella T. Hill  
Providence, R.I.

### A goal attained

We want to express our appreciation to those who work so hard to make the Land Stewardship Project the great organization it is. One portion of LSP, the Farm Beginnings program, has been particularly meaningful for us. Through completion of the program, working with mentors and LSP staff staying up on current programs, we have been able to attain another step in our goal of sustainable farming: we have purchased a farm!

We are now working toward making our dream of a sustainable farm come true. We have much gratitude for the valuable information we received from LSP, and do not think our goal would have been attainable without the instruction we've received over the past few years. Thank you all so much.

—Greg & Nancy Rasmussen  
Lockwood, Mo.



### What's on your mind?

Got an opinion? Comments? Criticisms? We like to print letters, commentaries, essays, poems, photos and illustrations related to issues we cover. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity.

Contact: Brian DeVore, *Land Stewardship Letter*, 4917 Nokomis Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55417; phone: 612-729-6294; e-mail: bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.

### Myth Buster Box

*An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them*

→ **Myth:** The only way for family farmers to survive in the livestock market is to sign an exclusive contract with a packer or sell specialty products through niche markets.

→ **Fact:** Farmers are finding ways to maintain profitable access to conventional markets through collective bargaining.

For the past several years, Jim Joens and a half-dozen other hog farmers in southwest Minnesota's Nobles County have been using the team approach to retain access to a good market while remaining independent. The farmers are all small by corporate farming standards—the biggest producer markets 3,600 pigs annually, the smallest around 700. But Joens and his neighbors are collectively shipping a semi-load (about 200 head) of hogs to a packer each week. This gives them enough marketing clout to gain the respect, and the price, they deserve.

The group started in 1997 when a local packer stated that it did not need to issue competitive bids for hogs, since it could fill its quotas with contracted animals. Joens and the others contacted the National Farmers Organization and started working with Merle Suntken, a marketing specialist with the organization. In return for a commission, Suntken negotiates with the packer and handles the weekly sales arrangements. On Friday mornings, the farmers deliver their hogs to a trucker in Wilmont, Minn., who then hauls them to a packer in Sioux Falls, S. Dak.

One of the biggest benefits of the arrangement is the farmers feel they are able to put some reliability back into their marketing plan. They adhere to the kind of philosophy that professional marketing consultants consistently try to drive home to farmers: don't always get the best price, but a consistent price.

Feedback from the packers via Suntken has helped the farmers produce leaner hogs, which has resulted in a higher price. The farmers are making an estimated \$5 to \$6 extra per hundredweight because they are marketing as a group and are receiving a quality premium.

→ **More information:** For details on how farmers can maintain access to livestock markets, see *Creating a Bright Future for Livestock Farmers in Minnesota*. A pdf version is available at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/citiz\\_task\\_report.pdf](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/citiz_task_report.pdf), or by calling Bobby King in LSP's southeast Minnesota office at 507-523-3366.



## Farm Beginnings pilots launched in 3 states

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings™ program (see page 1) has received a \$74,856 grant from the USDA's North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. The grant will be used to set up pilot beginning farmer education programs in Illinois, Missouri and Nebraska. LSP staff will work with agricultural educators, farmers and other professionals to set up the pilot programs.

From Nov. 30 to Dec. 2, representatives from the three states came to Minnesota to undergo an LSP-coordinated training on Farm Beginnings. During the course, a panel of beginning and established farmers, as well as Farm Beginnings steering committee members, shared their insights about the program. Participants in the training also visited the farm of Dave and Florence Minar near New Prague, Minn., and saw their grazing operation and dairy processing facilities. The training also consisted of observing a session of the current Farm Beginnings class.

This year's Farm Beginnings classes began in New Prague on Oct. 23, and are running twice a month until the middle of March. After March, course participants can attend a series of on-farm educational field days.

For information on the 2005-2006 edition of Farm Beginnings, contact Cathy Twohig in LSP's western Minnesota office at 320-269-2105 or [cathyt@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cathyt@landstewardshipproject.org). In southeast Minnesota, contact Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or [stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org). More information is also available at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs\\_farmbeginnings.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_farmbeginnings.html).

SARE offers competitive grants and educational opportunities for producers, scientists, educators, institutions, organizations and others exploring sustainable agriculture. The

North Central Region SARE is based at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. For more information on SARE, visit [www.sare.org/ncrsare](http://www.sare.org/ncrsare), or call 402-472-7081. □

## LSP members recognized by Niman

Three Land Stewardship Project members were recently recognized at Niman Ranch's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Appreciation Dinner in Des Moines, Iowa.

**Kyle Graney** received an award for superior meat quality. Graney raises hogs near Hampton, Iowa.

**Dwight and Becky Ault** were presented with a Special Farmer Recognition award. The Aults farm near Austin, Minn.

With the help of farmers who are using sustainable production methods, Niman

Ranch provides natural pork to restaurants and retailers across the country.

The company is currently looking for hog farmers. For details, visit [www.nimanranch.com](http://www.nimanranch.com) or call 641-998-2683. □

## Voices premieres

*Voices of Minnesota Farm Women* premiered at the University of Minnesota-Morris Nov. 4. This film tells the story of Minnesota's heritage and legacy through oral history interviews of contemporary women who are involved in biodiverse farming and local sustainable food systems. Produced by Cynthia Vagnetti, the 26-minute video features Mary Doer, Annette and Kay Fernholz, Muriel French, Paula Marti, Robin Moore, Florence Minar, Linda Noble, Bev Struxness and Jean Peterson.

The film, which the Land Stewardship Project is helping present, is funded by Humanities Iowa, Minnesota Humanities and the Bradshaw Knight Foundation. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for information on how to order the video. □

## Jim Scaife leaves for service in Iraq



Land Stewardship Project Board member Jim Scaife has departed this fall for Iraq, where he is serving a one-year tour as a chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve. Scaife farms near the southeast Minnesota community of Rushford. LSP's Lewiston office recently organized a supper for Scaife before his departure. Participants in the event posed for a photo with Scaife, shown here fourth from the left in the back row with his wife Tara and children. He can be reached at: Chaplain James F. Scaife, LSA Anaconda, HHD, 457th Trans Bn, APO, AE 09391. Scaife's e-mail address is [james.scaife@us.army.mil](mailto:james.scaife@us.army.mil). (photo by Jodi Dansingburg)



**Gary Holthaus read from his manuscript, *Farm Stories: That's How We Came to Have This Place* at the Land Stewardship Project's southeast Minnesota office on Nov. 8. The book of interviews and essays focuses on sustainable farmers in southeast Minnesota. It is a project of the Experiment in Rural Cooperation and includes a traveling portfolio of black and white photographs. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for information on obtaining the book once it is published. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)**

## Riddle NOSB chair

Land Stewardship Project member Jim Riddle has been elected chairman of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). This organization was created by the 1990 Farm Bill to advise the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture on establishment and implementation of the USDA's National Organic Program.

Riddle, of Winona, Minn., has served on the NOSB since 2001 and recently completed a one-year appointment in the position of Endowed Chair of Agricultural Systems at the University of Minnesota (see July/Aug./Sept. 2004 *Land Stewardship Letter*, page 7). He also chairs the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Organic Advisory Task Force, and was instrumental in passage of the state's organic certification cost-share program.

Planned NOSB projects include refining the material review process and helping develop organic rules for pet foods, aquatic animals, apiculture, greenhouses and mushrooms. □

## NRCS official: Food production, commodity programs often clash

On the one hand, the U. S. Department of Agriculture is supposed to coordinate programs that protect the land. On the other hand, the USDA also pays farmers to raise commodity row crops such as corn and soybeans. Those two activities clash, says a top official with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the agency charged with the conservation side of the Department.

State Resource Conservationist Paul Flynn spoke at the "Celebrating Food From Our Land" event Nov. 9 in Alexandria, Minn. The event, which was sponsored by Pride of the Prairie, featured locally produced foods. Pride of the Prairie is an initiative to promote the production and consumption of local foods in western Minnesota. The Land Stewardship Project is one of several organizations involved with the program.

Flynn said that promoting local food systems can be a way of getting cropping rotations and livestock systems established that are good for the soil and water. Unfortunately, federal commodity programs deter farmers from developing diverse, environmentally-friendly production systems.

"We are at loggerheads with USDA over, 'Are we going to have conservation, or are we going to raise commodities?'" Flynn said. "And when we raise commodities sometimes there's going to be an environmental fallout. A lot of our

resource problems can be traced...to the fact we're not producing food, we're producing commodities."

The new Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a recognition that subsidizing commodity production hurts the environment and violates World Trade Organization agreements, Flynn said.

"This is the broadest program we've ever rolled out. The Conservation Security Program doesn't really care what you grow, as long as you do it in a conservation manner." (See page 8 for

more on CSP.)

Flynn said there is also a growing recognition within the NRCS of the role sustainable farming methods such as organic agriculture and managed rotational grazing can play in conservation.

However, Alexandria-area farmer Gary Brever pointed out to Flynn that he has found a disconnect between what top officials at the NRCS say about sustainable agriculture, and the willingness/ability of staff on the local level to work with farmers using alternative systems. □



**More than 80 people feasted on locally produced meat and produce during the Pride of the Prairie's "Celebrating Food From Our Land" event. (LSP photo)**

## Citizen Task Force calls for policies that promote livestock on family farms

*New report describes strategy for helping rural communities*

A healthy livestock farming economy in Minnesota requires support for livestock on family farms, strong local township government and a tough corporate farm law, says a new report by the Citizen Task Force on Livestock Farmers and Rural Communities. The Citizen Task Force is a collaboration of four Minnesota farm groups: Minnesota Farmers Union, Minnesota National Farmers Organization, Land Stewardship Project and the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.

The report, *Creating a Bright Future for Livestock Farmers in Minnesota*, was released Sept. 28 in Willmar to a group of over 200 farmers, township officers and other rural residents. Minnesota Attorney General Mike Hatch addressed the crowd, saying the recommendations could go a long ways toward supporting a strong middle class in rural Minnesota. A viable middle class, he says, is the basis of a sound democracy.

"Diverse family farms are key to a strong rural middle class," says Hatch. "It is extraordinarily important to not allow continued consolidation of these industries. If you take away township control and relegate it to St. Paul or Washington, you take away that ability to control what happens in the community."

The Citizen Task Force recommendations focus on increasing the number and profitability of Minnesota livestock farmers in several ways that benefit rural communities:

### 1) Ensuring Fair Prices & Open Markets

Regulatory teeth must be put into Minnesota's law limiting corporate ownership of farms. The state must work to enhance the development of producer-owned processing and collective bargaining. Bob Arndt, President of the Minnesota National Farmers Organization, said that when farmers are able to join forces and market collectively, they are able to keep their capital in their communities.

