

The Land Stewardship

Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

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Spring 2008



LSP Farm Beginnings® graduates Ryan and Kristine Jepsen see farming as a way to protect the environment while making a good living (see page 22).

—*Immigrant Issue Still Hot in Farm Country*—

—*Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol*—

—*RIM-Clean Energy Proposal: Perennials, Farming & Economics*—

—*CSA Farm Directory Available*—

—*Biofuel's Clean Sweep*—

—*Review: Michael Pollan as Nutritionist*—



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

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Rocks, farming, love & loyalty

EDITOR'S NOTE: On a frigid Saturday morning in January, Land Stewardship Project member-farmer Tom Frantzen gave a keynote at the Minnesota Organic Conference in St. Cloud, Minn. Tom and his wife Irene raise crops and livestock in northeast Iowa. Over the years, they have gained recognition in the sustainable and organic agriculture community for their on-farm research, as well as their leadership in innovative marketing. Tom is a popular and passionate speaker. On this page are some excerpts of Frantzen's St. Cloud talk. To hear audio of the keynote, check LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast by going to www.landstewardshipproject.org, and clicking on the **Listen to the Latest Podcast** link under **Take Action** (it's episode 45).

Who causes change?

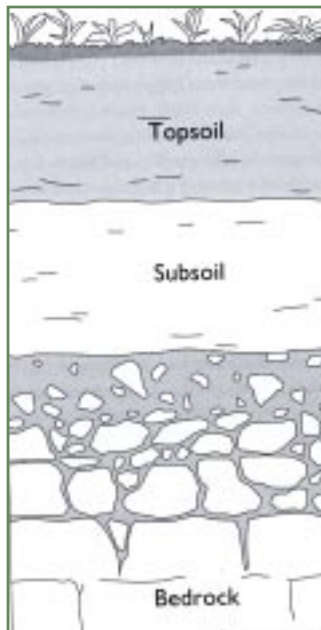
Change is not created by comfortable people. If you are a comfortable person with the world around you, you will not be an agent of change. Who creates change? *Uncomfortable* people create change.

Geology & affairs of the heart

I'm currently writing the history of this farm...I'm writing the history of the land that actually goes back to the origin of the surface...I knew a few things about our geological past and our natural history, but I didn't know a heck of a lot, and it took me about 18 months to read fairly in-depth physically where our land came from. If I talk about this at the coffee shop in Alta Vista on Sunday mornings, you know what they do? They throw Frantzen out on the street and make damn sure the door's locked. These people don't want to hear about geology; I don't understand that.

But nonetheless, what's happening is this: I now understand where we came from physically, earth-wise, and the amount of time it took. And I'll be 56 this March, and I drive through the same land and the same places I've driven for 50-some years, only I have a brand new love for the world around me. I've fallen in love with the land I've looked at for my entire life...I leave Clear Lake, Iowa, 70 miles west of us where the Des Moines lobe carved our land 10,000-20,000 years ago. Then I drive through the Iowan surface where we're at—that's a quarter of a million years old. And then we head over to Decorah, just 30 miles way, a 350-million-year-old surface and I only traveled a hundred miles. Man, what change we had. Fantastic change and change over time....

I believe in God because water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit and expands as it thaws. That's one of the most fantastic things you can imagine. Do you know we would not be where we are at all if it



wasn't for the fact that water turns solid at 32 degrees Fahrenheit? That's why we have the soil surface we have. And you know when it expands and it thaws, you know what that does? It gets into rocks and that develops our soils. You can say that's theology, that's geology. Pretty fantastic I think.

A 'new' discovery

A fantastic discovery: cows prefer to walk around and grass prefers to stand still. Now that's after 30 years of making the cow's behavior change by making her

stand still while we find new ways to haul the grass around and change where it's existing. We're trying to change what we think the world should be when in reality nature says you got it all going in the wrong direction.

Personal values

I do not know of anything more powerful than the basic principles behind Holistic Management. It says you cannot make good decisions without having an understanding of what you want out of life that is oriented to your personal values. What's it going to take to sustain what you want out of life long term and what resources will it require?

...Our farm continues to change, but I don't fear the change. What we fall back on is, do these changes conflict with what we want out of life or are they integrated with our personal values? Once you have that stake set in the ground, you can start to make progress.

...We have organic market hogs farrow-to-finish, and we have organic cattle with the beef cowherd. And people say, "You can't afford to feed high priced organic grain." And now that's an interesting question, isn't it? I mean, how can we afford to justify feeding high priced organic grains? Well, how would I make that decision if we didn't have our personal goals? What does the farm want long term? It wants a profitable, diversified farm with a stable resource base and a stable income. Well, we have a stable market with a stable pay price and the farm is doing very well, and feeding the grains is part of our long-term sustainability. I think it is a problem for people who have not had the discussion about what they want out of life and what their values are.

Loyalty to the future

There are niche markets in pork today that are being threatened by the farmers who raise livestock for them and who want to stop raising hogs. What a tragedy it would be if niche pork would be hurt and or destroyed because the farmers raising pork for them decide to opt out for a short-term buck and sell their grain for more money, and abandon the long-term stability of the marketplace that niche pork offered them. Now that's a tragedy. Because if you don't patronize the people who got you where you are in the niche market, don't expect those people to come back tomorrow. Being loyal is terribly important. Being loyal to the future is what we have to have. □

Immigration reform is needed now

By Ernesto Velez Bustos

Remember when Congress was interested in “immigration reform?” In 2006 and 2007, bills were proposed that promised to deal with an issue that has split communities and families apart. Now that we are in an election year, there is little chance such legislation will be moved in the near future. But the problem hasn’t gone away. The system is still so broken it threatens to undermine our food system while splintering families and making it possible for agribusiness to abuse basic worker rights. And thousands of Minnesota agricultural workers live in fear.

Here at Centro Campesino, we work with agricultural laborers who are toiling away in Minnesota’s canneries and packing plants, as well as its large livestock operations. Many employers are ethical and treat workers well. But some are not, and they are taking advantage of the unsettled nature of our immigration

policy to abuse employees. The fact that the “immigrant worker” issue remains up in the air works to the advantage of employers who see employees not as people, but as expendable machines.

For such unscrupulous employers, fear fueled by confusion over one’s status is a powerful tool. We’ve seen cases on large dairy and hog operations where workers have not been paid for weeks, or they are paid less than the going rate, or they are not given adequate time off. But these workers don’t report such abuses because of the fear that they will be deported. Such fear affects workers no matter their status, documented as well as undocumented. It also feeds into the general perception that immigrants and migrants are only here to break the law. The recent government raids in the Minnesota communities of Austin, Willmar and Worthington only serve to exacerbate this climate of fear and suspicion.

Even though Washington or Saint Paul may not be paying close attention to this issue right now, we all know lawmakers

will eventually pick it up again. That’s why it is critical that anyone who cares about basic worker rights and a just food system needs to call for true reform. If we don’t get comprehensive, national reform, piecemeal measures that do more harm than good may get snuck in.

For example, the U.S. Labor Department recently announced a proposal that would change the H-2A visa program. This program is a way for agricultural workers to come into the U.S. and work for less than a year. However, the Labor Department’s proposed changes would make it easier for employers to abuse workers through the H-2A program. For example, it eases standards employers must follow to show that they have tried to hire domestic workers first. It could also lower wages and lower housing standards for H-2A visa holders. Federal officials are now accepting public comments before they determine whether the changes should go into effect before the 2008 growing season. The government needs to get the message that this proposal is a mistake, that it does nothing to deal with the larger issue of supporting our food system while ensuring basic worker rights, and that in fact it could be

Immigration, see page 5...

Letters

Ignorant stewardship

Who left the gate open in your new logo? This is poor stewardship out of ignorance, forgetfulness or carelessness. Your 25th Anniversary poster, on the other hand, is right to the point(s).

— Earl Rosenwinkel
Duluth, Minn.

A bonding experience

Your *Ear to the Ground* podcast is an endless series of revelations. Just this week, I listened to the episode dealing with permaculture of hazelnuts and raspberries, the one where wood chips made from sawmill off-cuts were used as mulch, the one with the passive greenhouse producing greens when it’s snowing and the one with the Indian journalist which was an awesome combination of tears, anger and laughter, etc. Hearing your kind of farmers gives me a tremendous amount of hope.

I am an aerospace engineer living in southwest France and with the magic of the Internet and the quality of your podcast, I feel special bonds with Minnesota, even if I’ve never been there.

— Mandarine Lechat
Southwest France

You can read Lechat’s blog on his work to create a green life-style in rural France at www.wisemandarine.com. To listen to LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcasts, see www.landstewardshipproject.org, and

click on the **Podcast link under Take Action.**

Keeping it local

I love your website. I manage a farmers’ market in Williamsville, N.Y., and find your website inspirational and helpful. Please know that our market is helping my community think local. You have lifted my spirits today!

— Lynn Schwab
Williamsville, N.Y.



What’s on your mind?

Got an opinion? Comments? Criticisms? Of course you do.

We like to print letters, commentaries, essays, poems, photos and illustrations related to LSP’s work. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Work published in the *Land Stewardship Letter* does not necessarily represent the views of the Land Stewardship Project.

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

a huge step back in the wrong direction.

Rather, we need comprehensive immigration reform—the kind that provides workers with a legal path to citizenship, reunites families and ensures basic human rights. One positive piece of bipartisan legislation that has been proposed in Congress is the “AgJOBS” bill. The legislation would allow some 800,000 undocumented workers to register, pay fines and legalize their immigrant status by working in agriculture three to five more years before they could qualify for a green card. It could also streamline the H-2A visa program in a way that helps employers while not compromising worker rights. AgJOBS is not perfect, but let’s face it: we will never find the perfect immigration reform package that satisfies everyone. Proposals like AgJOBS go a long ways toward creating comprehensive reform.

That’s why even though immigration is not on the front burner in Washington these days, we need to keep working to educate ourselves and our decision makers about this issue so that when it does return front and center, sound policy will trump political expediency.

On a larger scale, we also need to be

aware of the role trade policy plays in the immigration issue, or we will never get at the root causes. Consider this: the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has flooded Mexico with cheap raw commodities, decimating the farm economy there. The number of immigrants from Mexico *decreased* by 18 percent in the three years before NAFTA went into effect. During the first eight years of NAFTA, the annual number of Mexican immigrants *increased* by more than 60 percent. People in Mexico don’t wake up one day and say, “Let’s travel to the U.S. and see what we can find.” Forces push them. They follow the money, and if we don’t make trade fair for all involved, people are going to keep coming out of desperation.

Why should you care whether we have comprehensive immigration (or trade) reform? Well, as much as 70 percent of the 1.6 million farm workers in America

are undocumented. That doesn’t even count all the workers involved in processing, cooking and serving your food. This “hidden” part of the economy affects anyone who eats. Just as importantly, I don’t think anyone wants to live in a country where we have legalized slavery, and that’s what the current broken system allows. □

Ernesto Velez Bustos is a community organizer with Centro Campesino, which works to improve the lives of migrant workers and rural Latinos and Latinas. It has offices in the Minnesota communities of Owatonna and Austin. For more information on Centro Campesino’s work, see the Spring 2007 issue of the Land Stewardship Letter at www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-lsl.html. The group can be contacted at www.centrocampesino.net or 507-446-9599.

Creating a just food system

The Land Stewardship Project has been meeting with organizers at Centro Campesino to discuss how the two organizations can work together to create a fair and just food and farming system. For more information, contact LSP’s Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

For details on how to comment on the Labor Department’s H-2A proposal, as well as how to support the AgJOBS proposal, see www.ufw.org.

LSP immigration & agriculture history quiz

EDITOR’S NOTE: The *Land Stewardship Letter* first ran a migrant and immigrant worker quiz in 2006 to correct some misconceptions about this highly-charged issue. Land Stewardship Project organizer Doug Nopar recently updated the quiz.

True or False

- 1) ___ Migrant agricultural workers from Mexico began coming to work in Minnesota more than 90 years ago (in the 1910s).
- 2) ___ The percentage of U.S. population that was foreign-born in 2002 was 11.5 percent.
- 3) ___ The percentage of U.S. population that was foreign-born in 1900 was 15 percent.
- 4) ___ I am a Mexican woman living in Mexico. My husband is a legal permanent resident of the U.S. If I want to legally immigrate to the United States, I will need to wait 15 years for my visa.
- 5) ___ There were 2.5 million undocumented Mexicans in the U.S. in 1995.

- 6) ___ As of 2006, there were 10.5 million undocumented Mexicans in the U.S.
- 7) ___ If they lose their jobs, most undocumented immigrant workers have access to welfare and food stamps as a safety net.
- 8) ___ In the U.S., children aged 10 can be legally employed as agricultural laborers.
- 9) ___ Due to NAFTA, there have been 2 million small farms lost in Mexico since 1995.
- 10) ___ The average current weekly wage for a laborer in Mexico is \$100.
- 11) ___ It was in the Mexican-American war of 1848 that the U.S. military took from Mexico the territories of Texas,

New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado.

12) ___ If I want to legally hire a Mexican worker to work on my farm, I need an H-2A visa for him/her. I must know who that individual is before they come to the U.S. I must also advertise for the position here in the local community and find no suitable local applicants that I can hire. I must file extensive paperwork and wait three to eight months for the visa to be available.

Answers: 1) True; 2) True; 3) True; 4) True; 5) True; 6) True; 7) False – undocumented immigrants are only eligible for a small amount of emergency medical assistance; 8) False – correct answer is age 12; 9) True; 10) False – correct answer is \$40-50 per week; 11) True; 12) True

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; University of Wisconsin Extension’s 2007 Western Wisconsin Rural Immigration Summit; National Agricultural Workers Survey of the U.S. Department of Labor; Pew Hispanic Center; Centro Campesino; Winona County Human Services Director Craig Brooks.

Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

→ Myth:

Because of petroleum-based fertilizers, we do not need to build soil using plant residue and other natural sources of organic matter.

→ Fact:

From tropical rain forests to Midwestern crop fields, nitrogen is a keystone of plant growth. And man-made nitrogen fertilizer is seen as a critical element in the production of crops such as corn. Indeed, the technology that allows us to create nitrogen in a factory (it has its basis in World War II munitions research) has made some pretty impressive corn yields possible over the years. Nitrogen fertilizer use on the farm has created a bit of a treadmill effect: as better hybrids and other advances increase yields, farmers have been advised to apply higher doses of fertilizer in an effort to replace the increasing amounts of nitrogen being removed from the soil by all that nutrient-hungry super-corn.