"Those who control the capital in the industry, control the industry," he told the meeting participants. "We want the farmers to control the capital."

### 2) Creating the Next Generation of Livestock Farmers

Financial incentives for getting started in dairy farming must be provided. State and local governments must also support efforts to protect farmland from development and keep farmland affordable. Doug Peterson, President of the Minnesota Farmers Union, said too often discussions about promoting livestock agriculture ignore the existing farmers in the state, as well as the young people who want to get started.

"You get more bang for your buck by targeting your money, targeting your resources at the existing operators," says Peterson. "We shouldn't be ignoring the majority of farmers in our state."

### 3) Promoting Livestock Farming that Benefits the Environment

A bonding proposal to fund the University of Minnesota's "Green Lands, Blue Waters" initiative should be passed. The initiative is working to improve the environment by promoting perennial cropping systems, including raising livestock on pasture. Paul Sobocinski, a Wabasso area hog farmer and LSP organizer, said farmers across the state are showing they can protect the environment while utilizing working lands.

"There are ways to make a living off the land while farming with nature and protecting the rural environment," he

said. "And there are ways the government, the University of Minnesota and consumers can encourage such systems."

### 4) Creating Local Food Systems that Benefit Farmers, Consumers & Rural Communities

The Minnesota Legislature should fund the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) Information Exchange program, the Alternative Swine Program and the state Department of Agriculture's on-farm demonstration grant program.

"Minnesotans want high quality foods produced by family farmers committed to good stewardship," said Mary Jo Forbord, a Starbuck area farmer and Executive Director of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota. "Consumers want to know where their food is coming from, how it is produced, and who is producing it. We welcome and value their interest."

### 5) Protecting Rural Democracy

The Legislature must uphold the current rights of townships and counties to enact zoning ordinances that regulate development in their communities, including large feedlots. La Valle, Wis., dairy farmer John Kinsman addressed the Willmar crowd, explaining that in his state the legislature gutted local democracy this year by making it possible for the state to override decisions made by local townships and counties.

"I urge you not to give up local control," said Kinsman. "Farmers in Wisconsin did not support this bill when it went through. This was railroaded through so fast most local governments didn't even know about it." □

## Have a say in Minnesota's livestock farming future

*Creating a Bright Future for Livestock Farmers in Minnesota* is available at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/citiz\\_task\\_report.pdf](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/citiz_task_report.pdf). For a paper copy, contact Bobby King in LSP's southeast Minnesota office at 507-523-3366 or [bking@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bking@landstewardshipproject.org). The mailing address is P.O. Box 130, Lewiston, MN 55952.

This report is a work in progress and the Citizen Task Force on Livestock Farmers and Rural Communities is looking for input from the public to help shape future versions. Comments can be sent to King in Lewiston.

# 5,000 Minnesotans tell Governor: Keep local government strong

Minnesotans from around the state gathered at the Capitol on Nov. 17 to show their opposition to recommendations from Governor Tim Pawlenty to weaken the powers of township and county governments, as well as bedrock environmental protections. To drive the point home, the citizens brought with them over 5,000 signatures on bright yellow postcards from Minnesotans who feel the same way. During the past few months, Land Stewardship Project

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***“It’s a blueprint for the destruction of family farming in Minnesota.”***

— from a Dec. 2 *New York Times* editorial criticizing Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s Livestock Advisory Task Force

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members and supporters gathered the signatures at county fairs, churches, busy street corners, grocery stores and other public venues.

The Governor’s proposals were created by his “Livestock Advisory Task Force,” and are part of the administration’s efforts to recruit large-

scale factory farms to Minnesota.

The Governor renewed his commitment to the proposals on Nov. 9 at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Agri-Growth Council, the state’s largest agribusiness lobbying organization. At the event, Pawlenty gave the “State of the State of Agriculture” address.

With hundreds of postcards on display boards as a backdrop, those gathered on Nov. 17 talked about their concerns.

“I gathered hundreds of signatures at the Todd County Fair,” says Todd County farmer and LSP member Alan Perish. “My neighbors know strong local communities need strong local control.”

Also on Nov. 17, LSP unveiled a media campaign with the headline, “Gov. Pawlenty, do you share our values?” and the theme, “Minnesota values strong local government, family farms, and clean water.” The advertisement will run in city, rural and suburban newspapers during the coming months.

“I was shocked when Governor Pawlenty proposed weakening local government rights and environmental protections to help corporate ag interests,” says Dodge County resident and LSP member Lois Nash, who is featured in the advertisement. “That is not why he got my vote. That is not what I value.” □

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***“Minnesotans should fight to hold onto it. Iowans don’t have it. County boards of supervisors can make recommendations on where the animals, buildings and manure pits go, but the state decides. That has caused enormous controversy.”***

— from a Dec. 6 *Des Moines Register* editorial on local control

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## MEP supports local democracy

Minnesota communities should retain the right to protect their local environment. That is one of the environmental priorities of the 2005 Minnesota legislative session, according to the Minnesota Environmental Partnership’s (MEP) “Protect Our Water” initiative. MEP is a statewide coalition of 90 conservation and environmental organizations, including the Land Stewardship Project.

MEP’s Protect Our Water initiative is working to get the 2005 Minnesota legislature to take action to protect the state’s 12,000-plus lakes and 92,000 miles of rivers and streams. Among its priorities, MEP wants to make sure that the legislature does nothing to undermine the fundamental right of local communities to develop planning and zoning regulations stronger than state law in order to protect the local environment.

Other Protect Our Water priorities include an initiative to support adequate funding to assess the pollution levels of Minnesota’s waters and a package of long-term bonding projects that help the environment, among other things.

“LSP supports MEP’s legislative priorities,” says Mark Schultz, LSP’s Policy Program Director. “Minnesotans value clean water and the environment and know how to protect our land and water at the local level, as well as through state initiatives.”

For more information, visit [www.protectourwater.info](http://www.protectourwater.info), or contact Schultz at 612-722-6377. □



During the Nov. 17 press conference, Lois Nash talked about why she collected postcards from citizens who oppose the weakening of local democracy. (LSP photo)

## CSP watersheds set for 2005 sign-up

### *Funding, implementation issues remain*

By Mark Schultz

The 202 watersheds targeted for Conservation Security Program (CSP) implementation in 2005 were announced by the USDA in November. Farmers in the watersheds will be able to sign up for CSP for a designated period of time sometime after the beginning of the year.

USDA named five watersheds in Minnesota (Redeye, Red Lake, Redwood, Root and Sauk), three in Iowa (North Raccoon, Turkey and Wapsipinicon), two in Wisconsin (Duck-Pensaukee and Crawfish), three in North Dakota (Painted Woods-Square Butte, Apple and Beaver) and two in South Dakota (North Big Sioux Coteau and Vermillion).

This expansion of CSP follows the start-up of the program in 18 watersheds in July 2004. However, USDA has maintained its policy that farmers in watersheds selected for CSP implementation are only eligible for the program during the designated period in the year in which the watershed is selected by USDA. Farmers in the 18 watersheds named in July 2004 will not be eligible for sign-up in 2005. USDA has said it

hopes to make CSP available in each watershed in the U.S. about once every eight years.

Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman has released \$162 million to be used for the CSP in 2005, which includes administrative support for USDA as well as payments to farmers.

The good news is that CSP implementation has started. The Land Stewardship Project is in communication with several thousand stewardship-minded farmers across the region about CSP, and will assist farmers with program information and preparation. LSP continues to believe CSP is a first step in the right direction.

However, both the funding level and the scope of the implementation for CSP fall far short of the intent of Congress and the letter of the law signed by President Bush in 2002. A good example is Secretary Veneman's "once-every-eight-years approach," which provides virtually no conservation incentives for farmers who miss the designated sign-up period, or who are not accepted by USDA the first time they apply.

LSP is urging farmers and others concerned about the care of the land to contact their members of Congress and tell them to fully fund CSP, and to make

it a continuous sign-up program. It makes no sense to gut funding for conservation on working farms, while continuing to bust the budget with nearly unlimited subsidies for maximum production of corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton and rice (the crops that receive the great majority of commodity payments).

In preparation for the next Farm Bill, which is slated for 2007, LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee is getting started on developing policy proposals. Input from LSP members is welcome. Please contact me or Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377, and look for notices of meetings we will be having this winter on the subject. □

*Mark Schultz is LSP's Policy Program Director.*

### CSP watersheds

For a complete list of watersheds selected for CSP implementation and a national watershed map, visit LSP's CSP Web page at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs\\_csp.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_csp.html), or call the LSP Policy office at 612-722-6377.

LSP also has a new CSP fact sheet, "Tips for Enrolling in the Conservation Security Program." A pdf version can be downloaded from our CSP Web page, or you can call the Policy office to obtain a paper copy.

## Dodge County citizens continue to work for local democracy

By Adam Warthesen

Land Stewardship Project members and other citizens of Dodge County continue to organize for common-sense township planning and zoning that's good for family farms, rural residents and the land. These citizens are standing up against outside agribusiness interests that continue to push a factory farm agenda—like the 3,000-animal unit dairy proposed in Ripley Township by a New Jersey investor.

Farmers and rural residents meet monthly to plan their work and share information. In October, Dodge County LSP leaders and others attended a Minnesota Association of Township training on township planning and zoning.

Also in October, proponents of the Dodge County mega-dairy submitted

material for a required environmental review. Citizens of Ripley Township have serious concerns about the environmental review process and have scheduled a meeting with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to discuss and ensure a process that:

- 1) Encourages and respects citizen input.
- 2) Allows for the findings of the environmental review of the proposal to inform the permitting process.
- 3) Is not rushed at the expense of citizen input or sound science.

The concerns of residents are based on the documented past performance of the MPCA during other environmental review cases such as the Reiland Dairy in Fillmore County, Hancock Pro-Pork in Pope County, and the Heartland tire burning proposal in Preston. In all of

these cases citizen input and sound science were overlooked in a rush to meet the timelines of developers.

Brad Trom, an LSP member who farms in Ripley Township, says the MPCA and Governor Tim Pawlenty both use language about "facilitating" the permitting process and treating developers applying for permits as "customers."

"We think it is important to remind them that Minnesota citizens are also their customers and the MPCA's mission is to protect Minnesota's environment," he says. □

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# The nation's highest court controls the future of checkoffs

By Mike McMahon

Land Stewardship Project members and independent hog farmers Jim Joens and Rich Smith traveled to Washington, D.C., on Dec. 8 to hear oral arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court on the constitutionality of the mandatory beef checkoff. Smith and Joens were joined by other members of the Campaign for Family Farms (CFF). LSP is an active member of CFF, which is leading the national effort to end the mandatory pork checkoff.

The outcome of this case will likely impact the future of many of the undemocratic, pro-factory farm checkoffs, including the pork program. On Oct. 18, CFF, joined by 49 farm groups with members in all 50 states, filed an *amici curiae* (friend of the court) brief with the U.S. Supreme Court asking the high court to uphold lower court decisions that found the mandatory beef checkoff unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court is expected to issue a decision the first half of 2005.

Independent hog farmers, CFF, and

Farmers' Legal Action Group were preparing to defend their legal challenge to the mandatory pork checkoff before the U.S. Supreme Court when the Court decided not to hear the pork case at the request of the Bush Administration.

"It's unfortunate that the Bush Administration specifically asked the Supreme Court not to hear the pork case and the Court concurred," says Smith, who farms in southwest Minnesota. "But we are confident that justice will prevail and both the pork and beef checkoffs will be terminated soon."

In 1998, CFF initiated a petition drive for a national referendum of hog farmers to decide the future of the mandatory pork checkoff. The Campaign submitted 19,043 hog farmer signatures (representing 20 percent of all U.S. hog farmers) to the USDA in May 1999.

After several months of delay by the USDA, hog farmers finally got the chance to vote on the mandatory checkoff in August-September of 2000. Independent hog farmers ended up voting the checkoff down, 53 percent to 47 percent. However, soon after taking office in early 2001, Secretary of

Agriculture Ann Veneman cut a backroom deal with the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) to throw out the vote and keep the mandatory checkoff in place.

The courts have repeatedly ruled in favor of ending the mandatory pork checkoff, with one District Court judge calling it "unconstitutional and rotten."

The NPPC and USDA have appealed, and unfortunately the courts have allowed the checkoff collection to continue throughout the appeals process.

Beef producers have also waged a successful legal challenge against the mandatory beef checkoff. In 2002 U.S. District Judge Charles Kornmann ruled the beef checkoff violated cattle producers' First Amendment rights by compelling them to pay for speech with which they disagreed. In 2003, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed Judge Kornmann's decision. In February 2004 the Bush Administration asked the Supreme Court to review the decision; in May, the Court agreed.

Farmers, commodity groups and legal experts will be closely watching the beef checkoff case. Under federal law, farmers pay mandatory checkoffs on every bushel of soybeans, every head of cattle, every pound of pork, and every hundredweight of milk. In addition, farmers in 20 states have to pay a mandatory corn checkoff. These checkoffs and many others take hundreds of millions of dollars out of farmers' pockets every year.

"Mandatory checkoffs and the commodity groups that are funded by them have failed family farmers," says Joens, who also raises hogs in southwest Minnesota. "Commodity groups have taken family farmers' money and used it to promote a corporate agribusiness agenda of factory farm livestock production and corporate control." □

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Members of the Land Stewardship Project crowded into the Minnesota Governor's office on Nov. 17 to deliver 5,000 signatures collected on bright yellow postcards. The postcards called on Gov. Tim Pawlenty to not weaken local government control. The Governor was not in the office that day. See page 7 for details. (LSP photo)

Jon Kaiser

## Ready for the next step

Jon Kaiser is less than a year away from paying off his Farm Beginnings livestock loan. He smiles when he says this, because it means he's just a little bit closer to making farming more than just a fantasy.

"I'm surprised I've come this far," says the 35-year-old while sitting at his kitchen table, his growing cowherd grazing a nearby pasture.

Kaiser grew up in Albert Lea, Minn., just north of the Iowa border, and got the farming bug as a teenager while pulling weeds out of soybeans on a local farm. That same farm produced hogs, and Kaiser learned early on he liked working around livestock. After graduating from high school in 1987, he studied agriculture in college and worked on various farms, including a dairy operation.

But he didn't see any way of getting started in farming on his own with limited financial resources. He liked raising hogs but this was the early 1990s, the beginning of an era—which has yet to end—when farmers were being told the only way to produce pork was to invest in expensive confinement facilities and sign exclusive packer contracts.

One day, while working on a hog farm, Kaiser read an article about a farmer in Michigan who was producing milk using a system called managed rotational grazing. The system can be set up and operated at a fraction of the cost

of conventional dairying, and the farmer was making a good profit, according to the article.

"That was what clicked for me," Kaiser recalls. "It seemed the way to get started from the ground floor with nothing was through grazing. I also



became convinced that cows belong outside; it's the way nature intended."

In 1998, Kaiser enrolled in Farm Beginnings. Through the class, Jon learned about financial planning and goal setting. At the time, the course was focused mostly on dairy grazing, and Kaiser met several other beginning farmers who were interested in starting from scratch using grass, good animal husbandry and sound business strategies. Even more importantly, he met established farmers from the area who were proving that grass farming was a viable alternative. Two of these farmers were Dan and Muriel French, veteran graziers in southeast Minnesota's Dodge County.

In 1999, Kaiser began share-milking with the Frenchs. Through this arrangement, Kaiser owns 20 percent of the 165-cow herd and gets 20 percent of the milk check. The young farmer pays for 20 percent of the grain fed to the cows, and covers the veterinary bill for his particular animals. The pasture, forage and machinery are provided, as well as housing for Kaiser, his wife Mindy, and their 4-year-old son, Nicholas.

In 2000, Kaiser was one of the first Farm Beginnings graduates to receive a no-interest livestock loan. The program, which was made possible by Heifer International, gives recipients five years to pay off the loan; during the first two years, no payments have to be made. Kaiser got 15 cows through the program, and bought 10 with his own money. Getting the Heifer International loan helped smooth the way for a bank loan, which made it possible to buy eight more cows. With the addition of calves his cows have produced, that brings Kaiser's milking herd up to 37 cows.

Kaiser says the share-milking arrangement has been a good post-graduate experience for him after Farm Beginnings. He's gotten to manage a grazing operation, while being given the responsibility of handling his share of the finances. In addition, the French farm is a member of PastureLand Cooperative, a group of southeast Minnesota grazing operations that market grass-based cheese and butter. That means Kaiser has seen firsthand how a dairy farm can add value to its production. He is also part of a network of graziers from the area who meet on each other's farms regularly to discuss management strategies.

"Before Farm Beginnings I didn't have anyone I could just call up or go to for questions," says Kaiser. "Now I have a number of people I can call on."

That network may prove invaluable as Kaiser works to push the fantasy part of farming even further aside. The share-milking arrangement has been great, says Kaiser, but he and his wife are looking for a permanent home for their cowherd. Mindy works at a hospital in Rochester, so the couple would like to stay in the area. They are willing to consider various possibilities, including buying an acreage and renting the grazing land.

"Just going out and buying a farm, that's not an attainable goal for me right now. But I would like to take the next step of being on my own," says Kaiser as he slips on his work clothes and heads out the door. "I'm getting anxious to take that next step." □



Jon Kaiser (LSP photo)

**Matt Fendry**

## Do-it-yourself dairying

**I**t's a wet October afternoon and Matt Fendry is seeing the downside to redirecting a farm's trajectory.

"When it's not a dairy farm, it doesn't have any of a dairy farm's infrastructure, not even the cement," he says as he skates his way through the greasy mud.

But as Fendry, 22, stands on a hillside overlooking the homestead and pastures, it's clear that the young farmer is fast creating his own dairy infrastructure. Behind him is a recently built hoop house, which serves as a tie-stall barn for cows. To the right are carefully managed grass paddocks, where a healthy herd of Jerseys is grazing. At the bottom of the hill is a milking parlor, which Fendry had custom-built based on designs he had seen on other farms.

Before the fall of 2001, virtually none of these elements of dairying were present on this former crop farm tucked away in a long valley just outside the southeast Minnesota community of Lanesboro.

Fendry's family moved to the 40-acre hobby farm in 1998. Matt, who had always wanted to farm, had raised vegetables and eggs to sell direct to consumers in the area.

But dairying was his real interest, so he began putting in motion a plan to create the dairying infrastructure both he, and the farm, needed. While in high school, he worked as a relief milker for two dairy farms—both grazing operations—and in 2000-2001 took Farm Beginnings. Soon after completing the course, Fendry's farming plans accelerated. He graduated from high school in May 2001, and the next month broke ground on the parlor. By late fall he was milking.

Fendry's milking herd got its start with 15 cows he obtained through a Heifer International revolving loan. The loan, which is administered through the Farm Beginnings program, provides recipients with livestock interest-free. It's a five-year loan, with recipients making payments the last three years. Fendry, who made his first loan payment earlier

this year, says not having to pay anything on it for two years was a huge benefit. The loan also required him to take a close look at his financials and to come up with a cash flow plan.

"It helps you solidify your goals that you have in your head," he says.

Farm Beginnings also exposed Fendry to established farmers who were showing that it is possible to make a go of it in agriculture. Some of the farmers were also dairying, but he said he also learned a lot from producers involved in other enterprises, such as hogs. No matter what



**Matt Fendry** (LSP photo)

type of agriculture they were involved in, they shared one thing that Fendry thrives on: a passion for farming.

"I knew what I wanted to do, so anything short of going bankrupt there was nothing that could stop me."

That passion and hard work have paid off. He now has a 22-cow certified organic milking herd and is selling his production for a premium to Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool, which markets it under the Organic Valley label. The last two years have been profitable, and Fendry wants to grow the herd to 30 cows by the end of next year. For now, he feels that's the size of herd he needs to stay viable while keeping the workload manageable (Rebecca, one of his two sisters, assists with the farming, and his father, Hugh, who has a town job, helps as well). The Fendry family recently

purchased a neighbor's land, bringing their farm's total size to 110 acres.

Not that there haven't been some difficult times. The first couple of years drought hit the area. Even worse, his newly acquired cows had somatic cell counts so high that Fendry risked not being able to sell their milk. Since he was working toward being certified organic, he couldn't use antibiotics to treat the problem. But through careful management of the cows and the building of the tie-stall hoop house to shelter them in rough weather, the young farmer was able to make the herd healthy. Fendry also credits Jeff Mattock, a nutritionist with the Fertrell Company and his livestock mentor through the Heifer International

loan agreement, with getting him back on track.

The young farmer, who tends to look on the bright side, is philosophical about that rocky start.