In recent years, another argument for applying lots of nitrogen has been that since it increases soil fertility, it builds that soil's organic matter and this increases its ability to trap carbon, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But a study out of the world's oldest experimental field under continuous corn finds that excessive nitrogen fertilizer actually accelerates decomposition of crop residue such as corn stalks by sending soil microbes on a kind of manic feeding frenzy.

In fact, research at the famous Morrow Plots at the University of Illinois found that heavy doses of nitrogen not only burn through all the crop residue, but also start working on the organic carbon in the soil itself. Over a 50-year period, this reduced yields in continuous corn by 20 percent, and

released a lot of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. These results are confirmed by long-term field studies from around the world.

The Illinois study is significant for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is that the results come out of a highly-respected experimental field that's been around for 100 years. Since synthetic nitrogen fertilizer was first applied to the Morrow Plots in 1955, researchers have been able to compare the impact on soil carbon and organic matter content both pre-nitrogen and post-nitrogen. The scientists began the study after they noted that corn growth and yields in the plots had been dropping despite massive applications of nitrogen and residue such as corn stalks. They soon found out why.

"What we learned is that after five decades of massive inputs of residue carbon ranging from 90 to 124 tons per acre, all of the residue carbon had disappeared, and there had been a net decrease in soil organic carbon that averaged 4.9 tons per acre," says Saeed Khan, one of the soil scientists who conducted the research. "Regardless of the crop rotation, the decline became much greater with the higher nitrogen rate."

Khan and the other scientists are quick to point out that nitrogen fertilizer has its place in corn production. But this and other studies make it clear that in many cases, we are still applying too much of a good thing. Too often manure and nitrogen-fixing plants such as alfalfa are not given proper credit by agronomists and farmers for their ability to increase fertility. And rather than rely on fertilizer rate recommendations

that cover a general region or soil type, farmers should use precise soil tests that measure exactly how much nitrogen their plants need to grow. The "late season nitrogen test" can be particularly useful, since it provides precise information on how much fertilizer growing corn plants need during the growing season itself.

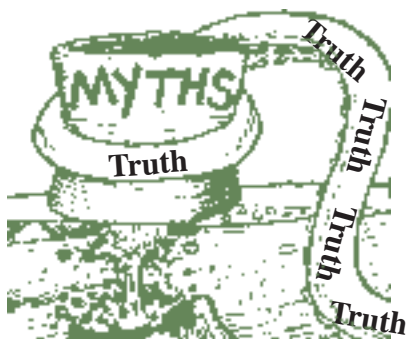
Reducing nitrogen applications helps the farmer's financial bottom line, but it's also good for the environment. For one thing, excessive nitrogen runoff from the Midwest has been blamed for contaminated drinking water, as well as for creating an oxygen-starved "Dead Zone" in the Gulf of Mexico.

In addition, there has been talk lately of utilizing corn "stover" or "stalks" to produce cellulosic biofuels. Although such material, which is left in the field after harvest, helps build up soil quality, reduce erosion and retain moisture, some have argued that fertilizers can take their place, freeing us to use the entire corn plant as fuel (see page 24).

The Morrow research shows that nitrogen fertilizer is not a good replacement for crop residue and that removing this "waste product" is bad for the soil, bad for our water and bad for the climate.

→ More information:

For more on the research at the Morrow Plots, see the Nov./Dec. 2007 issue of the *Journal of Environmental Quality* at <http://jeq.scijournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/36/6/1821>.



Myth Busters on the Internet

The *Land Stewardship Letter's* popular *Myth Buster* series is available on our website. You can download pdf versions at www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-myth.html. For information on obtaining paper copies, contact Brian DeVore at 612-729-6294 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org. □



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LSP News

LSP's 2008 Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol brings citizens & legislators together over local food

More than 200 citizens and legislators came together over local food at the Land Stewardship Project's 3rd Annual Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol Feb. 19.

At the breakfast, Sen. Ellen Anderson, Chair of the Minnesota Senate's Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee, spoke to the importance of the RIM-Clean Energy initiative (see page 15).

"Minnesota needs to continue as a national leader in bioenergy. This means creating incentives to move the industry towards native perennials as feedstock for bioenergy," Anderson said.

During the event, LSP's State Policy Committee unveiled "Renewing Family Farms and Rural Minnesota"—its legislative platform for 2008 (see page 13).

After the breakfast, LSP members met with their Representatives and Senators to lobby for policies that support rural communities, family farmers and the environment.

As in the past, the breakfast featured food grown on the farms of numerous LSP members. The meal was prepared by chef Brad Beal, along with Barb Nelson and other LSP volunteers. □



Since its debut in 2006, LSP's Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol has become a popular venue for farmers and others concerned about rural communities and the environment to get together with lawmakers to discuss positive policy options. (LSP photo)

Where did the food come from?

Sausage—Hidden Stream Farm, Elgin, Minn. ✓ **eggs**—Earth Be Glad Farm, Lewiston, Minn. ✓ **bacon**—Farm on Wheels/Cozy Meadows, Kenyon, Minn. ✓ **bacon**—Pastures A' Plenty, Kerkhoven, Minn. ✓ **coffee**—Velasquez Family Coffee, Saint, Paul, Minn. ✓ **bacon**—Niman Ranch, Thornton, Iowa ✓ **honey**—Honey & Herbs, Benson, Minn. ✓ **milk and cream**—Cedar Summit Farm, New Prague, Minn. ✓ **eggs**—EarthRise Farm, Madison, Minn. ✓ **oatmeal and eggs**—Dry Weather Creek Farm, Milan, Minn. ✓ **muffins, rolls and bagels**—Benson's Bakery, Benson, Minn. ✓ **milk, cream and butter**—Organic Valley Midwest, La Farge, Wis. ✓ **apple juice**—Pinetree Apple Orchards, White Bear Lake, Minn. ✓ **apple juice**—Whitewater Valley Orchards, St. Charles, Minn. □



Almost two dozen volunteers helped make the Family Farm Breakfast a success; some arrived at 5 a.m. to crack eggs, fry bacon, cook oatmeal and brew coffee for the event. (LSP photo)



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LSP News

Jackson named ‘Sustainable Woman of Ag’

Dana Jackson, Senior Program Associate at the Land Stewardship Project, has been named “Sustainable Woman of Agriculture” by the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (www.wfan.org). This is the first year for the award.

“Women have always played a major role in agriculture,” says Denise O’Brien, Director of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network. “For over 30 years Dana has helped move the sustainable agriculture community into the mainstream. She has become a mentor for many women involved in agriculture. Her commitment and passion clearly show through her achievements.”

Since 1994, Jackson has worked for LSP. From 1994 to 2005 she was LSP’s

Associate Director, and currently is Senior Program Associate in LSP’s Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program. She also coordinates the St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local*® Campaign.

In 1976, Jackson co-founded the Land Institute, where she held several positions until 1992. She received a Chevron Conservation Award in 1989 and a Pew Scholar’s Award in Conservation and the Environment in 1990.

In 2002, Jackson co-edited with her daughter Laura Jackson, a biology professor at the University of Northern Iowa, *The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems*, a groundbreaking collection of readings about nature and farming. Her

essays and articles have appeared in numerous books and publications.

Jackson earned a bachelor’s degree in language arts education from the University of Kansas and a master’s degree in public administration from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.

Jackson has served on the board of directors of numerous nonprofit organizations, including the Kansas Rural Center,



Dana Jackson

Rocky Mountain Institute and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. Currently she is on the boards of the Wild Farm Alliance, the St. Croix River Scenic Coalition, and the governing

council of the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society. She chairs the board of directors of the River Market Community Co-op in Stillwater, Minn. □

Speed dating for farmers & food buyers

Food producers and food buyers had a chance to get together in Winona, Minn., Jan. 14 during a special “Speed Networking” event at the Blue Heron Coffeehouse. The event, which was one of three held around the state, allowed local farmers and chefs/food buyers to participate in information sessions, and then to discuss one-on-one what it would take to develop local food relationships.

Fifty people participated in the Winona event. It included farmers representing a variety of enterprises, who used the event to network with food buyers from schools, a catering service, a bed and breakfast and local restaurants. “I’ve already heard of deals and relationships that were moved forward because of the opportunity to meet and greet—and eat,” says Caroline van Schaik, an organizer in the Land Stewardship Project’s southeast Minnesota office. The Winona event was sponsored by Renewing the Countryside, with local sponsorship from the Winona County Economic Development Authority and organizing support from LSP.

For more information on LSP’s local food systems work in southeast Minnesota, contact van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)



Chef Scott Pampuch (left) of Corner Table and farmer Larry Kendrick discuss local food buying and selling during the “Speed Networking” event in Winona. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)

Local food on local menus

In January, The Land Stewardship Project hosted Robin Gaines in southeast and southwest Minnesota, where she discussed ways of getting locally produced foods onto the menus of local institutions.

Gaines is the Food Service Manager for Bartel's Lutheran Retirement Community in Waverly, Iowa. Gaines has taken significant steps to get locally produced food served in the retirement home's cafeteria.

While in southeast Minnesota, she met with food service directors at Winona State University, St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Wabasha, and the Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

Gaines also participated in an LSP forum held in Marshall, Minn., called, "Growing the Opportunity for Profit for Farmers, Main Street Businesses and Institutions."

While in Minnesota, Gaines talked about how she started out serving locally produced sweet corn and tomatoes bought at a roadside farmers' market. Her kitchen now vacuum packs and freezes in-season produce for use throughout the winter, buys two beef cattle a month from a local farmer and gets non-homogenized milk from an on-farm processing dairy nearby. A quarter of the retirement community's food is now locally sourced.

Gaines' visit was sponsored by LSP's Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program. For more information, contact LSP's Terry VanDerPol at 320-269-2105 or tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org.



TOP PHOTO: Robin Gaines (left), Food Service Manager for Bartel's Lutheran Retirement Community, recently met with LSP member-farmers Sandy Deitz (center) and Andrea Mueller in southeast Minnesota to talk about how to get local food into institutions such as schools. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)

BOTTOM: Gaines also met with LSP members in western Minnesota who were interested in promoting local food systems. (photo by Terry VanDerPol)



2008 Community Food & Farm Fest May 3-4

The 2008 Community Food and Farm Festival will be May 3-4 at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds Grandstand Building (1265 Snelling Ave. N. in Saint Paul). During the past eight years, the Community Food and Farm Festival has evolved into one of the region's most popular venues for meeting farmers who are direct marketing various kinds of food. Farmers will be on hand to answer questions about the sustainable production methods they use to produce food that is safe and good for the environment.

Consumers can learn about joining a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

farm or buying food directly through various other means, as well as what products are within driving distance of the metro area (meats, vegetables, dairy products, grains and more). Consumers can sample various items and sign up to purchase sustainably raised food right on the spot.

The Food and Farm Fest is a joint effort of the Land Stewardship Project and the Minnesota Food Association. This year's Festival will again be held in conjunction with the Living Green Expo (www.livinggreenexpo.org), a two-day event that provides Minnesotans with

information, ideas, resources, products and motivation to live more sustainably.

For more information about the Community Food and Farm Festival, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/cfff/cfff.html or contact Georgia Rubenstein in LSP's White Bear Lake office at 651-653-0618; intern@landstewardshipproject.org.

Volunteers needed

We are seeking volunteers to assist with set-up and clean-up as well as volunteers to staff the LSP booth and Farm Festival areas. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Rubenstein. ☐



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studies from McGill University in Montreal.

She has worked as a coordinator of the McGill University Organic Food Co-op and as a Fair Trade intern with Minnesota Public Interest Research Group. Rubenstein also served with Worldwide Workers on Organic Farms in Ireland, France and Italy. While interning with LSP's Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program, Rubenstein is organizing the Community Food and Farm Festival in May (see page 9). □



Georgia Rubenstein



Land Stewardship Project member Barb Nelson made a point in January during an LSP meeting in southeast Minnesota. The meeting was held in St. Charles to discuss LSP's state and federal farm policy priorities for 2008. See pages 12-15 for more on LSP's policy work. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)

Taylor joins LSP

Tom Taylor has joined the Land Stewardship Project as an organizer with its Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program. Taylor has vast experience as an organizer, and has worked for Organic Consumers Association, Citizens Organized Acting Together (COACT) and Public Citizen. He also served as coordinator of the Northeast Minneapolis Farmers' Market.



Tom Taylor

Most recently, Taylor has worked for the Eastside Food Co-op, where, among other things, he organized the popular "Food Forums" series. He has also worked for numerous restaurants in

the Twin Cities area.

Taylor is based out of LSP's western Minnesota office in Montevideo and can be reached at 320-269-2105 or ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Richards & Rubenstein serving LSP internships

Karen Richards and **Georgia Rubenstein** are serving internships with the Land Stewardship Project.

Richards obtained a bachelor's degree in global studies with a Spanish minor from the University of Minnesota in 2007.

She has worked as a public and community relations intern for Dakota County Smoke-Free Communities and an intern for Refugio de Vida Silvestre Pasachoa in Ecuador. She was also a student organizer for the Real U. Richards is interning with LSP's Policy and Organizing Program, and helped coordinate the 2008 Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol (see page 7).

Rubenstein has a bachelor's degree in international development and Russian



Karen Richards

LSP blog

The Land Stewardship Project is writing a weekly food and sustainable agriculture web-based blog for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership. To read the blog, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org and click on the **Read This Week's LSP Blog** link under **Take Action**. □

Get connected with

LIVE WIRE

Sign up for **LIVE-WIRE** for regular e-mail updates and news from the Land Stewardship Project. To subscribe, call Louise Arbuckle at 651-653-0618 or e-mail lsplib@landstewardshipproject.org, and put in the subject line "Subscribe **LIVE-WIRE**." □

LSP podcast

The Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* audio magazine features interviews and field reports related to LSP's work.