"I learned a lot about cows those first few years. It accelerated my knowledge so much to have all those problems, where if I'd had the top herd I wouldn't have learned nearly as much."

And there are advantages to remaking a farm from scratch: there is no old dairy infrastructure to get in the way. Fendry knew from the beginning he wanted to do managed rotational grazing on a smaller scale. He also wanted a "step-up" milking parlor—one that allows him to manage each

cow on a more individual basis. He didn't have to monkey with dilapidated facilities, and from the start was able to set up things the way he wanted them. That can cost money, but Fendry has figured out how to cut corners. For example, his milking units and bulk tank, which he got from area farmers going out of business, cost \$800—brand new the cost would have been more like \$10,000.

Building your own dairy farm from the ground up also means not being able to blame mistakes on what was already there. But the knowledge gained through such missteps is yours to keep.

"You don't look at a mistake and call it a mistake, unless you don't learn anything," says Fendry. "If you do it twice then you can call it a mistake." □

## Community supported partnership

It was the summer of 2003 and things weren't going so well on Annake Witkop's vegetable operation in southwest Wisconsin. The previous year, Witkop had begun selling shares in her operation to a handful of consumers, a concept called Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). She liked this way of marketing and in 2003 had sold 35 shares in the farm. But that year a devastating hail storm shredded her gardens near the town of Viroqua, and the downside of CSA farming struck home. She actually was faced with the possibility of not being able to provide anything to her members for two weeks, a terrible feeling for a CSA farmer.

But Witkop was able to fill the boxes during those difficult two weeks by getting vegetables from two neighboring vegetable operations: One Sun Farm (see page 13) and Ridgeland Harvest. After that experience, Witkop and the farmers on those other two operations started throwing around an idea: "Why not create a cooperative CSA operation?" Both One Sun Farm and Ridgeland Harvest had been raising vegetables for the wholesale market in the Viroqua area, but liked the idea of adding more value to their production through the CSA concept. So in 2004, the Bad Axe Farmer's Alliance was launched, providing vegetables to some 94 members, mostly in the Twin Cities.

Recently, as the 2004 growing season came to a close, Witkop offered this assessment of joint CSA farming: "We had a really good year. I was really happy with the boxes we were able to provide members. It's a much more fun way to do a CSA."

Witkop's ability to roll with the punches and try a different strategy, all the while keeping an eye on her ultimate goal of making a living on the land, is partly due to her Farm Beginnings training.

The 30-year-old had already been farming for a year in southwest Wisconsin when she took Farm Beginnings in 2001-2002. She had grown up in the Twin Cities suburb of Hopkins and studied crops and soils at the University of Minnesota in the late 1990s. Her plan was to go into greenhouse management. But she ended up interning on two organic vegetable operations, one of which

delivered to a restaurant she worked at. After that experience, she was hooked. Witkop bought 78 acres, and began raising vegetables for the Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool, as well as for farmers' markets.

The vegetable producer enrolled in Farm Beginnings because she felt she needed help in setting long term goals for her farm and her life.

"I had set the goal, 'I want to start the farm,' but I had never sat down and thought about long term goals, not only about what I wanted to do but how I wanted to live," she says.

By the time Witkop had finished Farm Beginnings, she knew more than ever she wanted to farm. But she had changed her mind about the type of system she wanted to use. A major part of the change came when as part of the class she toured an operation that was raising vegetables for the wholesale market. She realized they were doing things on a scale she just didn't want to approach. She also came in contact with farmers who were utilizing



Annake Witkop (LSP photo)

the CSA model, and was impressed not only with their agronomic diversity, but also the relationship they enjoyed with consumers.

And Witkop is excited about adding a new twist to the CSA concept by joining forces with two other farms, and not just because the weather cooperated this time around. For one thing, the weekly three-and-half hour drive to the Twin Cities was shared by the partners, a major stress reliever for the farmers, who all have off-



farm jobs.

The unique partnership is set up based on an enterprise development principal Witkop first learned about through a presentation former Land Stewardship Project organizer Patrick Moore gave at a Farm Beginnings class. Developed by Ernesto Sirolli, the model teaches that any enterprise requires three things to succeed: marketing, production and financial management. But Sirolli also maintains that no one person can do all three things well. Attempting to do so is the bugaboo of small business owners, particularly farmers. So within Bad Axe, Annake handles the marketing end of things, putting together the brochures and doing other outreach to recruit members. Meanwhile, Ridgeland Harvest coordinates the production end of the partnership, scheduling who will raise what, etc., and One Sun does the bookkeeping.

"I'm really excited about how we set the partnership up," she says. "It's been a real treat."

Witkop feels having the three-way partnership will help each farm reach its individual goal, as well as the overall goals of the Alliance—which in the near term is to garner enough members that fewer farmers will have to have in-town jobs. And Witkop is looking forward to getting to know each one of those consumers.

"I was mostly intimidated having such an intimate connection with the customer base," Witkop says. "I thought it would be easier to just sell wholesale or to take my vegetables to the farmers' market. But it turns out CSA is my favorite kind of marketing." □

## The flip side of the food system

“**Y**ou are American heroes.” The praise doesn’t come much higher than that, no matter who you are or what you are doing. But when you are a new farmer and one of the people who eats your food is saying that, well, it just about makes all those sweaty days spent weeding vegetable plots worth it. That outburst of adoration came from a consumer during a recent end-of-the-season member meeting of the Bad Axe Farmer’s Alliance, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation made up of three different farms, including one operated by Dave and Erin Varney.

Erin and Dave met at a restaurant where they were both waiting tables during the late 1990s. The Varneys don’t recall being called heroes by their customers during that time. “I used to lay hot dogs and French fries down in front of little kids,” says Dave, 35. “I’ve seen both ends of the food chain.”

When Erin got pregnant with their first child, the Varneys got interested in healthy eating and started growing a garden. Dave, who says he grew up in a Twin Cities suburb “playing video games,” worked nights and gardened during the day—one year they grew an entire acre of produce on rented land. All those vegetables were great, but they couldn’t market them all.

The Varneys took the Farm Beginnings course in 2000-2001. One thing that attracted them to Farm Beginnings was that it provided information not only on various farming methods, but different ways to market what a farm produces. Dave says one of the most useful class sessions involved wiping the chalkboard clean and brainstorming about all the things that could be produced on a farm: “That list got pretty wild.”

“Farming isn’t just planting crops and raising animals,” says Erin, 33. “You can diversify into so many things. There’s just a wealth of knowledge to tap into.”

Through Farm Beginnings, the Varneys also learned the worth of networking with established farmers. That lesson has proved invaluable as they’ve bought land, expanded their farming operation, and started looking into various enterprises. In early 2001, they moved to Viroqua, Wis., and bought a 35-acre farm. They then began the process of developing a certified organic

operation. The Varneys are only six miles from the headquarters of the Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool, otherwise known as CROPP. This national farmer-owned organic cooperative has been a good customer for their vegetables, and Erin works there as well. But even more importantly, the presence of the cooperative means this corner of southwest Wisconsin has perhaps the highest per capita population of organic farmers in the Midwest. This has been invaluable as the Varneys figure out their organic rotations and the best way to market their production.

“Just the knowledge I’ve been able to tap into from farms around here is a huge



Dave Varney (LSP photo)

asset,” says Dave.

Through this network, they’ve met farmers who are emphasizing the production of permaculture crops such as nuts and fruits, rather than vegetable crops that have to be planted annually. Erin and Dave feel permaculture is a better fit for the land they farm—it’s in an environmentally sensitive area and tillable acres are limited.

“We have wild hazelnuts growing here,” says Dave. “It’s just like the land is saying, ‘Dave, Dave, grow hazelnuts here.’ If we can work with nature and not against nature, we’ll be better off.”

They are now in the process of establishing several permaculture crops—hazelnuts, of course, but also blueberries, strawberries, raspberries and cherry trees. It will be a few years before these plants

are producing enough viable products for marketing, so in the meantime the Varneys are raising vegetables to create a cash flow. Some of those vegetables are being grown amongst the permaculture crops that are getting established.

“We’re trying to grow food at multi-levels—they call it stacking in permaculture,” says Dave.

Since 2001, they’ve sold vegetables to CROPP, but this year the Varneys embarked on a new marketing endeavor: Community Supported Agriculture. Dave says operating a CSA is not something they would have probably done on their own, but then they began discussing the idea of a cooperative CSA with Annake Witkop, another Farm Beginnings graduate who farms in the Viroqua area (see page 12). The Bad Axe Farmer’s Alliance consists of the Varney operation (One Sun Farm), Ridgeland Harvest (Cate and Mat Irsfeld-Eddy) and Roots Down Organic Farm (Witkop).

This was the first season for Bad Axe, which had 94 members, mostly from the Twin Cities area. Each farm specializes in a different area of production and management. Of course, eventually the Varneys want to be the farm that puts berries and other permaculture-based foods in the CSA box.

The farmers estimate the CSA membership will need to triple in size to make it economically viable for all three farms, but they are pleased with how the first season went. The Varneys feel they can diversify their cropping mix—a major goal of theirs—under the CSA system, whereas marketing wholesale often means raising a whole lot of one thing.

Meanwhile, the Varneys are looking to the future—something that’s part of the territory when getting perennial crops established. One of their main near term goals is to develop more value-added enterprises so that Erin doesn’t have to work off the farm. To do that, they are still utilizing their brainstorming skills learned in Farm Beginnings.

Recently, the young farmers have devoted a lot of evenings to remodeling a commercial kitchen in the house’s basement. The plan is to use the wood-fired ovens to produce baked goods from products raised on the farm. The Varneys are spending the winter practicing recipes, and a coffee shop has agreed to buy their products. By next year they hope baked goods will be a part of the CSA share.

If the Varneys pull that off, they may need to prepare for more hero worship. □

# Opening new doors by closing others

When Brad Fernholz left the family farm in the early 1990s, he was pretty sure his future lay elsewhere.

“When I left for college I was never coming back here. Never,” recalls Brad, drinking coffee in a farmhouse he shares with his wife Kristi and their two young children near the western Minnesota community of Appleton.

Kristi grew up on a farm in the area as well, and she also went off to college and a career. But by the late 1990s, the draw of farming and being near family became strong. They raised organic vegetables for a time while living on a Wisconsin farm and began thinking about what they could do to make the food system more sustainable.

In the fall of 1999, the couple bought 54 acres on the borders of Lac Qui Parle Lake, western Minnesota’s top goose hunting area. The farm had not been a working operation for many years, but it was obvious the low-lying soil was rich. So, those first few years the Fernholzs set out to see just what that soil would grow. They tried a little of everything—from sweet corn to flax. They even considered making the farm a hunting camp.

By the second year on the land, the Fernholzs felt the need for a little direction in their farming. So they enrolled in the 2000-2001 Farm Beginnings class.

Kristi, 30, says the course helped them come up with a sharper focus for their farm. Through whole farm planning and brainstorming with their fellow Farm Beginnings participants, the Fernholzs were better able to figure out what they could, and could not, do on the farm.

“We threw all the ideas down and penciled them out, and then exposed them to a whole group of people,” says Brad, who is also 30. “It made us stop and go back to thinking why we were here.”

“It would have taken us years to do that without a group,” says Kristi.

The couple also got a dose of reality when local livestock farmer Jim Van Der Pol came to a class and laid out some worse case financial scenarios for farming.

That helped drive home what could happen if a farm gets overextended, markets fall through, or a weather disaster strikes.

“Personally, I appreciate getting hit with reality,” says Brad.

Such brainstorming and planning has brought together two seemingly contradictory forces on the farm: a widening of possibilities, and a narrowing of options. But they may not be as mutually exclu-



sive as they first seem. By narrowing the options on the farm—they don’t have enough acres to make small grains production viable for example—the Fernholzs can now focus on the handful of enterprises that do make sense for this piece of land. One of those is carrots.

“The soil down here loves to raise carrots,” says Brad, leading the way

down to a garden plot near the goose marsh. Indeed, the farm has a reputation in this part of western Minnesota for producing plump, delicious carrots. And that reputation has now reached as far as the Twin Cities. The Fernholzs sell certified organic carrots for a premium to the Wedge Natural Foods Coop in Minneapolis through a special “fair trade” agreement for local farmers. Strawberries also seem to be a good fit for the farm, and the Fernholzs have a certified organic u-pick enterprise going.

The couple’s farm, Coyote Grange, is part of the Pride of the Prairie initiative, which is promoting the production and consumption of local foods. One other enterprise they may add in the future is to graze brood cows on the land. The Fernholzs feel animal disturbance is needed to keep the soil and plant growth healthy, and cattle production could help increase cash flow.

“The farm is just begging for livestock,” says Brad.

In this part of western Minnesota, the extended Fernholz family has long been associated with organic, sustainable agriculture. So when the young couple moved back to the area, they already knew a lot of the innovative farmers in the community. But Farm Beginnings helped them stay in contact with that network—a key resource as they brainstorm future possibilities.

When mulling over the options, part of what the couple must consider is time. Until recently, both worked off the farm. Brad is still doing carpentry but Kristi quit her town job last summer to stay home with their 2-year-old boy, Gavin. And now they have a baby girl, Anika. Kristi is an accomplished photographer and sells beautiful nature-based shots taken on the farm.

Whatever the future holds, the couple feels they now have at least a good compass reading for the farm—even if the ultimate destination may be a ways down the road.

“There’s no way you’re going to be ready for farming just through this course,” says Kristi. “It takes a lifetime. But it’s the perfect course for thinking about the options.” □



Brad & Kristi Fernholz (LSP)

## Planning for the fall

It's mid-November, and as the sun sets on a southwest Minnesota hog farm, a winter chill cuts through Jason Penner's Carhartt work clothes. But he keeps working into the gloaming, putting the finishing touches on a hoop house. Already nestled on one side of the polyurethane-topped, Quonset-shaped building are 12 sows with pigs. Miniature metal hoop houses, called pasture huts, provide each sow with her own individual housing. In a few more days more sows will be added to this hoop house. Next door is the concrete slab and framing for another hoop structure, which will be where pigs are finished out before slaughter. These buildings will serve as the core of Jason and his wife Laura's natural pork production enterprise. Beyond the hoop buildings is a cornfield full of baled stalks, which will be used as bedding.

"I wish I was further along," says Jason, 29.

He's not just talking about the hoop buildings. Penner is anxious to get his farming career off the ground as well.

Ironically, Penner sold his first load of pigs on this particular day, and he received a good price, even though it was through the

conventional market. But the farmer knows how volatile hog prices can be and isn't betting on those good prices staying around forever.

"High hog prices have bought me some time," he says.

The countryside here is dotted with the low, enclosed buildings of large swine operations. This is hog country—just to the south is the number one pork-producing county in Minnesota. Penner says most of the hog farmers in this area are using concentrated confinement facilities to raise hogs on contract for large companies. That's not for Jason. For one thing, he grew up doing chores in his dad's confinement buildings (they are less than a hundred yards from the new hoops) and didn't like the smell or the working conditions. He also feels the

future is in natural pork niche markets.

"There isn't any way these 3,000-sow operations can meet the consumer demand for the kind of natural pork I'm raising," he says.

Penner's cautious attitude comes partially from his educational background. After graduating from high school in Butterfield, Minn., in 1994, he went to Taylor University in Indiana to study business. His original plan was to be a stockbroker, but by his sophomore year, he knew what he really wanted to do was return to Minnesota and farm. He didn't think there was much of a future in conventional agriculture, but knew from



Jason Penner (LSP)

his business training that the more an economic sector concentrates, the more niche opportunities are created. After graduating from college, Jason took a job with a software company in Indiana. But at night he surfed the Web, learning as much about alternative hog production and marketing as he could.

Laura, a native of Indiana, got her nursing degree from Ball State. In 2003, they moved back to the area and bought a house on five acres, just a mile from Jason's parent's farm. The couple enrolled in the 2003-2004 Farm Beginnings course and twice a month that winter did the two-and-a-half-hour drive to Montevideo, Minn.

The course helped provide some real world grounding for what Jason had been gleaning off the Internet. And although he

had done plenty of business plans before, Farm Beginnings helped push him to finish one for his farming enterprise. Penner feels one of farming's weaknesses is that many people don't think the basics of sound business planning apply to it, that it is its own unique animal.

For Laura, 27, Farm Beginnings was a good introduction to the nuts and bolts of agriculture. "At first I just asked a lot of questions on the drive home," she recalls. "It did get me more excited about what Jason was doing as I saw what my role would be in the farm."

Last spring, the Penners rented 80 acres and pasture farrowed 10 sows. In September, they began construction of the two hoop buildings on his family's home place. Jason's research has shown that one problem with natural pork markets is

the lack of pigs that are born in the winter. He's hoping to take advantage of that gap in the market with the hoops. He also likes the buildings because they are multiple use facilities—they can be utilized for various stages of hog production, as well as put to other farm uses such as storage.

There have been some potholes along the way: they had a tough time convincing lenders that hoop houses were a good credit risk, which delayed construction by about two months. The Penners also feel a bit isolated and wish there were more small and mid-sized farmers their age in the area.

Meanwhile, the education process has continued. Jason attended a hoop house conference in Iowa earlier this fall, and he has visited, called and e-mailed Dan Wilson, a northwest Iowa farmer who is a pioneer in natural pork production. Jason is still telecommunicating for the Indiana software company, and Laura works as a nurse. They have an 18-month-old son, Ian, and another baby on the way. On one hand, as Jason says, he wishes he was further along. But being on the short side of 30 puts things in perspective.

"My dad told me he didn't really start farming until he was 30. He was farming, but he really didn't get a clear perspective or vision of what he needed to do to be successful and profitable until he was 30. I hope I am starting out of the gate with a good vision." □

## Pulling dad back into the picture

**D**on't farm. That's what Jennifer Mark's father told her for 15 years.

"I just kept telling him, 'But I want to farm so bad,'" the daughter recalls.

Ray Mark's pessimism was well founded. Even though his farm in southeast Minnesota's Houston County had been in the family since 1855, by the late 1980s it wasn't looking economically viable any more. In 1990, Jennifer left the 200-acre operation to study agricultural business. Ray sold the 30-cow milking herd, rented out the cropland and got a town job. Meanwhile, Jennifer ended up getting a degree in physical therapy and started a career, staying away from the farm for a dozen years. But the entire time, she still had plans to return and continue the Mark legacy on the operation. In 1992, she visited Australia and saw how farmers there were raising livestock using managed rotational grazing. Over the years, she also attended grazing field days sponsored by the Land Stewardship Project.

Jennifer, who had always enjoyed working with the cows growing up, became convinced that farming could be viable on the operation using grass-based livestock production ("I don't have an affinity for sitting on a tractor," she says). Jennifer now lives on the farm with Ray and her mother Anne. Also on the farm is Jennifer's 10-year-old son, Justin.

"My son and brother's kids are the sixth generation that would be on the farm," Jennifer says. "I would like to pass it on to that generation."

In 2001, she signed up for the Farm Beginnings course. Perhaps motivated a little by fear, her father signed up as well.

"He was afraid of what would happen if he didn't go," says his daughter, only half jokingly. Jennifer, 32, is less risk averse than her father, who is 55. She concedes that she is impatient to get back into farming and launch new enterprises. In the end having them both attend the classes was good, since Ray provided a stable balance to some of what Jennifer admits can be "her wild ideas."

Ray Mark also saw that family farming could be viable. During the classes, local established farmers talked about how they were using innovative production and marketing techniques to make a go of it. They even heard from lenders who were excited about the potential of sustainable agriculture. In

fact, at one point Ray Mark got a bit angry about how he had bought into the narrowly defined path of conventional agriculture early in his farming career, focusing on production without considering the cost of that production.

"If I had only known about these ideas 15 years ago, 20 years ago, we wouldn't have been in the situation we were in," he says.

Jennifer, for her part, got a chance to look at the farm from a different angle as she went through the Farm Beginnings brainstorming sessions and grappled with various enterprise options: "We were pretty traditional before, and we knew that wasn't working."

She also got a healthy dose of reality



in terms of farming and balancing it with an in-town job.

"You can raise 3,000 chickens, but you have to get rid of 3,000 chickens," she says. "And you have to get to work on time too."

Since completing Farm Beginnings, the Marks have moved forward to take the farm back and convert it to grass-based livestock production. In 2002 they got 28 ewe sheep and a ram through the no-interest livestock loan program

administered by Farm Beginnings. They chose a breed called "Border Lester," because it is a good dual-purpose animal: it can be used for both meat and wool production. In 2004, they raised 700 broiler chickens and a few pigs. Most of the production is marketed to consumers and retailers through the Southeast Food Network, an alliance of area farmers.

Jennifer is excited about future marketing opportunities through the Network, as well as at area farmers' markets and natural food stores. Right now they are grazing 30 acres of the 200-acre farm, and the plan is to double that grazing acreage in the coming year. One thing that will help is USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program cost-share money the family received for fencing.