To listen in, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org, and click on the **Listen to the Latest Podcast** link under **Take Action**. For a step-by-step guide on how to subscribe to the free *Ear to the Ground* service, visit www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html. □

LSP members honored

It's awards season and several Land Stewardship Project members have been honored recently for their work to promote a sustainable food and farming system as well as stewardship of the land:

Shortridge & Thompson receive MDA awards

Peter Shortridge and **Tony Thompson** were recently honored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA).

Shortridge, who is president of Northland Organic Foods in Saint Paul, Minn., was given the MDA's Excellence Award for international marketing of agricultural products. The award went to the company as a whole, as well as Shortridge and the firm's International Marketing Director Amy Nankivil. Northland works with organic, identity-preserved and non-GMO raw materials and ingredients. It exports to 18 countries.

Thompson, who farms near Windom, in southwest Minnesota, was given the MDA's Environmental Stewardship Award. Thompson raises corn and soybeans and he harvests seeds from native plants growing on his family's land. The seeds are sold through Thompson's Salix Ecological Resources business. Thompson has also worked hard over the years to protect and enhance wildlife habitat on his land, particularly grassland and wetland habitat.

Zimmers Organic Farmers of the Year

Gary, Rosie and **Nicholas Zimmer** have been given the MOSES 2008 Organic Farmer of the Year award. The award was presented in February at the annual Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference.

The Zimmers farm 1,200 acres of organic alfalfa, grass, corn, soybeans, green peas, oats, barley and rye near Avoca, in southwest Wisconsin. They also milk 200 cows and raise 100 head of beef cattle as well as pasture-raised feeder pigs and poultry.

They market their meat and cheese under the Otter Creek Organic Farm label. They also market their meat and

cheese, as well as vegetables, through the Local Choice Farm Market in Spring Green, Wis.

In 1984, Gary founded Midwestern Bio-Ag, which provides consultation, soil testing, livestock feed supplements, educational resources and other services to farmers. The Zimmers have conducted on-farm research over the years and their annual field day is quite popular, with over 700 people attending the 2007 event. Gary has written several books on sustainable agriculture, including *The Biological Farmer*.

MOSES (Midwest Organic and

own and operate the 480-acre Prairie Horizons Farm in western Minnesota's Pope County. Five years ago they transitioned their dairy farm into a grass-based beef operation. They use managed rotational grazing and recently had their pasture and hay ground certified organic. The Forbords have established native prairie plantings on their land, which serves as home to grassland songbirds and numerous other species of wildlife.

The Forbords are also involved in the Pope County Working Lands Initiative, which is a partnership involving federal, state and local conservation agencies, as well as farmers and private non-



Mary Jo Forbord's Prairie Horizons farm was recently honored by the Minnesota Chapter of the Wildlife Society. (LSP photo)

Sustainable Education Service) sponsors the annual Organic Farmer of the Year award in recognition of outstanding stewardship in the Midwest of both the land and the agricultural community. For information on making nominations for the 2009 award, see www.mosesorganic.org, or call 715-772-3153.

Forbords lauded by Wildlife Society

LSP members **Mary Jo** and **Luverne Forbord** have been given the 2008 Conservation Award by the Minnesota Chapter of the Wildlife Society. The Forbords

profits. One of the latest projects of the Working Lands Initiative is to convert to grass 40 acres of row-cropped fields on the Forbord farm that will then be harvested for biomass energy research and development.

The Forbords are leaders in the sustainable agriculture movement—Mary Jo is Executive Director of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota and they often participate in on-farm research. In addition, Prairie Horizons has hosted Grazefest the past two years to help others learn about grass farming.

LSP pushes beginning farmer initiatives in D.C.

By Adam Warthesen

As this issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press, the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives were selecting lawmakers to sit on a conference committee and moving forward on negotiations for a new Farm Bill, which would then be sent on to President Bush. As we've reported in previous issues, during 2007 the House and Senate

writing, LSP's work on the Farm Bill was paying off, and some good initiatives related to conservation, beginning farmers and local food systems — all LSP priorities — were still alive.

Beginning farmers

One of the proposals we're most excited about is the House bill's authorization and dedication of \$15 million in funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. The Senate also included the same beginning

"The message we presented to lawmakers was that with opportunities in agriculture today, like the growth in organics, alternative crops and local food markets, investing resources to support beginning farmers can provide great dividends for our rural communities and economy," says Kingstrom, who graduated from LSP's Farm Beginnings® program in 2004 and now operates a tree farm on his family's land near Sacred Heart, in western Minnesota.

Fly-in participants also focused on policies that provide access to conservation programs for beginning farmers and socially disadvantaged producers. Another topic of discussion was policies and funding to support asset building programs that help beginning farmers establish a pattern of savings and build equity in new farming operations.

Joy Faul, who farms with her family on their fourth generation small grain and specialty crop operation in North Dakota's Kidder County, also participated in the January fly-in. Faul, who is participating in the Farm Beginnings Organics 101 class hosted by Foundation for Agricultural and Rural Resources Management and Sustainability in Medina, N. Dak., says Congress should act now and reach out to support beginning farmers.

"We are talking about smart, cost effective start-up support and incentives, not dependence programs," she says.

Local food systems

Another good Farm Bill advance was made on the local and regional food systems front, when a new House proposal put forth by Rep. Peterson this winter secured \$30 million per year for the USDA's Value-Added Producer Grants Program (VAPG), and included new language to support a value chain concept where a farmer, retailer, and (or) distributor might come together to get VAPG funding. The Senate reauthorized VAPG but failed to dedicate funding to the program.

Conservation

The Senate Farm Bill shines when it comes to conservation. The Senate invests an additional \$3.3 billion over the next five years in the Conservation Security Program (CSP). In addition, proposed Senate changes to CSP would make it more transparent and user-friendly for farmers.



Participants in the Beginning Farmer and Rancher fly-in recently met with Collin Peterson (second from left), Chair of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee. Pictured with Peterson are (left to right): David Silveira, California; Chad Kingstrom, Minnesota; Joy Faul, North Dakota; Jesus Escobar, California; Adam Warthesen, LSP Policy Program Organizer; and Steve Schwartz of California. (LSP photo)

developed their respective versions of the agricultural law that will govern everything from what food is raised to how the land is taken care of to what our kids eat in school. A new Farm Bill is drafted every five years or so, and during the creation of this version of the law, Land Stewardship Project members and staff have been very involved in pushing for initiatives that benefit family farmers, local food systems, rural communities and the environment.

The bad news is that no matter what the conferees decide, the final Farm Bill will lack significant reforms of its commodity program, which pays farmers to raise monocultures of row crops, such as corn and soybeans.

The good news is that as of this

farmer provision in its version of the Farm Bill, but it lacked mandatory funding.

LSP member and beginning farmer Chad Kingstrom traveled to Washington, D.C., in January with me and over a dozen beginning farmers from across the nation to meet with likely House-Senate Farm Bill conferees. During the LSP sponsored fly-in, farmers held 20 visits with policymakers over two days. Among the lawmakers they met with was Collin Peterson, a Minnesota Representative who chairs the House Agriculture Committee. While in Washington, Kingstrom and the other fly-in participants pushed for adequate funding and reducing barriers that might exclude new farmers and ranchers from participating in Farm Bill programs.

Farm Bill, see page 13...



While in Washington, Farm Beginnings participant and North Dakota farmer Joy Faul met with North Dakota U.S. Representative Earl Pomeroy, who is a member of the House Agriculture Committee. (LSP photo)

...Farm Bill, from page 12

Unfortunately, in the House we see a “Conservation Title” dominated by a \$1.9 billion per year Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Under the

House proposal, critical programs such as CSP receive limited funding or, in the instance of the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program, face reduced acre enrollments. The new House proposal rolled out this winter did take some steps to undo the massive House cuts to CSP made earlier in the Farm Bill process. But it’s clearly not enough.

At a minimum, CSP needs to be funded at the Senate levels over the next five years. This will give more farmers the

chance to use this program and do good conservation on America’s farmland.

“My biggest concern is insufficient funding for the Conservation Security Program,” says Lyle Kruse, an LSP member who farms near Canby, Minn. In 2007, Kruse and other LSP member-

farmers traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss conservation priorities with members of Congress. “This program will help farmers like me conserve America’s soil, water and wildlife habitat.”

While many conservation title programs are important, what farmers and America needs is a balanced conservation approach where farmers can use a number of different options to achieve conservation on the land. That requires a bigger investment in CSP by the House.

While negotiations continue in Washington, D.C., and the latest permutations suggest we’ll not get a new Farm Bill until at least late April, we can be confident that the efforts of LSP members and our allies has kept us in the hunt for what hopefully will be wins for family farmers and the land. Thanks to all who have made calls, written letters, sent e-mails or attended meetings with decision-makers over the past few years. □

Adam Warthesen is an organizer for LSP’s Policy Program, and can be reached at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org. For the latest updates on the Farm Bill, see www.landstewardshipproject.org.

Land Stewardship Project State Policy Platform 2008

Making a Commitment to Family Farms, Rural Communities & Environmental Stewardship

EDITOR’S NOTE: Earlier this year, the Land Stewardship Project’s State Policy Committee developed a platform that outlines LSP’s priorities for the 2008 session of the Minnesota Legislature. The next few pages provide an excerpt of the platform. To read the entire document, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/08/state_policy_platform.pdf.

1. Supporting the Next Generation of Farmers

The Minnesota Legislature should support the next generation of farmers by:

✓ **Helping beginning farmers with access to land.** The Legislature should create a program that gives a state tax credit to landowners who rent land to beginning farmers. The credit would be up to 15 percent of the gross rental income. The beginning farmer should be eligible for a state tax credit of \$500 towards the cost of participating in a farm business management program or approved equivalent. The credit would be available for up to three years.

✓ **Creating a promotional and informational campaign to encourage beginning farmers.** Minnesota needs to reaffirm to those wanting to start farming that we believe in small- and moderate-sized family farms. The Legislature should allocate funds to create a promotional campaign with the theme: “You can farm.” The state would compile and mail out informational packets detailing all of the resources available to help beginning farmers. These packets should feature real-life examples of successful beginning farmers.

2. Stewardship of the Land

The Legislature should promote stewardship of the land by:

✓ **Improving water quality and conservation through a comprehensive working lands program that promotes landscape diversification and perennial cropping systems.** As part of Clean Water Legacy, the state should create a program to achieve clean water goals in agricultural areas by offering incentives for targeted watersheds to utilize perennial cropping systems (pasture-based livestock production or perennial crops for energy, for example). Perennial cropping systems dramatically reduce runoff and create wildlife habitat while keeping working lands working. Water quality monitoring should be done to evaluate and enhance the program’s effectiveness.

✓ **Fully funding the Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program (ESAP).** ESAP was established in 1987 as part of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to demonstrate and promote alternative practices which are energy

Platform, see page 14...

...Platform, from page 13

efficient, environmentally sound and profitable, as well as which enhance the self-sufficiency of Minnesota farmers. Among other things, ESAP is responsible for making grants to farmers for on-farm research into innovative sustainable agriculture practices. The results are then published annually in the *Greenbook*. This hands-on, grassroots type of research has facilitated farmer-to-farmer education and helped farmers move towards more sustainable farming practices. Full funding of \$250,000 per year should be restored to ESAP.

✓ **Strengthening the University of Minnesota's alternative livestock program and expanding the University's work in organic agricultural research and outreach programs.**

➔ **Alternative livestock program:** This program has provided necessary research and outreach for the growing number of farmers, especially beginning farmers, who want to produce livestock using pasture-based and deep-bedded straw systems, as well as other alternative methods. More research dollars are needed for livestock genetics and forages that work for grass-based systems and to study animal behavior in sustainable systems. The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture should be appropriated \$150,000 annually for this work.

➔ **Organic research and outreach:** Minnesota is a leader in organic production (fourth in cropland acreage and fifth in the number of organic farms). There is intense interest in organic crop and livestock production in the state, which will benefit Minnesota's small- and medium-sized farming operations. Research to develop practices that increase the stability of organic production, control production risks and reduce costs is needed to further develop an organic production sector that can contribute to farm and community stability. The University of Minnesota should be appropriated \$1.1 million dollars for this work.

✓ **State incentives should give equal treatment to family farmers, including those who are using sustainable and organic systems.** Tax credits, grant programs, and payment incentives for farmers should give equitable treatment to family farmers and sustainable farming practices. For example, a Dairy Investment Tax Credit should include credits for expenditures on pasture development and on-farm processing. Incentives should not be triggered by expenses that are beyond what small- to medium-sized farmers would spend to improve their farming operations. The state must be careful to ensure that incentives are not tilted towards the largest producers, thus creating an uneven playing field.



Land Stewardship Project members and staff met with the University of Minnesota's Allen Levine, Beverly Durgan and Robert King in late February. Levine is dean of the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources Sciences and Durgan is the director of U of M Extension. King is the head of the Department of Applied Economics at the U of M. During the meeting, which took place in LSP's southeast Minnesota office in Lewiston, farmers talked about how important would be to have organic and sustainable agriculture programs fully funded and supported at the University. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)

3. Local Democracy & Corporate Accountability

The Legislature should promote local democracy and corporate accountability by:

✓ **Maintaining strong community and township rights.** Any legislation that undermines local democracy should be opposed.

✓ **Enacting a "livestock contractor fairness and corporate responsibility act."** Many farmers raise livestock on contract for corporations that both own the livestock and have substantial management control over the farm. However, the contracts can completely shield the corporation from any liability, placing all the risk on the farmer. This is obviously unfair and can be addressed by requiring that when a corporation owns the livestock and has management control over the farming operation, it must be named as a party on a feedlot permit. This will prevent the farmer from being solely liable, especially when environmental harm may be caused by management decisions made by the corporation and imposed on the farmer.

✓ **Restoring the right of citizens to petition for environmental review of industrial-scale feedlots.** In 2003, most feedlots under 1,000 animal units were exempted by the Legislature from environmental review. This means that for 97 percent of feedlots, citizens cannot petition for environmental review even when the potential for harm is apparent. The result is that the majority of the

largest feedlots in Minnesota are built without an up-front analysis of potential environmental harm. Previously, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency or local units of government could initiate environmental review of feedlots between 300 and 1,000 animal units. Citizens utilizing a petition process were able to trigger consideration of environmental review. These powers need to be restored.