The next big plan? The Marks are seriously considering bringing dairying back to the farm, perhaps as early as the spring of 2005. Because of the location of the farm in a narrow valley and the shallow water table in the area, it's considered environmentally sensitive, and the size of a dairy herd would be limited. But the Marks have been researching adding value to a small milking herd through on-farm processing. Ray recently attended a *Stockman Grass Farmer* magazine conference in Pennsylvania where he met other farmers who are doing on-farm processing.

Jennifer feels this kind of value-added enterprise could help start bringing people back to the farm—currently she, Anne and Ray have town jobs. So who gets to return first to fulltime farming? This is where the Mark daughter shows some uncharacteristic patience.

"Dad gets to go back to the farm first." □



Left to right: Anne, Ray, Justin & Jennifer Mark (LSP photo)



Joseph Guiney

## At an agricultural intersection

On a muggy June morning in southern Minnesota, Joseph Guiney leads a group of 14 people past his oat and soybean fields to two acres of neatly tended 12 x 150 foot square plots. He explains how he is using the plots to test six varieties of hard red spring wheat. Later in the summer, he will harvest the plots and take samples of the grain to a laboratory, which will test the wheat for milling and baking qualities. The research project is sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the USDA's Risk Management Agency Community Outreach and Assistance Partnership Program.

Small grains have all but disappeared in southern Minnesota, Guiney explains to the group, but he finds they are integral to his organic cropping operation. Having small grains like wheat and oats in the rotation with soybeans helps him naturally break up pest cycles and build up soil without the use of chemicals. The trouble is, there isn't much of a local market for small grains. The farmer needs to figure out how to add value to these grains and is hoping to do that by raising varieties that produce high quality baking products.

It's obvious from his presentation that Guiney, who has been farming since the early 1990s, knows what he's doing when it comes to crop production. Of the 240 acres, 145 are certified organic. The farm has been in his family since 1907 and Joseph's father was born on this place in 1917; Joseph's great grandfather homesteaded the next section over in 1856.

Guiney, 40, took the Farm Beginnings course in 2002-2003. He concedes that he pretty much has the production end of organic crop farming down. So why, after over a decade of farming, would someone take a beginning farmer course? The soft-spoken Guiney explains that he is at a juncture in his farming career. He feels that at some point in the near future he needs to make a decision on whether to farm fulltime, or not farm at all.

"I thought it would provide some tools for making that decision," he says, citing the example of an intense University of Nebraska seminar on the viability of processing commodities on the farm. On average 80 percent of the participants in that seminar decide not to undertake such an enterprise, says Guiney.

"Sometimes you need the tools to

decide *not* to do something."

Organic crop production is challenging enough. But on top of that Guiney is a fulltime social worker in the Twin Cities. There have been weeks when he has had to make the hour-and-a-half drive to the farm just outside of Austin half-a-dozen times.

Timing is everything when you're trying to control weeds in an organic crop field. Chemicals can make weed control easier and aren't as dependent on weather conditions. But herbicides and other chemicals aren't an option in organics.



Joseph Guiney (left), with University of Minnesota researcher Paul Porter (LSP photo)

For Guiney, the 2004 growing season was particularly difficult—unusually wet weather plagued southern Minnesota, spawning perfect conditions for weed infestations.

"You cultivate on a Saturday thinking you'll have Sunday too and then it rains," says Joseph with a hint of frustration.

Being a commuter farmer also means he can't have livestock on the farm, something Guiney is convinced is needed if there is to be a long-term nutrient cycle that's good for the soil. But he is also reluctant to jettison all of the invaluable agronomic knowledge he has gained over the years. Much of that came in the form of some tough on-the-job training.

In the early 1980s, Guiney got turned off to farming. He had worked for a large farmer and had raised a few hogs on his own, but hadn't made much money. So he went to St. John's University and got a degree in government. He did some missionary work and eventually became a

social worker. But then he read a special National Science Foundation report on sustainable agriculture and began gleaning alternative production information from *New Farm* magazine.

"That opened up my eyes to a world of possibilities," he says.

Guiney became convinced that if he were going to farm, it was going to be organically. He feels it's better for the soil life and produces a healthier product. He began converting the home farm to organic in the early 1990s.

"I made a lot of mistakes," he says. "A mistake on a conventional farm can be amplified on an organic farm."

And it wasn't just production missteps that dogged Guiney. In 1995, he raised his first certified organic soybeans.

"And I didn't even know where I was going to sell them," he says with a smile. "I was pretty green."

But the farmer also recalls fondly his "breakthrough year"—in 1998 he reined in the weeds, got good yields and sold a crop of organic food grade soybeans that was of exceptional quality.

Guiney says he found it valuable when taking Farm Beginnings to have existing farmers come in and talk about what they were doing. He also learned how to do market research on products—one presentation was put on by a well-known organic marketing expert. Guiney has been putting such information into practice with his on-farm research.

So what's the road-weary farmer decided? Nothing definite yet. But his research into producing small grains that he could add value to is bringing him a little closer to dealing with this impasse.

"Farming's a discipline—you're always going to be learning." □

## Screening new enterprises

Mark and Wendy Lange know that farming can provide the independence and quality of life that no in-town job can. But from their home near the western Minnesota community of Milan, the couple doesn't have to look far to see that even the most experienced farmers often succumb to rock-bottom commodity markets, sky-high production costs and fickle weather. So what business does a middle-aged couple (both are 45) have, thinking they can get a successful start on the land?

"If you do your research and homework there's no reason you can't do it," says Wendy confidently.

The Langes say Farm Beginnings helped them decide whether farming was really a sensible option for them, and if so, what form that farming enterprise should take. But it didn't raise expectations of farming success too high—at the course's core are the nuts and bolts of business planning and goal setting.

"They made it clear it wasn't going to be easy," says Wendy. "You have to have your goals and plans together before you get to a starting point."

For the Langes, having a farmer support network proved critical as they launched their farming operation soon after completing Farm Beginnings in 2002. The couple owns an 80-acre parcel that was homesteaded by Mark's great-grandfather in 1910 and they farm 20 more acres through a sharecrop arrangement. Both come from rural backgrounds but had very little hands-on experience with production agriculture. The small size of the farm and the fact they both had town jobs meant the Langes needed enterprises that could be managed part-time, but had the potential to grow into something profitable enough to allow one of them to stay on the farm fulltime. One key Farm Beginnings workshop is a brainstorming session where participants tally-up new ideas for enterprise development. For the Lange farm, everything from strawberry production to aquaculture was offered up by fellow course participants.

"There must have been 25 ideas people had for this place," says Mark. "It gave us a little different look at the farm."

Eventually the Langes settled on meat goat and organic grains production. Goats appealed to them because they were small and relatively easy to handle (the Langes have a horse barn that serves as a good

kidding area), and the market potential is good: the couple's research via the Internet and personal conversations showed that the U.S. is a net importer of goat meat, and there's a demand for good breeding stock.

They bought their first goats in December 2001 and kidded 17 babies from 12 does. In November 2002, they acquired 60 more does through a Farm Beginnings no-interest livestock loan program. That loan provided a major stepping-stone for the Langes' livestock enterprise: in 2004 they kidded 97 goats from 86 does. They market the goats at a South Dakota stockyard. In fact, the goat enterprise has grown so much that Wendy quit her town job in 2003.

She has more than the goats to keep



her busy these days. The Langes recently acquired two used stone flour mills to add value to the organic small grains they raise. An on-farm milling facility has been set up in a garage that was completely remodeled to meet health specifications. The Langes now sell organic wheat flour as well as pancake and biscuit mixes under their "Dry Weather Creek" label. Area natural food co-ops and

supermarkets carry their products. Making small grains economically viable is important to the Langes—they feel crops like wheat and oats fit well with their conservation-minded crop rotation.

But Wendy says they also knew from their research that marketing the grain as a raw commodity straight off their farm — especially a farm their size — would not be economically viable. Again the couple's research showed that there was a local market for organic flour and mixes. The flour enterprise also works well with their goat operation because they can feed screenings from the mill to the livestock.

Recently, they launched yet one more enterprise: producing eggs rich in Omega-3 by feeding flax to chickens. The Langes belong to a poultry cooperative that is marketing the eggs—they are popular with health-conscious consumers—to natural food stores and supermarkets throughout the region.

When considering changes to the operation, Mark and Wendy sit down and pencil out the pros and cons, weighing such factors as market availability and how it fits with their crop rotation and work load. Eggs got the thumbs up because the cooperative handles marketing and flax fits into their cropping rotation. They also liked that the enterprise could provide a steady cash flow throughout the year. It also helps that thanks to Farm Beginnings, the Langes know of other farmers in the region that are undertaking similar enterprises.

Says Wendy, "Just being around other people who have done these sorts of things successfully gave us a little jumpstart." □



Mark & Wendy Lange (LSP)

# The sustainable offspring

*Time, Soil, and Children provides insights into what it's like being a kid on a farm marching to a different agrarian tune.*

By Dana Jackson

The previous nine pages feature beginning farmers who are plowing their own paths in sustainable agriculture. But what about the children of farmers who were pioneers in alternative farming long before Farm Beginnings was launched? During her one-year appointment in the position of Endowed Chair of Agricultural Systems at the University of Minnesota, Beth Waterhouse set out to determine how the daughters and sons of these farmers felt. As part of this project, she interviewed the second generation of 13 farm families in Minnesota. The result is a delightful book, *Time, Soil, and Children: Conversations with the Second Generation of Sustainable Farm Families in Minnesota*.

Waterhouse writes that one thing came clear after her interviews: “The crop of children raised by these creative farm families mirrors at least one of the principles of sustainability—diversity. They are a testament to diversity, and a testament to fair mindedness, foresight, thoughtful transitions into and out of college years, and leadership—yes, the clear beginnings of a diverse new leadership in our state.”

The book is made up of actual replies the second generation gave to Waterhouse’s interview questions, grouped under theme topics. Here are some samples:

## *The meaning of work*

“First thing that comes to mind about growing up in our family is all the chores we had to do,” says **Connie (Fernholz) Carlson**.

“Back then, we had an idea that you had to feed cows, fix fence...” recalls **Deborah Lentz**. “You had to do chores or else the world wasn’t running. It was real life.”

**Colin King** reflects on the meaning of work. “It’s more of an ideology, and the core of it is—once you start a project you have to finish it.”

**Amanda Bilek** remembers more hard work: “Bailing hay was a lot of hard work. One summer I remember we put up about 10,000 bales of hay!”

“Mornings were madness,” remembers **Melissa (Ault) MacKimm** of her years

growing up near Austin, Minn. “There also were often chores before school started in the mornings. I remember that I had to make sure I had enough time, because I couldn’t go to school smelling like a barn. My world would fall apart if that happened.”

## *The power of leaving*

**Inga Haugen** left the farm with a clear intent to return one day: “I refuse to live in a place where I can’t see the stars at night.”

**Janaki Fischer Merritt**: “I don’t know how many papers I wrote about farming [at Carleton College]. The more other things I did, the more interested I was in farming.”

## *Rebels in farm country*

**Craig Fernholz**: “Even though organic has turned really big now, that farm is still unique. If you drive from Minneapolis out to Madison along Highway 7, you see corn and soybeans, corn and soybeans, along the whole way. As soon as you get to about a mile away from our house, you see corn and soybeans, wheat, barley, flax, oats, corn, soybeans, wheat, barley and alfalfa fields.”

**Melissa MacKimm** recalls: “When our farm changed into a sustainable farm, there were hard moments...I remember initially when the crops didn’t look as nice as the field next to them because of our different methods. Of course it was all new, the equipment was new, and the methods had not been tested all that much, and there was peer pressure coming from the outside.”

## *A next generation’s challenges*

**Deborah Lentz**, who now raises organic produce, knows firsthand that “Farming can be a burnout career from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Just being gone for five days in the summer is really hard—a summer family vacation together is impossible from June 1 to October 31... The pressure to do conventional farming is just so real. Organic vegetables are a lot of work.”

**Janaki Fischer Merritt** is happy farming with his parents: “Farming in the CSA [Community Supported Agriculture] style allows me to experiment and solve problems. I use my curiosity. The CSA is

a connection to people—a responsibility to them.”

**Josh Van Der Pol**, a partner with his parents selling pork from “Pastures of Plenty” farm: “It is actually harder to be marketing as well as farming. Yet the direct marketing customers are loyal; we want to keep them happy, and we see a future in it.”

**Craig Fernholz**, who now works at the Guthrie Theater says, “I think Dad’s a little worried that none of us are going to come back to the farm. I mean, he’s really happy for us that we’re all doing what we want to do, but at the same time he’s done all this work on the farm.”

## *Influences of their own children*

**Josh Van Der Pol**: “When Jacob was born, I wanted to give him the life I’d had.”

**Mike Minar**, whose family processes their milk on-farm: “I wanted to be able to go to lunch with my kids, or go to their school functions.”

And Mike’s son Nicholas, age 7, declares, “Mom, I’m gonna buy a creamery,” and often speaks about “when I’m old enough to work at the plant.”

## *Hopes for the future*

**Brandon Rutter**: “I hope (personally) to live where there is green, to raise some kids there, to be able to spend as much time with them as my parents did with me.”

**Adam Warthesen** speaks from his perspective as a Land Stewardship Project staffer: “I would like to see agriculture fundamentally changed, so that you’d no longer subsidize the production of row crops, where the taxpayer dollar is more tied to what the public actually wants rather than what corporate America desires.”

**Malena Arner Handeen**: “Our hopes for our children? I hope I can set an example for them—one that was set for me—the belief that you can leave things better than you found them.” □

*Dana Jackson is LSP’s Associate Director. She and her daughter Laura edited The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems (Island Press, 2002).*

## **To get the book**

*Time, Soil, and Children* is available from the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture for \$6. Call 1-800-909-6472 or visit [www.misa.umn.edu](http://www.misa.umn.edu) for more information.

## Extension educator scholarships available to attend Food Alliance meeting Feb. 10

Food Alliance Midwest has travel scholarships available for Extension educators in the Upper Midwest to attend the Alliance's Fourth Annual Meeting on Thursday, Feb. 10. The meeting will be held in Bloomington, Minn., from

approximately 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. An exact location will be announced later.

Scholarships will reimburse Extension educators for up to 200 miles of travel to attend the meeting. Scholarships are available on a first-come, first-served

basis. For more information and/or to reserve a scholarship, contact Food Alliance Midwest Certification Coordinator Ray Kirsch at 651-653-0618 or ray@foodalliance.org.

At the annual meeting, educators will have an opportunity to learn how farmers are using Food Alliance certification and how Food Alliance marketplace partners—distributors, retailers, and food service providers—are working with certified farms to capitalize on consumer demand for regional, environmentally friendly, socially responsible foods. □

## Minnesota Cooks! brings farmers, chefs & consumers together

Chefs, farmers and celebrities gathered for the second annual Minnesota Cooks! event at the Minnesota State Fair on Aug. 31. During the event, more than 2,500 State Fair visitors were shown the connections between leading chefs from the Twin Cities and farmers who grow foods in environmentally and socially responsible ways. Chefs put on cooking demonstrations while talking about why they prefer to source their food locally. Ingredients from Food Alliance Midwest farmers were used, and several farmers were on hand to talk about their production methods. Minnesota Farmers Union co-sponsored the event with Food Alliance Midwest.

*Right: Chef James Kyndberg of Bayport Cookery in Bayport, Minn., was one of the chefs who talked about why he prefers fresh, local ingredients when cooking.*

*Below: Fair-goers sampled dishes prepared by the chefs, and got a chance to chat about how the food was produced. (LSP photos)*



## Now is a good time to apply for Food Alliance Midwest certification

Winter is a good time for farmers to sit down and complete a Food Alliance Midwest application. An application takes about an hour to complete, and Food Alliance certification is good for three years. Thus, your investment of an hour pays dividends for years.

To receive an application, contact Food Alliance Midwest Certification Coordinator Ray Kirsch at 651-653-0618 or ray@foodalliance.org.

Applications are also available on the Food Alliance Web site at: [www.foodalliance.org](http://www.foodalliance.org).

You can meet Food Alliance staff and discuss Food Alliance certification in person at upcoming conferences. Here are some of the conferences we'll be attending:

- ✓ Wisconsin Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Conference, Jan. 9 -11, in Stevens Point, Wis.
- ✓ Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference, Jan. 14-15, in Des Moines, Iowa
- ✓ Minnesota Pork Congress, Jan. 19 -20, in Minneapolis, Minn.

A special thanks to volunteers Alecia Ball and Krista Mattson who helped stuff gift bags, distributed flyers and prepared a mailing. Also, Katherine Mullen of the *Blue Sky Guide* and Brian Erickson of Minnesota Grown were instrumental in the success of this event. Finally, thanks to everyone who dined at participating restaurants on Oct. 5. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for details on the 2005 Dine Fresh Fine Local event.

For more details about Dine Fresh Dine Local and how to support local food production while eating out in the Twin Cities region, visit [www.dinefresh.dinelocal.com](http://www.dinefresh.dinelocal.com), or call 651-698-5586. □

## Eat Well Guide

The Eat Well Guide ([www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org)) is a free, online directory of sustainable meat, poultry, dairy and eggs. As a partner organization with the Eat Well Guide, the Land Stewardship Project has submitted names of farmers that are on our Stewardship Food Network List, in the Pride of the Prairie directory, or are certified by Food Alliance Midwest. You can update your farm's listing in the Eat Well Guide by searching under "Advanced Search," and typing your farm's name under "Keywords." Once you find your record, click the link to "E-mail us if you see any errors or omissions with this entry." The Eat Well Guide also plans on e-mailing producers every six months for any changes or updates.

If your farm isn't listed, contact Cathy at 651-653-0618 or [cathye@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cathye@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Dine Fresh Dine Local a delicious success

At least 200 dining parties showed their support for local farmers on Oct. 5 during the first annual "Dine Fresh Dine Local" event in the Twin Cities. This was a special one-day culinary event involving 13 restaurants. Participating restaurants donated a portion of the day's proceeds to the Land Stewardship Project, Food Alliance Midwest and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Minnesota Grown program for their work in promoting sustainable farming and healthy local foods. During the event, gift bags containing a 2005 *Blue Sky Guide* and a *Minnesota Grown Directory* were handed out. The *Blue Sky Guide* booklets included in the gift bags were courtesy of Great River Energy. LSP memberships were awarded to 13 people who entered a

drawing the night of the event.

"The event was very successful, and we were very pleased with the turnout," says Tracy Singleton of Birchwood Cafe. "We would like to do this event more than once a year."

Participating St. Paul restaurants were Black Dog Coffee & Wine Bar, Chet's Taverna, Tanpopo Noodle Shop, Trotter's Cafe & Bakery, and Zander Cafe.

Minneapolis restaurants that took part were Auriga, Birchwood Cafe, Cafe Brenda, French Meadow Bakery and Cafe, May Day Cafe, Restaurant Alma, St. Martin's Table, and Signature Cafe.

The event was covered by the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *Star Tribune*, *Minnesota Women's Press*, *Country Today*, *Agri News*, *Mix* and FM 107.1 radio.

# Stewardship Food Network

The *Stewardship Food Network* is a list of Land Stewardship Project members who produce meat, dairy products, eggs, vegetables, fruit, flowers, grain and other goods in a sustainable manner. The Network also lists LSP member-businesses selling or processing food produced by other LSP members.

Some of the production methods used by the Network farmers include certified organic, antibiotic and hormone-free, humanely raised and slaughtered, free of genetically modified organisms, pasture-based, integrated pest management to reduce pesticide use, deep-bedded straw livestock housing and conservation tillage. The listing provides contact information for the farmers so consumers can call

or e-mail them personally to learn more about production methods, availability of products and prices. For a complete listing, contact our Twin Cities office at 651-653-0618, or go to [www.landstewardshipproject.org/foodfarm-main.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/foodfarm-main.html).

LSP periodically updates and makes corrections to its Stewardship Food Network list. If you are an LSP member who would like to be listed, call 651-653-0618 or e-mail [cathye@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cathye@landstewardshipproject.org). Here are the latest additions:

### North Central MN

- **Eller Family Farm**  
Barbara Eller

12722 350th Street  
Onamia, MN 56359  
Phone: 320-532-4946; 800-323-1361  
E-mail: [ellerb@mlecmm.net](mailto:ellerb@mlecmm.net)  
Web site: [www.ellerfarm.com](http://www.ellerfarm.com)  
→ Products: *Grass-fed beef, poultry, eggs, wildcrafts*

### Southeast MN

□ **Wolf Hill Farm**  
Caroline van Schaik  
& Christopher Iremonger  
40002 Wolf Hill Drive  
La Crescent, MN 55947  
Phone: 507-643-0618  
E-mail: [wolfhill@acegroup.cc](mailto:wolfhill@acegroup.cc)  
→ Products: *Grass-fed lamb*



# Membership Update



## Giving the gift of stewardship

By Cathy Eberhart

Gift-giving can be a complicated thing. There can be great joy in picking out special gifts to show our appreciation for each other. But making the gift meaningful, and not just something that will be hidden away in a closet, can be a major challenge.