4. Community Based Local Food Systems

The local foods movement continues to grow with more farmers finding profit in producing food for local markets. Farmers are selling directly to consumers and to

Platform, see page 15...

local institutions such as schools and nursing homes. They are also moving product through local retail outlets such as grocery stores and food co-ops. This increases profits to farmers and benefits the local economy.

As a society we have invested in transportation systems that make marketing of agricultural products to distant places possible and affordable. We need to invest resources in re-creating an infrastructure that makes local marketing possible. The state can strengthen programs that support this movement and fund critical research to help local food initiatives move forward and fully develop.

The Legislature can support community based local food systems by:

✓ **Funding research to assess bottlenecks and opportunities for community based food systems.** As the demand for local food grows, farmers and distributors are struggling with creating the systems to make it work. Large Minnesota institutions such as the Mayo Clinic and the University of Minnesota, as well as elementary and high schools, are interested in purchasing locally grown foods. The state should appropriate \$500,000 to the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) to do a comprehensive study on the barriers to establishing community based food systems and the future opportunities offered by growing local foods markets.

✓ **Providing resources for Minnesota's farmers' markets.** Minnesota's farmers' markets are growing and expanding and becoming an integral part of urban and rural communities. The state needs to support

existing markets and help new ones get established. The state should appropriate \$500,000 for competitive grants to help with, among other things, support staff, signage and physical improvements to markets.

✓ **Increasing the capacity of our state's meat processing inspection program.** The growing demand for locally-raised meats is beyond the capacity of the current infrastructure to keep up with. State meat inspectors have to be on hand while processing takes place in state certified processing plants. When an



Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Speaker of the Minnesota House, spoke at LSP's Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol (see page 7) Feb. 19. She vowed to work with LSP and other groups to make sure organic and sustainable agriculture programs are funded at the University of Minnesota. (LSP photo)

inspector is not available, processing must be postponed, causing inefficiencies for processors and farmers. The state should invest in basic market research to assess capacity and demand potential in various regions of Minnesota to determine where future investment must be made in the meat inspection program and the meat processing industry.

5. Community Based Renewable Energy

Minnesota can be a leader in developing and promoting renewable energy. Our policies should ensure that renewable energy is community based and is developed in ways that benefit family farmers and rural communities. Opportunities exist now to lead the nation in research and to create an infrastructure that allows for and encourages community based renewable energy. If we do not act soon and with a clear vision, these opportunities may pass us by.

The Legislature can promote community based renewable energy by:

✓ **Research into on-farm energy conservation.** Sustainable agriculture provides many environmental benefits, and an overlooked one has been energy conservation. Research should be done on the energy consumption and output of sustainable systems versus conventional systems (a grass-based dairy versus a conventional dairy, for example). An appropriation of \$150,000 should be made to the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) to do this work.

✓ **Promotion and incentives for community based bioenergy that is produced from native perennials.** University of Minnesota research shows strong benefits both in terms of energy output and conservation when native prairie grass is used as a feedstock for bioenergy. Minnesota needs to position itself to be on the forefront of this development and we need to do it in a way that encourages diversified perennial systems and community ownership of the next generation of energy production from perennials. □

For information on how to help advance LSP's state policy initiatives, contact Bobby King at 612-722-6377, or Paul Sobocinski at 507-342-2323.

LSP pushes 'working lands' conservation/bioenergy program

RIM-Clean Energy primes the pump for perennial biomass production

A proposal currently making its way through the Minnesota Legislature would help farmers create the foundation for a biofuels industry that is environmentally and economically sustainable. The program, called Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)-Clean Energy, would pay farmers

to grow native perennials for bioenergy.

The initiative, which is being supported by the Land Stewardship Project, along with 46 other conservation, wildlife and environmental groups, was authorized by the Minnesota Legislature last session. However, it needs funding in order to get off the ground. LSP is working to get \$46

million in bonding funds, which would provide for approximately 13,000 acres of native perennials on farmland.

Although this program is closely associated with bioenergy, it is set up to help farmers get multiple uses out of their land. The intent is to support native

RIM-Clean Energy, see page 16...

...RIM-Clean Energy, from page 15

perennial biofuels production that has environmental benefits, including improved water quality and soil health, as well as reduction of chemical inputs, storage of soil carbon and increased biodiversity/wildlife habitat.

Scientists and conservationists say that corn-based ethanol is a good interim step towards creating more sustainable energy systems. However, since corn is an annual crop that only covers the soil a few months out of the year and relies on petroleum-based inputs to grow, it is not the final answer.

“This bioenergy movement has a lot of potential to create good, but it also has a lot of potential to create harm if it focuses on crop residue as an energy source,” says Bobby King, a Policy Program organizer for LSP. (See page 24 for more on environmental problems related to crop residues and bioenergy production.)

That’s why there is great interest in making biofuels from perennials—plants such as grass that cover the land year-round and that can grow with relatively few chemical and energy-intensive inputs.

The environmental benefits can be significant: Research by LSP and others has shown that shifting the plantings on a relatively small amount of strategically located farmland from annual crops to perennial plant systems such as grass can dramatically improve water quality.

But planting monocrops of switchgrass, for example, isn’t the ultimate answer. Monocrops, including grass, usually must rely on chemical inputs such as petroleum-based fertilizer to stay viable year-after-year. Diverse stands of grasses and forbs which replicate the native prairie ecosystems of the past, on the other hand, can be self-supporting for decades, according to David Tilman, a University of Minnesota ecologist who has been working with an interdisciplinary scientific team to research how biofuels can be produced in environmentally and economically sustainable ways. The excess biomass would be harvested in the fall for energy, leaving a permanent stand of perennial plants as ground cover and a future source of growth. This could be done on marginal farmland without high amounts of fertilizer, pesticides and energy.

A Tilman study featured in the journal

Science found that 51 percent more biofuel energy per hectare (2.47 acres) was produced by a diverse mix of native grasses when compared to corn-based ethanol. The research also found that highly diverse plots of grasses containing such species as goldenrod, Indian grass, big bluestem and switchgrass yielded 238 percent more energy than stands consisting of just one species.

RIM-Clean Energy has the potential to put such scientific research into practical use on the land.

“RIM-Clean Energy is not a traditional conservation easement or crop subsidy program—it is designed to be a working lands easement program,” King says, adding that such a program is needed if Minnesota farms are to contribute to energy security in a way that is good for the environment and rural communities. “Most of this money would go right into farmers’ pockets, and it begins the process of creating the type of infrastructure needed for this type of energy system.”

How it would work

During the summer, LSP and other member-groups of a technical committee met to determine what parameters the RIM-Clean Energy program should operate under.

The program, which would be coordinated by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, will pay farmers for a 20-year commitment to growing native perennials for bioenergy.

The agreement requires best management practices that, for example, utilize lower amounts of pesticides and fertilizers. The program will operate in areas where the presence of perennials will have a proven positive impact on impaired waters and other natural resources. RIM-Clean Energy project areas will also be in regions where they can efficiently provide feedstock for bioenergy industry development.

The RIM-Clean Energy base level payment for planting one native perennial grass or native woody species would be 80 percent of estimated market value.

Landowners would also be compensated for the cost of establishing such plantings. A multi-tiered payment system would make it possible for landowners to receive more money if they plant a greater diversity of species. The program would be funded through bonding funds which are used by the state to purchase a

20-year easement on the property.

Funded at \$46 million, farmers growing energy crops under RIM-Clean Energy can expect \$32 million in sales to bioenergy facilities over 20 years. In addition to investing in farmers, the program could create 50 new fulltime jobs and more than 85 seasonal jobs in native seed production as well as prairie installation and management industries, according to an analysis by Clean Energy Minnesota. RIM-Clean Energy could also spark secondary support businesses in rural areas, including custom harvesting.

Jim Falk, a farmer and seed dealer from Murdock, Minn., says this program could help provide a key safety net and incentive for farmers who want to transition out of conventional row-cropping but fear the financial risk of getting into native perennials.

“Farmers want options that include perennial crops and the state will only be able to meet water quality goals with more perennial crops on the land,” says Falk, who is a member of LSP’s State Policy Committee. “It makes sense for the state to invest in farmers who are willing to be early innovators and drive this change by growing native perennials for bioenergy.”

Legislative status

As this *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press, the Minnesota Senate and Gov. Tim Pawlenty had both proposed \$3.3 million for RIM-Clean Energy in their respective bonding packages. The House had no funding, as of this writing.

In March, LSP members like Falk were contacting lawmakers, encouraging them to fully support a program that could help Minnesota be a leader in sustainable biofuels production.

“Minnesota needs to be ahead of the curve on this,” says Falk. “If we can’t get RIM-Clean Energy going this session, Minnesota will be playing catch-up and our state’s farmers and rural communities will be the worse off for it.” □

More information

For details on how you can push for full funding of RIM-Clean Energy, see www.landstewardshipproject.org and check our **Action Alerts** page under **Take Action**. You can also call LSP’s Policy Program office at 612-722-6377. A RIM-Clean Energy fact sheet is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/RIM-CE_fact_sheet.pdf.

'Sow the Seeds' plants a future for flooded farmers

By Paul Wotzka

During two days last August, numerous farms in southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin and northeast Iowa were devastated by rainstorms of historical proportions. The storms broke a severe drought and signaled an intense wet period that brought a year's worth of rainfall to the region during the month of August alone. Some areas received over 20 inches of rain in a three-day period.

Soil washed away by the truckload. Livestock drowned. Hay was uncut due to wet field conditions. Barns, fences, and farming equipment were ruined or severely damaged. Pastures and fields were filled with rocks and debris, making them inaccessible. In the aftermath of the flooding, cool temperatures and wetness took hold and lasted throughout September. An early frost brought the growing season to a close for many vegetable and fruit crops.

All in all, it was a major disaster for numerous farmers in the region. In fact, for many producers the devastation threatened to bring an end to their farming careers. Especially hit hard were organic and sustainable farmers, many of them Land Stewardship Project members, who raise crops and livestock products for specialty markets. This part of the Midwest has an unusually high number of farmers who are using organic and sustainable methods to raise produce and livestock.

Federal crop insurance is set up to help farmers who raise conventional crops and livestock. Few sustainable and organic farms are familiar with the programs, and they entail complex record-keeping that discourages grass-based livestock producers or organic vegetable growers from using them. Federal and state disaster relief efforts are at best slow and complex, and at this writing in many cases farmers have still not yet received financial assistance through government programs.

That's why the Sow the Seeds Fund was so critical in helping many of these farmers.

About the Sow the Seeds Fund

In 2006, the Wedge Community Co-op and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) launched the Sow the Seeds Fund to strengthen the local

food system in the Upper Midwest. Once the August 2007 floods hit, the Wedge and IATP quickly launched a special Sow the Seeds flood relief effort.

Within just a few weeks of the storms,



The August rains decimated a field of organic salad greens on Harmony Valley Farm near Viroqua, Wis. (photo courtesy of Harmony Valley)

Sow the Seeds was able to mobilize a grassroots funding effort. Dozens of retail food co-ops, restaurants, churches and nonprofit organizations used donation jars and other means to collect money from hundreds of donors. Foundations, businesses and business associations took notice and generously contributed to the Fund as well.

A committee of agricultural and community leaders, including LSP, was formed to reach out to affected farmers and review producer applications for financial aid. In just five months, over \$390,000 was raised and distributed to area farmers who applied for support.

This accomplishment was even more remarkable when compared with the inefficiency of the state and federal agricultural disaster relief programs, which continues to leave many of these farmers unclear about whether and when they might receive any government disaster relief.

Timely help

The timely aid from Sow the Seeds allowed farmers the resources to buy hay to feed their livestock through the winter and to repair fences in their pastures. Sow the Seeds also helped produce growers

hire help to salvage vegetable and fruit crops that took two to three times as long to harvest because of the wet conditions. The 31 farmers who received financial assistance through the flood relief effort

represent the panorama of people who grow and process food for consumers' kitchens: vegetable and fruit growers; organic dairy and beef farms; a goat cheese maker and an ice cream producer; as well as growers of hazelnuts, turkeys and chickens.

But more valuable to producers than any amount of financial assistance was the knowledge that people cared. The people that eat, market and cook the food grown by

these farmers responded with their pocketbooks to this disaster, but it was the altruistic giving from people's hearts that mattered most. As one farmer put it: "When you are devastated by a natural disaster like this flood, you feel alone and paralyzed to help yourself out of the mess Mother Nature delivered; the people that gave to the Sow the Seeds Fund helped my psyche out more than anything... they gave me the hope that there were better days ahead. They really cared." □

Paul Wotzka recently interviewed the 31 producers who received support through the Sow the Seeds flood relief effort.

More on Sow the Seeds

While the 2007 flood relief effort has now concluded, Sow the Seeds will continue to support local sustainable food systems in the Upper Midwest. For further information, see www.sowtheseedsfund.org, or call IATP's Ben Lilliston at 612-870-3416.

Racking up the food miles

By Cael Warren

The concept of “food miles” has spurred heated debate across the developed world, causing people to question the origins of the food that ends up on their tables. Despite how common the phrase is, many people never know more about food miles than what the phrase implies: miles traveled by food. What is behind this catch-phrase, and what does it mean for our food system and the environment?

Defining ‘food miles’

A food mile is, very simply, a mile that a unit of food travels from where it is produced to where it is consumed. Each bite of food that we eat travels some number of food miles, ranging from as little as a tomato’s 0.0057 miles from our gardens to our kitchens to as much as the 9,000 miles that much of our lamb travels to our plates from New Zealand pastures. We use food miles to assess the impacts of our food system on energy use, fossil fuel dependence, global climate change, traffic congestion and the economic well being of our food-producing communities. In this way, “food miles” is more than a number; it is a simplified metaphor to convey to consumers the relative environmental and social costs of our increasingly global food system.

In the same way that nutritional information on packaged food informs us about the basic nutritional details of the contents, the number of food miles gives a generalized measure of the relative impact of each morsel of food on our world’s social and environmental landscapes.

Most of my food has traveled further in its lifetime than I have in mine

The number of miles traveled by each unit of food has increased rapidly as constantly improving technology chips away at the high (financial) transportation costs of the past. It has been estimated that each item of food now travels 50 percent further than it did in 1979, a change primarily attributable to the rise of regional specialization in industrial

monocrop agriculture. A 2003 Iowa study revealed that conventional produce traveled an average of 1,500 miles from producer to consumer, nearly 27 times further than the average distance (56 miles) traveled by locally grown produce.

That figure is remarkable, but the real shocker is that the study didn’t even include imports in its calculation of the conventional average food miles. Imports made up only 21 percent of fruits and 4 percent of vegetables consumed in the U.S. in 1970. By 2001, about 39 percent of fruits and 12 percent of vegetables were imported (the typical American meal on average contains ingredients from at least five foreign countries), so the 1,500-mile figure likely represents a gross underestimate of the true average number of miles that our produce travels to reach our tables.

The Iowa food miles study has been replicated elsewhere, especially in the United Kingdom and Canada, revealing similar or even more dramatic results. A 2005 London study revealed that food in the United Kingdom travels 65 percent further than it did two decades ago, while a study done in the Waterloo Region of Canada showed that 58 imported foods traveled an average of about 2,800 miles, creating their own weight in greenhouse gas emissions during transportation alone. Clearly, the trend of high food miles is not unique to the U.S.

Biting the hand that feeds us

Food miles are strongly connected to the environmental and social costs of transporting food, so an awareness of the distance food travels to our plates is key to understanding the true impact of our consumption choices. The most obvious environmental impact of high food miles is burning fossil fuels and emitting greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

Transportation accounts for somewhere between 10 percent and 20 percent of emissions in food production, a relatively large percentage considering that these emissions could be avoided or reduced by using a more local food system. In the United States, a Michigan study found that 10 percent of energy used in the U.S. is for food production and distribution, while about 14 percent

of that is devoted to transportation. Considering that annual carbon-equivalent emissions (a direct consequence of energy use) in the U.S. are 16 trillion pounds, food transportation accounts for 224 billion pounds of carbon-equivalent emissions, from the U.S. alone, every year.

To make matters worse, the same food system that so heavily contributes to global climate change is extremely vulnerable to its effects. The industrial agriculture system, one of the world’s biggest producers of greenhouse gases, faces devastation as climate change causes climactic cycles to become less predictable and temperature and precipitation variability to become extreme.

Results of these climactic changes could include environmental degradation, water shortages, salinization, soil erosion, pests, disease and desertification—all potentially detrimental to the systems that produce our food. The world’s heavy dependence on an industrial agriculture system of high food miles therefore jeopardizes the security of our global food supply.

Food miles are not only significant for their contribution to climate change. Other social and environmental impacts also illuminate the importance of food miles. For example, preparation of food for lengthy journeys has its own implications for the environment. Product packaging is more common among foods that travel longer distances, adding more waste into our already sprawling and overflowing landfills.

Finally, there are important social costs associated with high food miles that are often overlooked. First of all, bringing in more cheaply produced food from elsewhere sends money out of the local economy, sacrificing the potential for local economic growth and self-sufficiency.

And as the Alliance for Better Food and Farming reports, studies show that the nutritional value of produce declines as time passes after harvest, so high food miles are nutritionally detrimental as well. These high costs to the environment and to society in general have prompted a growing movement of local food consumption, an important step toward a more sustainable food system. At the same time, many critics say that the number of food miles does not accurately represent these social and environmental costs.

Food Miles, see page 19...

Simple & to the point

Of course, using food miles as a representation of the environmental impact of our food choices is an oversimplification. It is true that the environmental costs of our food choices are not fully measured by the number of miles our food travels to reach our tables; how food is grown and the mode of transportation are two variables that provide a more comprehensive "life cycle measurement" of a food's total environmental impact. It is also true, however, that no measure

fully, simply and efficiently describes the costs of our food choices, which is why "food miles" remains an important concept. Instead of wasting valuable resources attempting to measure every detail of these impacts, and then confusing consumers with the results, "food miles" gives us a basic idea with time left over to start addressing the problem.

What can you do?

As consumers increasingly demand locally produced food, local producers will supply it, shortening the average distance between producer and consumer.

Shopping at your local farmers' market or co-op is an excellent start, but even when buying at giant supermarket chains, check your bags of apples or potatoes for their origin. When given the choice, select the product grown closest to home. If every consumer makes this choice, we will begin to see a dramatic reduction in average food miles. □

Cael Warren is a Land Stewardship Project intern working within LSP's Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program.

A food miles road map

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Get your 2008 Twin Cities CSA Directory

Spring is here and Twin Cities-area consumers who want to receive fresh, sustainably-produced vegetables on a weekly basis during the 2008 growing season should reserve a share in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm now.

The 2008 edition of the Land Steward-

ship Project's *Twin Cities Region Community Supported Agriculture Farm Directory* features 33 farms. New this year, thanks to LSP volunteer Carol Stoneburner, the directory features a link to an online map showing the locations of farms and their drop-sites.

For a free copy, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html. For a paper copy, call LSP at 651-653-0618, or stop by its downtown White Bear Lake office at 2200 4th Street (second level). □

Harvest for the Hungry

Harvest for the Hungry is a program of the Emergency Foodshelf Network (EFN) that provides fresh, locally-grown produce to households facing hunger in our community. Harvest for the Hungry relies on donors and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) members to help purchase produce from Minnesota and Western Wisconsin farmers at wholesale prices. Your contribution will

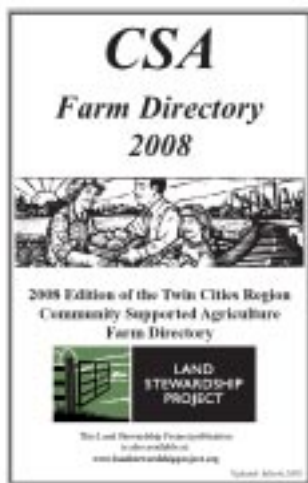
be evenly distributed among our local farm partners, or you may designate your entire donation to a specific farm. EFN has recently received funding to match every donation up to \$60,000.

All produce collected through the Harvest for the Hungry program will be delivered for free to EFN's network of foodshelves, on-site meal programs and hunger relief agencies. For more information, visit www.emergencyfoodshelf.org or call 763-450-3869. □

LSP's Stewardship Food Directory

The Land Stewardship Project is in the process of updating its Stewardship Food Directory list (formerly called the "Stewardship Food Network"). If you have been listed in the past, you should have received a mailing in March. If you didn't receive a notice and would like to be listed, feel free to e-mail LSP's Sarah Claassen at sarahc@landstewardshipproject.org, or call her at 612-722-6377.

If you'd like to view the current list, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/foodfarm-main.html#SFN. □



Gilbertsons named 'Keepers of the Vision'

By Jill McLaughlin

Food Alliance Midwest held its Annual Meeting Feb. 6. The Twin Cities event provided an opportunity for growers, ranchers, processors and distributors to come together with university faculty, retailers, food service institutions, government staffers and nonprofit allies to discuss what can be done to further the consumption of local and sustainable foods in our region. Over 100 attendees participated in discussions on developing value chains in the sustainable foods industry.

David Ward, Executive Director of the Association of Family Farms, was the keynote speaker. Ward told the audience that, "The time is right to introduce values into the conventional food supply chain. Consumers are looking to grocery stores, restaurants and even college campuses to lead the way in providing food that represents their values." Ward's group hopes to develop communication strategies to inform consumers about where these "values based value chains" are occurring.

Other presenters included Jim Ennis, Director of Food Alliance Midwest, Bob Olson, Business Development Manager

for Food Alliance Midwest, JoAnne Berkenkamp of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Kevin Edberg of Cooperative Development Services, Lindy Bannister of the Wedge Community Co-op, Warren King of Wellspring Management, Bertrand Weber of Taher Foodservice, and Brian Erickson of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.



Keeper of the Vision Awards

Each year, Food Alliance Midwest grants a "Keeper of the Vision for a Sustainable Future" Award to a certified grower and a market partner for their leadership in helping to develop both the

supply and the demand for sustainably-grown foods. This year's grower award went to Gary and Annette Gilbertson of Scandia, Minn., who have been Food Alliance Midwest Certified since 2001. They were recognized for their commitment to growing an array of vegetables in a manner that protects the environment and is good for the community.

Amidst the continuous sprawl of the Twin Cities suburbs, Gilbertson Farms plays an important role in preserving rural Minnesotan life. "We're here because we love the land," says Annette. Annette and Gary are constantly learning new techniques for their farm, and currently employ crop rotations, minimum tillage, drip irrigation and green manure as sustainable ways to increase economic viability and improve their yield. Their variety of efforts has resulted in loyal customers. As Annette says, "People are coming to us at the markets, looking for us. People have come to know who we are."

For the Gilbertsons, Food Alliance Midwest represents a part of this process. "You'll know it's quality food," says Gary. Annette agrees: "I want to be able to put that seal on my food and let people know what it stands for."

"Gary and Annette embody sustainability and have been leaders for many years," says Ennis. "They do a superb job promoting and educating both growers and consumers about sustainable agriculture practices. Over the past four years, the Gilbertsons have traveled to colleges and corporate campuses throughout Minnesota in the late summer serving roasted sweet corn in the cafeterias while talking to students and employees about their family farm."

Market Partner award

Ray Thering was given the "Keeper of the Vision for a Sustainable Future" Market Partner award. He is currently the District Executive Chef for ARAMARK, located at the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis. Thering manages catering, retail operations, and residential dining facilities at the U of M.

Thering hails from Buffalo, N.Y.,



Annette and Gary Gilbertson, shown here with their son Mark, raise vegetables and flowers near Scandia, Minn. (Food Alliance Midwest photo)

Food Alliance, see page 21...

where he was raised on a farm and where his passion for animal welfare and “the farming scene” began. He went on to graduate from the Culinary Institute in 1973. Thering has been involved in various food service enterprises, serving stints at Purdue University, Boston University, 3M World Headquarters and the 1980 Olympic Games in Lake Placid, N.Y., where he was Executive Chef. At all of these positions, Thering has championed local and sustainable foods.

“Ray has been a pioneer and leader in bringing local and sustainably-grown

foods onto the University of Minnesota’s campus, and was recognized for his leadership and commitment to local growers. He is making an immense impact,” says Ennis.

Achievement Awards

New to the meeting this year were two “Partnership Achievement Awards,” granted to organizations who have, along with Food Alliance Midwest, partnered in furthering consumer awareness and education around local and sustainably-grown foods. Doug Peterson of Minnesota Farmers Union and Jan Joannides and Brett Olson of Renewing the Countryside received these awards for their

creativity and commitment to the Minnesota Cooks program.

Minnesota Cooks is in its sixth year and is a collaborative program of these three organizations, who, through two events a year, work to strengthen rural communities by reconnecting consumers with the Minnesota farmers and chefs who provide delicious, healthy, sustainably-grown foods. □

Jill McLaughlin is the Assistant Program Manager for Food Alliance Midwest. She can be reached at 651-209-3382 or jill@foodalliance.org.

Food Alliance Midwest acquires first certified distributor

H. Brooks and Company, a Twin Cities produce distributor, recently became Food Alliance Midwest’s first certified distributor. A family-owned company with over 100 years experience in supplying fresh fruits and vegetables, H. Brooks pursued Food Alliance certification in order to serve customers with an increased assortment of products from regional and sustainably-oriented growers and suppliers.

H. Brooks’ partnership with Food Alliance Midwest will allow the company to become a local and regional hub for distribution of certified food, which will expand the reach of Food Alliance farmers’ marketing efforts.

H. Brooks successfully met Food Alliance certification standards that focus on Purity and Nutritional Value, Quality

Control and Food Safety, Reducing Use of Toxins and Hazardous Materials, Resource Management and Recycling, and Safe and Fair Working Conditions. □

PastureLand named to *Saveur*’s ‘30 great butters’ list

Saveur magazine has named a Midwest Food Alliance certified product as one of the 30 greatest butters in the world. The editors of the magazine (www.saveur.com) reviewed more than 100 butters, and in “Issue #109” recognized PastureLand’s Summer Gold Salted Butter for its “distinctly herbaceous flavor that makes an excellent accompa-

niment to seafood.”

PastureLand (www.pastureland.coop) is made up of six farm families who produce milk on grass in southeast Minnesota. □

Minnesota Cooks at 2008 Minn. State Fair

Chefs and consumers will come together with Food Alliance Midwest-certified farmers for a day of fresh, sustainably-produced food during the sixth annual Minnesota Cooks event Tuesday, Aug. 26, at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in Saint Paul. Cooking demonstrations and panel discussions will take place throughout the day. The program will take place in Carousel Park, just west of the Grandstand Ramp.

For more information, contact Food Alliance Midwest’s Jill McLaughlin at 651-209-3382 or jill@foodalliance.org. □

What is Food Alliance Midwest?

The Food Alliance seal certifies that a farm is producing food using environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices. Food Alliance certification is available for all crop and livestock products, including fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products and meat products.

Food Alliance Midwest, based in Saint Paul, Minn., was established in 2000 by the Land Stewardship Project and Cooperative Development Services.

It is the Midwestern affiliate of the Food Alliance, which is based in Oregon.

Food Alliance certified products are available for sale throughout the United States and Canada in natural food co-ops and grocery stores, as well as select restaurants and food service dining halls.

For details on Food Alliance Midwest, including a list of stores that carry its products, visit www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs/mwfa.html, or call 651-265-3682.

Food Alliance is looking for farmers

Food Alliance Midwest is looking for farmers in the Upper Midwest who produce fruit, vegetables and livestock using sustainable methods and are interested in getting those methods certified. Details on what it takes to get certified by Food Alliance are at www.foodalliance.org/certification/index.html. More information is also available by calling 651-265-3682.

Farm Beginnings

Ryan & Kristine Jepsen

Looking for something more

It's one of those bone-hard days in late January when winter winds rake the ridges of southeast Minnesota and northeast Iowa, making 4 above zero feel like 40 below. Just south of the Minnesota border, Ryan Jepsen is on one of those ridges, hauling hay to his cattle with a tractor and front-end loader. Steam rises off the backs of the bovines as their stomachs cook down the forage into digestible nutrients. Jepsen finishes up, parks the tractor and moves his lanky frame briskly the few yards to a new pole barn that provides welcome relief from the wind.

"When I was a kid, I always said I'd either be a doctor or a farmer," Ryan says later with a grin as he downs cup after cup of hot coffee in a cramped camper trailer parked inside the barn.