The Land Stewardship Project is offering stewardship gifts that I hope will be meaningful to the people in your lives:

- ✓ Give a gift of hope to your loved ones—and to beginning farmers eager to make a living on the land.
- ✓ In the name of your favorite cooks, invest in work to produce more healthful food for our communities.
- ✓ Honor those active citizens in your life with a gift that empowers people to fight for family farms and the environment.

With a gift of any size, we will send the recipients a beautiful full-color certificate notifying them of your gift and giving them more information about the work that your gift helps accomplish in their honor.

With gifts of \$35 or more, we will also give them a one-year membership in LSP—a practical gift that includes a subscription to the *Land Stewardship Letter*, a Food Alliance Midwest calendar featuring local foods recipes from some of Minnesota's best cooks, a copy of our Stewardship Food Network list, and other resources for stewardship of the land and table.

With a gift of \$50 or more, we will send them your choice of a Land Stewardship Project mug, hat or T-shirt.

You and your loved ones will know your gift will be invested in the work of supporting beginning farmers, promoting healthy local food and empowering citizens to fight for family farms and the environment. This is the good work that we are accomplishing together, but it can also be your gift to give.

Look for more information on the LSP

Web site at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-joinus-gift.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-joinus-gift.html). You can also use the gift order forms we've provided here on page 23.

For more information, or to get more order forms, contact me at 651-653-0618 or [cathy@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cathy@landstewardshipproject.org). Happy gift giving! □

Cathy Eberhart is LSP's Membership Coordinator.

*"LSP is my best investment made so far in this lifetime."*

—Iowa farmer Greg Koether

*"I couldn't agree more with the note dad wrote to you, so I told him to enroll me as a member also."*

—Kayla Anne Koether

*(from a membership renewal note written by the Koethers)*

## Re-charge with **LIVE WIRE**

Sign up for **LIVE-WIRE** to get regular e-mail updates and news from the Land Stewardship Project. Stay current on information and activities related to land stewardship, local food and grassroots organizing.

To subscribe, call Louise Arbuckle at 651-653-0618 or e-mail [lsqwbl@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lsqwbl@landstewardshipproject.org) and put in the subject line "Subscribe LIVE-WIRE." □

## Support LSP in your workplace

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

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



You can support LSP in your workplace by giving through the Minnesota Environmental Fund. Options include giving a designated amount through payroll deduction, or a single gift. You may also choose to give to the entire coalition or specify the organization of your choice within the coalition, such as the Land Stewardship Project. If your employer does not provide this opportunity, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For more information, call 651-653-0618 or e-mail [lsqwbl@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lsqwbl@landstewardshipproject.org).

## Gift Order Form

My Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

- Enclosed is my gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_ in honor of the persons listed below.  
→ I would like to become a Land Stewardship Project Member myself.  
I've enclosed membership dues of \$35 or \$\_\_\_\_\_.

*Land Stewardship Project will send a colorful certificate to let people know of your thoughtful gift.*

### Payment Information

Check enclosed,  
payable to *Land  
Stewardship Project*

Charge \$\_\_\_\_\_ to  
my \_\_\_ Visa \_\_\_MC

\_\_\_\_\_  
Card Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
Exp. Date

1) I would like to give a gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_ in honor of the person/s listed below

Gift Recipient Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

They are most interested in  
(check all that apply):

- Farm Beginnings™  
 Healthful Local Foods  
 Empowerment Through  
Organizing

Gifts of \$35 or more include a one-year Land Stewardship Project membership.

Gifts of \$50 or more also include choice of  bucket hat  baseball hat  mug  T-shirt (circle size: L XL)

## Opportunities

## Resources

### Dairy farmers looking for land

Reagan and Kevin Hulbert are looking to rent a dairy farm where they could graze 50 to 100 cows. They are recent graduates of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings™ program in southeast Minnesota, and have extensive dairying experience. They are open to many possibilities, but their main goal is to have the opportunity to graze cows.

If you would be interested in working with them, call the Hulberts at 507-523-3599, or e-mail [wellness\\_rk@yahoo.com](mailto:wellness_rk@yahoo.com).

Another Farm Beginnings graduate, Jon Kaiser, is also looking for land (see page 10). He is currently building up a dairy herd through a share-milking arrangement on a grazing farm in southeast Minnesota. Jon, along with his wife Mindy, are looking for situations where, for example, they can buy

their own homestead and milking facilities and rent grazing land.

Jon can be contacted at 507-635-5985.

### GMO legal guide

Considering whether to plant genetically modified seed next spring? *Farmers' Guide to GMOs* is a new publication that offers help for American farmers trying to negotiate the legal minefield of genetically engineered crops. Contamination, technology agreements, non-GMO warranties and seed-saving are some of the topics addressed in the guide, which is a co-publication of Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG) and Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA (RAFI-USA).

To download a copy, visit [www.flaginc.com](http://www.flaginc.com) or [www.rafiusa.org](http://www.rafiusa.org). For more information, call Dave Moeller at 651-223-5400.

Speaking of FLAG, the nonprofit law center has a new toll-free number (1-877-860-4349) that Minnesota farmers can use to get brief legal advice and referrals.

### LSP communications internship

The Land Stewardship Project is looking for a communications intern. This internship will provide hands-on experience in all aspects of nonprofit external communications. The position is not paid. The location of the internship may be in either South Minneapolis or White Bear Lake, Minn. Some of the duties include:

- Researching fact sheets and articles.
- Editing and writing for the *Land Stewardship Letter*.
- Working with the media.

Please submit a cover letter, resume, and three writing samples to Louise Arbuckle at: LSP, 2200 Fourth Street, White Bear Lake, MN 55110; or [lsplib@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lsplib@landstewardshipproject.org).

Questions? E-mail Louise or call her at 651-653-0618.

## STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

- **JANUARY**—LSP will hold a series of meetings for members to provide input on the next federal farm bill (details to be announced); Contact: LSP Policy Program, 612-722-6377; marks@landstewardshipproject.org
- **JAN. 4—Minn. Legislative Session Begins**; Contact: LSP's Policy Program, 612-722-6377
- **JAN. 7-8—Winter Meeting of the Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group**, St. James, Neb.; Contact: Mark Schultz, LSP, 612-722-6377; marks@landstewardshipproject.org
- **JAN. 8—Crow River SFA New Farm Revolution meeting**, Howard Lake, Minn.; Contact: Connie Lahr, 320-963-3690; pclahr@yahoo.com
- **JAN. 9-11—Wis. Fresh Market Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conf.**; Stevens Point, Wis.; Contact: 920-478-3852
- **JAN. 12-13—Illinois Organic Production Conference**, Normal, Ill.; Contact: 217-333-1588; www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/conf/index.htm
- **Holistic Management Courses**, Albuquerque, N. Mex.; Contact: 508-842-5252; www.holisticmanagement.org/ww\_2005Rendezvous.cfm
- **JAN. 14-15—Practical Farmers of Iowa 20th Annual Conf.**, Des Moines, Iowa; Contact: 515-232-5661; www.practicalfarmers.org
- **JAN. 19—Farm Biodiversity Sessions & Tour, featuring LSP member Jim Riddle**, Pacific Grove, Cal.; Contact: 831-761-8408; www.eco-farm.org
- **JAN. 19-22—25th Annual Ecological**

**Farming Conference**, Pacific Grove, Cal.; Contact: 831-763-2111; www.eco-farm.org

→ **JAN. 21-22—2005 Minnesota Organic & Grazing Conference**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: 651-296-1277; www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/organic/default.htm

→ **JAN. 22—Wis. Farm Direct Conference**, Pewaukee, Wis.; Contact: 262-857-1945; www.savorwisconsin.com/events

## Lappé in Minn. Feb. 11

On Friday, Feb. 11, Frances Moore Lappé will be featured at two LSP events in southeast Minnesota. Lappé, a leading sustainability and anti-hunger activist, is the author of *Diet for a Small Planet*, among other books. Event details were being worked out at this writing. For more information, call 507-523-3366 or e-mail lspse@landstewardshipproject.org.

- **JAN. 28-29—7th Annual Midwest Value Added Ag Conference**, Eau Claire, Wis. Contact: 715-834-9672; www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.htm
- **FEB. 1-2—Beginning Vegetable & Fruit Grower Workshop**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mfvga.org; 763-434-0400
- **FEB. 3-4—Upper Midwest Regional Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference & Trade Show**, St. Cloud, Minn.; Contact: www.mfvga.org; 763-434-0400
- **FEB. 9-12—Advanced Organic Vegetable Production Workshop**, East Troy, Wis.; Contact: 262-642-3303, ext. 100; www.michaelfieldsagainst.org
- **FEB. 10—Food Alliance Midwest 4th Annual Meeting** (see page 20 for details on Extension educator scholarships), 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Bloomington, Minn.; Contact: Jim Ennis, 651-265-3684;

- jim@foodalliance.org
- **FEB. 11—Churches' Center for Land & People Rural Life Gathering**, Sinsinawa, Wis.; Contact: Tony Ends, 608-748-4411, ext. 805; cclp@mwci.net
- **FEB. 11-12—Northern Plains Sustainable Ag Society Winter Conference, featuring Sally Fallon**, Aberdeen, S. Dak.; Contact: 701-883-4304; www.npsas.org
- **FEB. 19—14th Annual Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Annual Conference, with the theme "Success and Succession on the Land: Sustainable Farming's Next Generation,"** University of Minnesota-Morris; Contact: Mary Jo Forbord, 320-760-8732; mforbord@sfa-mn.org; www.sfa-mn.org
- **FEB. 25-26—16th Annual Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference, featuring a keynote by LSP's Dana Jackson** entitled "Organic Farming & Wild Nature: Setting a Higher Standard," LaCrosse, Wis.; Contact: 715-772-3153; www.mosesorganic.org
- **MARCH—LSP will lead a farmer fly-in to Washington, D.C., to push for federal farm policy reform** (details to be announced); Contact: LSP Policy Program, 612-722-6377; marks@landstewardshipproject.org
- **APRIL 30-MAY 1—2005 Living Green Festival/Community Food & Farm Festival**, Grandstand, Minnesota State Fair Grounds, St. Paul; Contact: 651-215-0218; www.livinggreen.org

For the latest on meetings, field days and other activities, check out [www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-calendar.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-calendar.html).



**Land Stewardship Project**  
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