On days like this, a stethoscope, regular paycheck and warm examination room looks pretty good. But despite the hard work in sometimes-brutal weather conditions, Ryan and his wife Kristine are glad they chose life on the farm a few years ago. Thanks to training they received through the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings® course, Ryan, 30, and Kristine, 29, feel they have their livestock operation, Grass Run Farm, off to a solid start.

"I've eaten a lot of humble pie in the past few years," says Ryan. "But going out there on a cold day and seeing those cattle chewing their cud, or hearing from someone about how much they liked our beef or seeing the soil improve where there was just dead brome grass before, that makes it worth it."

The good life out West

A little more than two years ago, the Jepsens were getting a different kind of satisfaction out of life. At the time, Ryan, who has a degree in biology from Luther College in Decorah (just 30 miles from the farm), and Kristine, who graduated with an English-journalism degree from Augustana College in Sioux Falls, S. Dak., were living in Idaho. There Ryan shod horses and guided elk hunts while Kristine was an editor at Powder Mountain Press. For a time, they were caretak-

ers on a 400-acre ranch in Wyoming that bordered a national forest—the country was breathtaking, with deep powder skiing out the back door. The living was also relatively debt-free, where financial decisions, according to Ryan, were along the lines of, "I looked at the Cabela's catalog and bought a new pair of waders."

But something was missing. The couple had long been interested in farming, and Ryan had actually interned on an organic operation while in college. Plus, while out West they had participated in food production as members of a Community Supported Agriculture biodynamic farm and learned the basics of beef production from a neighboring rancher.

"You read *Stockman Grass Farmer* for five years, and if you're a dreamer like I am you can't help but want to be on the farm," says Ryan.

In fall 2005, they moved to northeast Iowa and rented a few acres of pasture. It didn't take them long to begin raising and



Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

marketing pasture-raised beef and pork through the Decorah farmers' market and directly to friends and family. They supplement their income with off-farm jobs: Kristine does website work at Luther College and Ryan works as a farrier. But soon after arriving back in Iowa, the Jepsens realized that if farming was to ever become a fulltime endeavor, they needed to brush up on their business planning and marketing.

"If you don't know your net profit, you have no way of knowing when you can give up the horseshoeing or that job in town," says Ryan. "I can't just bust out a marketing plan. Marketing is one of those jobs I have to work at."

On the advice of Chris Blanchard, a farming neighbor who regularly presents at LSP's Farm Beginnings classes, Ryan and Kristine took the course during the winter of 2006-2007, making the 70-mile drive to Winona, Minn., twice a month.

LSP's Farm Beginnings, which began

Farm Beginnings, see page 23...



Ryan and Kristine Jepsen market their grass-fed livestock directly to consumers. Feedback from customers "is really important to what we do and sometimes it's the factor that revives us after going through months of drudgery," says Kristine. (LSP photo)

its second decade in 2008, is a program in which established farmers and other ag professionals provide insights into low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course provides workshops on goal-setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and innovative production techniques. In addition, class participants have an opportunity to network with established farmers and utilize them as mentors.

While in Farm Beginnings, the Jepsens learned how to set goals and analyze various enterprises for profitability. They also learned the basics of Holistic Management, which helps farm families look at their operations as a whole and determine how to attain goals centered around the environment, quality of life and financial security.

Today, the Jepsens rent 150 acres from Ryan's family. Around 135 acres was in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and 100 acres came out of the setaside program in 2007; the rest will come out later this year. In 2007, the Jepsens got funding through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to put in fencing and watering systems for their managed rotational grazing operation. They have been transitioning the CRP land, which was mostly a monoculture of brome, into diverse stands of pasture grass.

By 2009, they hope to have all 150 acres in pasture and to expand their beef herd. Ryan and Kristine bought a two-acre homestead on the property—all was left on it from previous tenants was a small tin shed and an unfinished cabin. In March, they finished the "barn"—a 40 x 88 foot split-level structure. The lower floor is being used to store hay and equipment, as well as provide meat freezer space. Upstairs are the couple's living quarters—one end has a balcony that offers a spectacular view of the valley that plunges way from the ridge, as well as a broken-down wagon from a previous farming era.

Throughout all these transitions, the Jepsens have continued to build a customer base for their meat, which is raised on certified organic pastures. Besides beef and a few hogs, they also sell humanely raised, grass-fed veal. They market mostly within 50 miles of the farm. Besides word-of-mouth sales and the farmers' market, they sell beef and pork to the Oneota Community Food Co-op and the T-Bocks sports bar, both in

Decorah. But their veal has a reputation that reaches beyond the region, with eaters as far away as Colorado giving it rave reviews. Part of the reason they've been able to market beyond the immediate locale is the website (www.grassrunfarm.com) Kristine has set up.

Although grass-based beef production is the focus of their operation presently, one thing the Jepsens learned from Farm Beginnings is not to limit their options. They see the farm as the potential source of many enterprises, including dairying, environmental education and poultry production.

"When you're starting out, you kind of run the numbers on several different things and think about the possibilities and kind of fit the opportunities together as you go along. It's fun to take on new challenges. We both trend toward that," says Kristine, adding with a laugh: "Maybe we should buckle down."

But "buckling down" may not make complete economic sense. The Jepsens remember well the marketing advice they received in Farm Beginnings: it's easier to market three or four products to one customer than to find four new customers for the same product. As they consider all of these options, sitting in the back of their minds is some important advice they got from Chris Blanchard, the Farm Beginnings instructor.

"He said it's important to eliminate enterprises that are not profitable," says Ryan. "It frees you up to focus on profitable enterprises."

Red-faced satisfaction

The sun has set and the mercury long ago raced into negative territory. As Ryan and Kristine bundle up to check on the

Give it a listen

To listen to LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast featuring Ryan and Kristine Jepsen, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org and click on the **Listen to the Latest Podcast** link under **Take Action**. It's episode 48.

livestock, they talk about another key component they will consider when weighing the pluses and minuses of various enterprises: the intangibles that don't always show up on the bottom line.

They talk proudly of how much more organic matter is present in the soil after they converted their fields to well-managed pastures. Besides reducing erosion and runoff, the Jepsens are convinced such practices sequester carbon, helping in the fight against climate change.

And once in awhile they will drop in on T-Bocks for a meal. Inserted in the menus are Grass Run Farm fliers with the Jepsens' photo. Sometimes customers will come up to the couples' table to lavish praise on the job they've done.

"You just put your head down and turn a different color from embarrassment," says Ryan.

"But it's pretty gratifying to get that feedback," adds Kristine. "I don't know how the commodity farmer would get that same gratification. It's really important to what we do and sometimes it's the factor that revives us after going through months of drudgery."

Then it's out into the bitter winter night, where a little drudgery plants the seeds of such heartwarming moments at a meal table. □

2008-2009 Farm Beginnings course deadline Aug. 28

The Land Stewardship Project's Minnesota-area Farm Beginnings program is accepting applications for its 2008-2009 class sessions, which will be held in the communities of Goodhue (southeast Minnesota) and Paynesville (St. Cloud, Minn., area). The deadline for registration is Aug. 28; new course information is up on our website at www.farmbeginnings.org. You can also get more information by contacting LSP's Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or lpse@landstewardshipproject.org.

In recent years, Farm Beginnings courses have been launched in Illinois, Nebraska and North Dakota. Check

LSP's website for details on those courses. A Farm Beginnings course is also in the works for northeast Minnesota. For more information on that program, contact Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

Spring & summer FB field days

Farm Beginnings will be holding public field days on grazing and marketing at various Minnesota farms April 12, April 26, June 14 and June 21. For some of the field days, there is a \$20 charge for non-Farm Beginnings participant. Details are in the **Stewardship Calendar** on page 32.

Sweeping the landscape bare

A corn-based ethanol future means squeezing every last bit of energy off Midwestern crop fields, but at what cost?

EDITOR'S NOTE: In this issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, we launch a series of articles on the biofuels revolution. In recent years, the drive to produce energy from crops has had major impacts on economics, land stewardship and community dynamics in our rural areas. This installment examines some of the environmental problems associated with a continued emphasis on corn-based ethanol production.

By Brian DeVore

Soil scientist Gyles Randall calls it the “broom handle” effect. That’s when a corn field has been shaved clean: stalks, leaves, the whole nine yards—all the way to the stubble, leaving a field with a sparse, bristly look. There’s a whole lot of bare soil between those broom handles, and not much organic matter.

“That scares the bejeebers out of me,” says Randall, who regularly monitors cropland erosion and fertilizer runoff in southern Minnesota.

Crew-cut cornfields are just one possible response to an inescapable fact: we simply cannot raise enough corn in this country to meet our seemingly insatiable thirst for fuel. But agriculture, ever the eager overachiever, is giving it a try as the ethanol boom hits full stride.

Estimates of just how much corn will be raised for ethanol in the future vary, but all trends point up. According to Purdue University agricultural economist Chris Hurt, this year the demand for ethanol will surge from the current 7.3 billion gallons to 13.5 billion gallons. On Feb. 22, the USDA released a grains and oilseeds outlook for 2008 that predicts corn use for ethanol production will increase this year by 900 million bushels—a 28 percent jump from 2007. Even if 90 million acres of corn is planted this spring—predictions range from around 88 million acres to 92 million acres—there are doubts as to whether it will be enough to supply the capacity of current ethanol plants. A recent U.S. Senate proposal recommended the production of 15 billion to 36 billion gallons of biofuels by 2022. If a major portion of that fuel comes from corn ethanol, the long-term demand for corn will be unprecedented.

Because of the biofuels boom and increased worldwide demand for all agricultural products, cropland is becoming a dear resource. Overall, corn, soybeans and wheat acreage is expected to be 225 million acres in 2008, 7.4

million acres more than was planted in 2007. Where will that land come from? According to the USDA’s experts, some it will come at the cost of cotton ground and the 2.5 million acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) setaside land that is coming out of contract this year (some farmers have placed newspaper ads encouraging landowners to rent land for crops, rather than renew CRP



contracts). The rest of it? One guess is that forage and grassland will be plowed up for corn.

The result, say farmers, soil scientists and environmental experts, could be increased erosion, more contaminated water and less wildlife habitat. “We’re concerned about ethanol if it’s going to take grassland out and put it into production,” says Matt Holland, director of conservation programs for Pheasants Forever in Minnesota.

Soil scientists and conservation groups aren’t the only ones that fear the environmental impacts of corn-based biofuels. Of the more than 1,000 farmers who responded to the 2007 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll, 75 percent said removing corn residue for ethanol will increase soil erosion. Even as they expressed optimism that biofuels will be an economic boon, 77 percent said bringing marginal land into grain production would reduce wildlife habitat.

In February, the scientific journal

Science published two papers that concluded biofuels could make the environment worse by pushing farmers worldwide to plow up grasslands and clear forests for bioenergy. One paper concluded that when changes in land use are taken into account, corn-based ethanol could nearly double greenhouse gas emissions over a 30-year period.

Corn ethanol boosters say one way farmers can meet biofuel demand is not by using more land but by increasing how much corn current fields produce. Indeed, corn hybrids are getting better and better. Walk into any farm country coffee shop and you will hear farmers express wonder at how well new corn varieties weather drought and disease. The USDA projects average corn yields in the U.S. will rise from 155 to 173 bushels per acre by 2018. But there are concerns some of that yield increase is coming not from individual corn plants, but from stretching the boundaries of what is considered arable.

“Fields have become larger,” says northeast Iowa farmer Dan Specht. “The edges are getting cleaned up and fencerows are being cleared. The bulldozer operators have definitely been busy. People are farming roads right to the bottom of the ditch, farming right around the telephone poles, getting two more rows where a fenceline used to be.”

Making use of every square foot may be efficient, but it doesn’t leave much room for fencerows, grassy waterways and other structures that provide wildlife habitat while protecting soil and water.

USDA’s forecast

Perhaps the most extensive analysis of the possible farm-level environmental impacts of biofuels came in 2007 from the USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS) and its Office of the Chief Economist. That analysis concluded that as corn production for biofuels increases, nitrogen fertilizer use will go up around 6 percent by 2016 in both the Corn Belt (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio) and Lake States (Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan), and pesticide use will be almost 5 percent higher. The amount of nitrogen leaching into groundwater will be 2.4 percent higher in the Corn Belt by 2016, and 10.6 percent higher in the Lake States. Erosion will be between 1.5 and 3 percent higher during the next decade.

Nitrogen fertilizer runoff from Midwestern farms is the major cause of the Gulf of Mexico’s oxygen-depleted “Dead Zone.” Scientists have estimated that

Biofuels, see page 25...

nitrogen levels in the Mississippi River basin will need to decrease by 30 percent to 50 percent to shrink this hypoxic area. But the increase in corn cultivation required to produce 15 billion gallons of ethanol by 2022 would *increase* the amount of nitrogen in the Gulf by at least 10 percent, according to a study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in March.

Broom & doom

As Randall points out, one potential contributor to increased erosion and chemical runoff is taking the next step beyond making ethanol from the corn kernel and using the entire stalk or “residue” of the corn plant for fuel via cellulosic technology. This technology is still not commercially viable, but it’s generating a lot of excitement. Besides making biofuel from the corn stalk, engineers say we could also burn it as biomass for ethanol plants that are suffering from high natural gas prices.

Corn stalks are often dismissed as crop waste, but in fact they play a critical role in soil conservation. They protect it from the erosive force of rain drops and are key to replacing organic matter. The importance of crop residue is one reason most farmers have given up the moldboard plow, which buries such material.

But crop residues will play a bigger part in biofuels in the future, according to government analyses. One study by the U.S. Department of Energy and the USDA estimates that crop residues will provide one-third of ethanol’s needs by the middle of the 21st century. Fulfilling such a role would require 60 percent to 75 percent of crop residue to be recovered, according to the USDA.

Some residue can be removed without causing major environmental problems, but it’s not clear where the tipping point is. Randall, for one, believes that taking more than half the residue may be detrimental. Others say—depending on the slope of the land and the soil’s organic matter content—as much as two-thirds could be sacrificed without major problems. The bottom line is we don’t have a handle on exactly how much residue should be left on a field to protect the soil and keep it agronomically viable.

“Despite the broad recognition of the need for specific guidelines for residue removal to avoid environmental degradation, none yet exist,” concluded the USDA in a 2006 report.

Corn-on-corn

During the past few decades, the conventional wisdom has been that farmers needed to rotate corn with another crop from year-to-year in order to fight disease, preserve soil fertility and maintain decent yields. Rotations are seen as a way of reducing fertilizer use while



In an attempt to extract every last bushel of corn from the land, farmers are stretching the arable boundaries of fields to places like the edges of creeks. (LSP photo)

naturally breaking up pest cycles. Planting soybeans or alfalfa between corn crops can fix nitrogen in the soil. Small grains such as rye protect the soil while naturally controlling weeds. When it’s continuous corn, such natural defenses are supplanted with tillage and chemicals.

The biofuels craze has ushered in an era when “corn-on-corn” is agronomically acceptable. The ERS-Office of the Chief Economist analysis predicts that continuous corn plantings will rise 28 percent by 2016 in the Corn Belt and 39 percent in the Lake States. Farm magazines and extension bulletins are now full of advice on how to raise corn on the same field year-after-year. Yes, yields will take a hit in the short term, but agrichemicals and tillage offer a way to compensate, say the experts. *Progressive Farmer* magazine recently described how one southeast Minnesota operation went from 2,900 acres of corn to almost 4,500 acres on a total of 6,000 acres; the farm has three ethanol plants within 30 miles. The magazine’s advice? Pour on more fertilizer and get rid of plant residue (see page 6 for more on the limits of nitrogen

fertilizer use in continuous corn).

In recent years, soybeans have been the most popular crop used as a rotation between corn plantings. Some soil scientists aren’t that crazy about soybeans as a rotation crop, since they can burn up organic matter and don’t add that much plant residue back to the soil. In a way, soil scientist Randall says, corn-on-corn can be a plus for the soil compared to corn-soybeans. But he has a big caveat.

“As long as we practice good conservation” corn-on-corn is okay, he says. “We need to not be moldboard plowing.”

But conventional tillage in the Corn Belt will go up as much as 2.8 percent by 2016, according to the USDA. Although there is a fair amount of conservation tillage done to raise soybeans, interest in corn conservation tillage has plateaued.

Soil scientists say that cover crops—crops such as rye planted after the harvest of corn to protect the soil and build organic matter—should play an increasingly important role in crop rotations if we are to balance production with conservation. But cover crop use in the Corn Belt is quite low, according to a study published in the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* last fall. Only 11 percent of the more than 1,000 farmers surveyed in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Minnesota had planted cover crops sometime during the previous five years, according to the study.

Looking at such trends, it’s clear using a row crop like corn as the basis for biofuels is ultimately not a good long-term strategy environmentally or agronomically. Perennial plant systems such as grass offer a better alternative down the road. But that means sharing some of the research and development resources corn hybrids have soaked up for so long.

“For example, we’re probably looking at switchgrass genetics that are equivalent to 1940s corn genetics,” Randall says. “I’d like to think we could pump public research dollars into faster growing, perennial plant systems.” □

Future installments will examine biofuel alternatives involving perennial plant systems such as grass, and how such systems could be adapted agronomically and economically in our rural communities.

See page 15 for information on RIM-Clean Energy, a program that would help promote sustainable bioenergy production on farms.

In Defense of Food An Eater's Manifesto

By Michael Pollan
2008; 228 pages
The Penguin Press
www.michaelpollan.com/
indefense.php

Reviewed by Dana Jackson

Michael Pollan's new book, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, hit the bestsellers list so fast one wonders if the ink had time to dry. Pollan's reached that enviable author's position where readers automatically buy his next book based on the reputation of his former books. In his first best seller, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World* (see Nov./Dec. 2001 *LSL*), Pollan launched his career as a food system analyst and critic by writing about the life cycle of the French fried potato. In his second best seller, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (see Autumn 2006 *LSL*), Pollan contrasted the corn-bean feedlot machine that powers our fast food restaurants to a meat production system based on grass, and he explored a hunter-gatherer system at a very personal level. This book made him "that guy who writes about food."

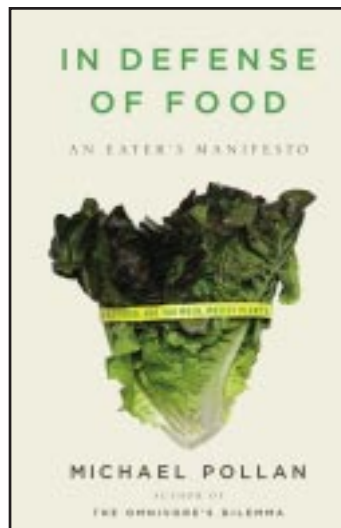
Somewhere between *Botany of Desire* and *Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan stopped being a writer from Connecticut and became a professor of journalism at the University of California-Berkeley. The long list of acknowledgments in this book gives readers a hint of the support structure provided by editors, assistants, graduate students and grants that his prestigious post provides.

Though his fee is celebrity high, Pollan makes lots of presentations around the country, and he's found that people are confused about what to eat because of the "shifting ground of nutrition science," and an aggressive "food-marketing machine that thrives on change for its own sake." In an attempt to clear up the confusion, he wrote an essay about diet and health for the *New York Times Magazine*; that essay became the basis for *In Defense of Food*.

Pollan states that the aim of his book is to "help us reclaim our health and happiness as eaters." He sees a need to

defend the eating of food because most of what people eat today is not "food" and not really "eaten," but consumed while they are on the go or looking at screens. Literally from the first page of his book, Pollan sets out to tell readers "what humans should eat to be maximally healthy." It's very simple: "Eat food, not too much, mostly plants," and the rest of the book is an elaboration of this first commandment.

The problem today, Pollan writes, is that people aren't eating food, they're eating nutrients. Nutritionists and food manufacturers have reduced whole foods to their nutrient components. Beta carotene is what's important in veg-



etables, and Vitamin C is what counts in citrus. This is why cereal boxes, even food co-op brands, scream out their quantities of vitamins, protein or fiber and their heart-healthy absence of cholesterol and trans fats. Manufacturers of processed oat cereal sell boxes of nutrients. Go to the bulk bins for rolled oats if you want food.

Nutritionism is an ideology that ignores qualitative differences between foods and divides nutrients into good ones and bad ones, though their standing may reverse later on. For example, proteins once ranked better than carbohydrates, but carbohydrates are now ranked superior to proteins, according to the USDA food pyramid.

Pollan makes an example of the 30 year-old campaign to convince people that dietary fat is responsible for chronic disease. The federal government's 1981 Dietary Goals directed us to eat low-fat foods and choose margarine (trans fat) over butter (saturated fat), only to discover 20 years later that trans fats

were really worse than butter. Many people who avoided fats became obese eating carbohydrates.

Pollan acknowledges that Marion Nestle previously discussed these issues thoroughly in *Food Politics* and other books (see Dec. 2003 *LSL*), and that early on Joan Gussow, a retired Columbia University nutritionist, opposed the focus on nutrients instead of whole foods.

Like Nestle and Gussow, Pollan recognizes that it isn't nutrient imbalance that makes Americans obese and plagued with diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and high rates of cancer. It's the whole pattern of eating that Pollan calls the Western diet, which features "lots of refined, processed carbohydrates and meat, lots of added fat and sugar, lots of everything except fruits, vegetables and whole grains." We eat refined instead of whole foods made from crops grown in simple monocultures rather than complex agricultural systems, and we value quantity over quality. Our diets have been simplified to a heavy dependence upon four crops—corn, soy, wheat and rice—which account for two thirds of the calories consumed per capita in America. Pollan blames America's abandonment of food for the ideology of nutritionism on the government for "issuing dietary advice based on sketchy science. He also takes journalism to task for uncritically reporting the latest dietary studies on the front page, and rips the food industry for "marketing food-like products with tenuous health claims."

From journalist to nutritionist

So far, so good. But Pollan's analysis becomes fuzzy in the section "From Leaves to Seeds." He argues that the basis of our diet has shifted from leaves to seeds, thereby shifting the ratio of omega-3 fatty acids found in leaves to omega-6 fatty acids found in grains. The use of seed oils and margarine instead of animal fat and butter produced from grass-fed cows also contributes to greater consumption of omega-6s. The body uses these fats in different ways, and this change in ratio could be affecting rates of heart disease.

But humans never depended upon leaves as the mainstay of our diet. Leaves are mostly cellulose which our bodies cannot process for energy. Since we domesticated cereal grains and legumes over 10,000 years ago, flours and breads and cooked beans and grains have been the chief energy source for people in many parts of the planet. Leaves have

Defense, see page 27...

been a nutritious accompaniment to meals, but not the main food.

Pollan changes the context of this argument and makes it more accurate when he discusses how the food chain of our meats originally started with green plants and moved to a base of seeds. The meats humans have eaten for most of our evolutionary history came from leaf grazers, and it's only in the past 50 years that we made grain the basis of their diet.

So now nutritionists are asking if a deficiency of omega-3 could be the problem with the Western diet. Omega-3 fatty acids may be "poised to become the new oat bran of our time," Pollan notes.

Here's the problem I have with *In Defense of Food*: In the last part of the book, Pollan gives advice on how to escape from the Western diet, and I was a little surprised that he became a nutrition

adviser, given the fallibility of previous advisers. He says, "Don't eat anything your grandmother wouldn't recognize as food," and "avoid food products containing ingredients that are unfamiliar or unpronounceable or more than 5 in number." But though my agrarian, working-class great-grandmother might judge processed foods in plastic packages inedible, she'd probably also reject perfectly healthy but unfamiliar fruits and vegetables and whole foods that aren't culturally German or English.

Pollan says we should avoid food products that make health claims, shop the peripheries of the supermarket (produce, dairy, meats) and stay out of the middle where boxes and cans of processed foods are. Shop in farmers' markets and buy a freezer. Makes sense. But he also includes specific advice about what, when and how much to eat, including advising readers to eat slowly, to take a multi-vitamin-and-mineral pill

after age 50, and if you don't eat fish, a fish oil supplement. Wait a minute!

According to the *Natural Foods Merchandiser's* 2006 list of the top "natural food" sellers in natural supermarkets (including food co-ops), number one was vitamins and minerals, and number four (after packaged fresh produce, bread and baked goods) was food supplements.

After castigating nutritionism and the heavy influence of food industry marketing, Pollan's advising people to shop the inside of the store for bottles of processed nutrients. Hmm.

Dana Jackson coordinates the St. Croix River Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local® campaign out of the Land Stewardship Project's White Bear Lake office. She can be contacted at 651-653-0618 or danaj@landstewardshipproject.org.

King Corn

A Film by Aaron Woolf, Curt Ellis & Ian Cheney
2007; 90 minutes
Mosaic Films Incorporated
www.kingcorn.net

Reviewed by Brian DeVore

As someone who has to have something explained to me at least three different times, in at least as many ways, I've become a big fan of books, articles and films that use simple (not to be confused with simplistic) vehicles to explain very complicated subjects. I grew up on a farm. I've written about agriculture for two decades. I've interviewed farmers, economists, scientists and political wonks about the ins and outs of agricultural policy. I've read books and viewed documentaries that break down the history of this beast. But frankly, like many Americans, I'm still pretty confused as to why we have a situation where, for example, farmers are rewarded for raising corn but punished for raising grass or vegetables.

That why I was delighted when the young gents who made and starred in the film *King Corn* pulled out a Fisher-Price toy farm set to explain not only farm policy, but basic farm economics. It was more straightforward and hard-hitting than a thousand Purdue University PowerPoints. *King Corn* uses humor, pathos, participatory journalism, and yes,

children's toys, to tell the story of how corn is raised, where it goes when it leaves the land, and what its ubiquitous nature means to human, environmental and economic health. Anyone familiar with Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma* or Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* will not be surprised by the conclusions of the film: corn is way, way too much of a good thing, and government policy is only making things worse.



But what struck me about the film was the helplessness exhibited by the various subjects of the *Maize Monarchy*. Everyone interviewed—from farmers to university scientists to a former USDA head—seems a little perplexed as to how to extract themselves out of a system where we don't so much as raise corn, as serve at its beck and call. They are being carried along by the powerful corn current and don't seem willing or able to swim to shore and strike out in a different direction. (By the way, I give the filmmakers an A+ for empathy when it comes to the subjects of their film—

this is no Michael Moore-type skewering.)

Many of the people featured in this film seemed, if not pleasantly comfortable, somewhat comfortably numbed by what corn was doing to their communities, to the land and to their families. None of them appear to like what was going on, but they weren't uncomfortable enough to change things. Even the owner of a giant beef feedlot in Colorado just shrugged his shoulders and said the dominance of corn was the result of the American consumer's demand for cheap meat and there wasn't much he could do about it. The late Earl Butz, interviewed in a nursing home and a feeble shadow of his former self, didn't make a convincing case that when he was U.S. ag secretary he had any more control over the situation than the local farmer. Is the invisible hand of King Corn just moving us around like chess pieces? Get a grip people: it's a plant, not a force of nature.

It's important here not to focus exclusively on corn as the bad guy. Let's not forget it makes a good feed grain and source of human food, and that it grows well in the Midwest.

The same attitudes and policies that made corn the monocrop king could make lima beans or apples or even pasture grass into too much of a good thing. All in good measure.

Corn isn't the enemy. Our comfortable relationship with it is. □

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.



Get your *Buy Fresh Buy Local* bags & aprons

You can show off your support for fresh, local food with a new *Buy Fresh Buy Local*® cloth shopping bag or apron. Shopping bags (15 x 16) with the colorful St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* label, or the Pride of the Prairie *Buy Fresh Buy Local* label, are available for \$15.

The full-length apron, which features the St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* label, is also available for \$15.

For information on buying these items, contact the Land Stewardship Project's Louise Arbuckle at 651-653-0618 or lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org.



Land Stewardship Project t-shirt features new logo

LSP's union-made t-shirt is 100 percent certified organic cotton and features our new green and black logo on the front and "Keeping the Land & People Together" on the back. These short-sleeved shirts are cream-colored and come in men's and women's sizes.

Shirts are available in LSP's Lewiston, Montevideo, Minneapolis and White Bear Lake offices. You can also have them mailed to you by calling Louise Arbuckle at 651-653-0618.

The price is \$15. If you are ordering by mail, contact Louise at 651-653-0618 or lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org for information on additional shipping costs. □



LSP cap looks good in the field or in town

The Land Stewardship Project's new baseball-style cap is union-made in the U.S. of high quality 100-percent cotton. It comes in black with LSP's green and white embroidered logo featured on the front. A fabric strap and brass clasp on the back make this a one-size-fits-all cap.

Caps can be obtained from each of our offices: Lewiston, 507-523-3366; Montevideo, 320-269-2105; Minneapolis, 612-722-6377; White Bear Lake, 651-653-0618. You can also have them mailed to you by calling our White Bear Lake office.

The price is \$15. If you are ordering by mail, call 651-653-0618 for information on shipping costs. □



Posters & notecards

LSP poster

LSP's special 25th Anniversary commemorative poster is now available for the bargain basement price of \$5 if you buy one at an event or at one of our offices (\$5.33 with Minnesota sales tax). If you order one through the mail, the price is \$8



((\$8.33 with tax). To order by mail, contact Louise Arbuckle at 651-653-0618 or lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org. Posters can also be purchased from our offices in the Minnesota communities of Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) and South Minneapolis (612-722-6377).

This poster is by artist Ricardo Levins Morales of the Northland Poster Collective. For almost three decades, the Northland Poster Collective (www.northlandposter.com) has featured the art of social justice, the tools of grassroots organizing and activism, and the craft of union workers. For LSP, the Collective has created a piece entitled, "Keeping the Land and People Together." The 17 x 22 high-quality, laminated artwork is suitable for framing and portrays a food and farming system that benefits the land, its people and our communities.

LSP notecards

LSP is offering a set of blank notecards that feature our commemorative poster. The 4 x 5 cards come in packages of eight, and cost \$10. To order the cards, contact Louise Arbuckle at 651-653-0618 or lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org.



Organic land for rent

Land Stewardship Project members Wes Slaymaker and Diana Cohen have five acres of organic vegetable farming ground for rent near Osceola, in western Wisconsin. This five-acre parcel is part of a larger 20-acre farm.

For details, call 608-449-2237 or e-mail wslaymaker@ecoenergyllc.com. □

Land for Twin Cities-area Hmong farmers

In 2007, many Hmong farmers who sell at Twin Cities area farmers' markets had a hard time finding land to rent, due to high corn and soybean prices. It's looking like 2008 will be no different, and in fact land may be even tighter as crop prices rise higher. Most of the fruit and vegetable growers have to pay deposits on their farmers' market stalls a year in advance, before they know if they have land to rent.

If you have farmland within easy driving distance of the Twin Cities and would be willing to rent out as little as two to five acres for fruit and vegetable production, contact Jim Meisenheimer at the Farm Service Agency at 651-602-7719, or Ly Vang of the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women at 651-255-0799. □

Rochester Farmers' Market position

The Rochester Downtown Farmers' Market is hiring a part-time assistant manager for the 2008 summer season. Primary duties will be recruiting and coordinating volunteers, and assisting the market manager.

The market is open on Saturday mornings from May through October and this paid position is for five hours per week.

For more information, contact Kari Dunn at 507-273-8232 or rochfarmmkt@hotmail.com. □

Farmers' market sales without the 4 a.m. wake-up

Want to sell your production at a farmers' market without spending hours at a booth? The Market General Store is a new project of the Mill City Farmers' Market in Minneapolis that's designed to diversify goods offered at the market while bringing in producers with limited time and financial resources. Through the General Store, Mill City market professionals sell products for the farmers, so that the producers do not have to spend time and resources staffing a market space themselves. Farm-

ers pay a nominal weekly vendor's fee and receive direct profit from the sale of their product.

Mill City is looking for farmers who are producing products not available at the existing market: grains, dried beans, bison, dairy products, value-added products, etc.

For more information, contact Nick Schneider at 612-824-7588 (ns.schneider@mac.com), or Aaron Reser at 612-716-6159 (aaron.reser@gmail.com). □

Minority ag report

Shut Out: How US Farm Programs fail minority farmers is a report produced by Oxfarm America. The report documents how racial and ethnic discrimination stands in the way of full participation by socially disadvantaged farmers in our farm programs (according to the most recent Agricultural Census, minority farmers receive 1 percent of all commodity payments).

For a copy of the report, as well as other resources related to creating fair farm policy, see www.oxfamamerica.org/farbill, or call 800-776-9326. □

A breezy read

The *Farmers' Guide to Wind Energy: Legal Issues in Farming the Wind*, contains important legal information for farmers interested in a range of wind energy developments.

For information on ordering, call Farmers' Legal Action Group at 877-860-4349, or visit www.flaginc.org. □

This year LSP is prioritizing making membership renewals simpler, more efficient and timelier because:

- **It will save money.** A better renewal system means less time and resources spent on renewal requests and follow-up.
- **It will cut down on waste.** Less follow-up means fewer mailings and less paper used.
- **It will improve our ability to plan for the future.** On a personal level, it is hard to think that getting your annual dues in a few months late is of much consequence. But when you take a wider look at the whole organization, membership dues really do add up. If we do a better job of getting annual renewals in on a 12-month cycle, it allows LSP staff to plan, manage and budget more accurately.

Membership, see page 31...



**LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT**

Membership Update

Money, timeliness & renewals

Why renewing your membership on time makes a difference for family farmers, rural communities and the environment

By *Mike McMahon*

First, let me say thank you for your generosity in recent months. The Land Stewardship Project has asked for your help to become a more powerful and effective organization and you have responded with your dollars and your actions.

At different times during the year we ask for your support above membership dues to help raise the funds we need to

build effective programs that advance our vision for a sustainable and socially just food and farming system. The funds raised through these requests support all of LSP's work and they are an important part of our annual budget.

Yet the single most important thing you can do to help LSP advance its mission is to become a member and stay current on your membership. Membership is the key to staying informed and active on the issues you care about while building a stronger organization better able to create positive change.

To improve LSP's renewal system, we are implementing some changes. These changes are designed to better communicate your renewal date, save time and resources, and decrease the amount of time between renewals.

I should also say LSP has a very good renewal rate and most members renew on their first notice. But we can improve and more consistent renewals will help LSP grow. Here are three changes we've made to our membership renewal system for 2008:

1) Switching from a renewal date to a renewal month and communicating more explicitly and through more avenues about your renewal month. We have changed from a renewal date to a renewal month simply to make it easier to remember. You'll start seeing your renewal month on mailing labels and more clearly printed in written communication like appeals, thank-you letters and the *Land Stewardship Letter*. Eventually it will be added to your e-mails from LSP.

2) Holding firm on a member's renewal month. This means that if a member is due to renew in March 2008 and she or he sends in annual dues in May 2008, the member's renewal month will remain March 2009. In the past we have moved renewal dates forward to correspond with the date the dues were paid. The problem with this approach is there are a number of memberships that in effect become 15-18 month memberships (rather than an annual membership). Under the old system LSP pays for keeping a membership current while waiting for the renewal, without ever collecting the dues while the member was lapsed. Keeping the renewal month consistent will also help establish a clear renewal timeline and help us cash flow our work.

3) Establishing a paperless renewal system. LSP is now prepared to offer a paperless renewal option for members. By signing up for this automatic renewal plan, you can help us reduce waste and keep costs down. It is a simple, efficient and secure way to support LSP. If you are interested in renewing your membership this way, please see the "Saving trees" sidebar for more information.

Again I'd like to thank you for your LSP membership and your generosity. There is a lot of talk about change right now and undoubtedly change is going to

Saving trees

Reduce waste, keep costs down and simplify your Land Stewardship Project membership renewal by setting up an automatic renewal plan —monthly, quarterly and annual options are all possible.

Simply select the paperless renewal option on the enclosed renewal form and you will no longer receive membership renewal or donation requests through the mail and your membership will automatically renew on the date you select.

Setting it up is simple: You tell us when you would like to pay your membership dues, how much you would like to donate, and where to charge your gift by providing us with checking account information or a credit card number on the enclosed membership renewal form. When your scheduled donation comes due, we will notify you by e-mail one week before it is automatically gifted from your account. Your membership will renew every year automatically until you notify us you have decided to end your membership.

This is secure and efficient: The Land Stewardship Project works with Vanco Services, LLC to process donations electronically. Vanco works with over 5,000 churches and nonprofits to process automated donations securely and at low cost.

Questions? Please call our White Bear Lake office at 651-653-0618 and ask for Abby, Cathy or Mike.

happen, but what kind of change and who will benefit has not been decided. By maintaining your membership in LSP, you help make changes that are going to benefit family farms, rural communities and all of us who want healthy, safe food.

Please contact me if you have ques-

tions about your membership. □

LSP Membership Coordinator Mike McMahon can be contacted at mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org or 651-653-0618.

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 work-place giving as an option in making our communities better places to live.

Together member organizations of the Minnesota Environmental Fund work to:

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



You can support LSP in your workplace by giving through the Minnesota Environmental Fund. Options include giving a designated amount through payroll deduction, or a single gift. You may also choose to give to the entire coalition or specify the organization of your choice within the coalition, such as the Land Stewardship Project. If your employer does not provide this opportunity, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it.

For more information, contact LSP's Mike McMahon at 651-653-0618 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **APRIL 8**—U of M Organic Winter School: Organic Livestock Feed Production workshop, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Stone Mill Coffeehouse & Eatery, Cannon Falls, Minn.; Contact: Harriet Behar, harriet@mosesorganic.org; 608-872-2164

→ **APRIL 11-20**—"Spring Thaw" art exhibit, with proceeds to benefit LSP, Water & Oil Art Gallery, 506 Kenny Rd., St. Paul, Minn.; Contact: 651-774-2260; www.waterandoil.com

→ **APRIL 12**—Farm Beginnings introduction to grazing workshop, Franciscan Spirituality Center, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: Heather Flashinski, LSP, 715-289-4896; fbse@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **APRIL 17**—"Local Food Supply," one in a series of meetings on Sustainable Rural Communities featuring LSP's Caroline van Schaik & Maggi Adamek of the U of M Experiment in Rural Cooperation, La Crescent, Minn.; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, 507-523-3366; caroline@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **APRIL 19**—7th Annual Seward Co-op Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Fair, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., 2111 East Franklin Ave., Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: www.seward.coop; 612-338-2465

→ **APRIL 19**—Wargo Nature Center Earth Day Event, Centerville, Minn.; Contact: 651-429-8007

→ **APRIL 26**—Farm Beginnings field day on grass-fed dairy & PastureLand Co-op, Benrud Farm, Goodhue, Minn.; Contact: Heather Flashinski, LSP, 715-289-4896; fbse@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **APRIL 26**—Workshop on post harvest & handling of produce, East Troy, Wis.;

Contact: www.michaelfieldsagainst.org; 262-642-3303

→ **APRIL 30**—Application Deadline for the 2008 World Meeting of Food Communities-Terra Madre; Contact: www.slowfoodusa.org/events/terra_madre_2008.html; 718-260-8000

→ **MAY 3-4**—All Goat Expo, Stearns County Fairgrounds, Sauk Centre, Minn.; Contact: http://acidnineonline.com/mngoats.com

→ **MAY 3-4**—2008 Community Food & Farm Festival, Minnesota State Fairgrounds, Saint Paul (see page 9)

→ **MAY 17-18**—16th Annual Rivers & History Weekend, Upper Sioux Agency State Park, Granite Falls, Minn.; Contact: CURE, www.curemriver.org or 877-269-2873

→ **MAY 18**—Slow Food Minn. foraging walk & dinner, Lentz Farm, Lake City, Minn.; Contact: www.slowfoodmn.org

→ **MAY 19**—2008 Session of the Minnesota Legislature adjourns (see page 13)

→ **JUNE 5**—Agroforestry Training, Eagle Bluff, Lanesboro, Minn.; Contact: 800-876-8636; http://umnnext.cmi.registration.com/ProgramDetail.aspx/AgroforestryTrainingLanesboro

→ **JUNE 14**—Farm Beginnings tour on on-farm milk processing, Cedar Summit Farm, New Prague, Minn.; Contact: Amy Bacigalupo, LSP, 320-269-2105; amyb@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **JUNE 20-22**—Midwest Renewable Energy Fair, Custer, Wis.; Contact: www.the-mrea.org/energy_fair.php; 715-592-6595

→ **JUNE 21**—Farm Beginnings workshop on grazing & pasture assessment, Marshall & Canby, Minn.; Contact: Susan Hurst, LSP, 320-839-7132; fbwest@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **JULY 10**—Organic Field Day, SROC, Lamberton, Minn.; Contact: http://swroc.coafes.umn.edu; 507-752-7372

→ **AUG. 4-8**—21st North American Prairie Conference: The Prairie Meets the River, Winona (Minn.) State University; Contact: Bruno Borsari, 507-457-2822; http://bio.winona.edu/NAPC

→ **AUG. 12-14**—Sustainable Agriculture Coalition summer meeting, 20th Anniversary celebration & symposium on the future of sustainable agriculture, Farmington, Minn.; Contact: Adam Warthesen, LSP, 612-722-6377; adamw@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **AUG. 16**—Minnesota Garlic Festival, Wright County Fairgrounds; Contact: Jerry Ford, 320-543-3394; www.sfa-mn.org

→ **AUG. 26**—Minn. Cooks Event, Minn. State Fair, St. Paul (see page 21); Contact: Food Alliance Midwest, 651-265-3682

→ **AUG. 28**—Registration deadline for 2008-2009 Land Stewardship Project's Minnesota Farm Beginnings® Course (see page 23); Contact: Karen Benson, LSP, 507-523-3366; www.farmbeginnings.org

→ **SEPT. 6-7**—15th Annual Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association Harvest Festival, Bayport Festival Park, Duluth, Minn.; Contact: www.lake.superiorfarming.org; 218-393-3276

→ **OCT. 20-22**—Farming with Grass: Achieving Sustainable Mixed Agricultural Landscapes in Grasslands Environments, featuring LSP's George Boody, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Contact: www.swcs.org/fwg; 515-289-2331

→ **OCT. 23-27**—World Meeting of Food Communities-Terra Madre, Turin, Italy; Contact: www.slowfoodusa.org/events/terra_madre_2008.html; 718-260-8000

Check www.landstewardshipproject.org for the latest on upcoming events.



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