

The Land Stewardship

Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Vol. 27, No. 2

www.landstewardshipproject.org

Summer 2009



The Jody and Mike Lenz family.



The Vanessa and Nolan Lenzen family.

LSP's Farm Beginnings and the future of family farming (see pages 14-17).

—Legislative Round-Up—

—Health Scare Stories—

— Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse—

—Stewardship & Local Food: What's the Connection?—

—Pollinator Peril—

—Reviews: Holy Ground, Deeply Rooted—

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

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This newsletter printed by Roscoe Printers, Wanamingo, Minn.

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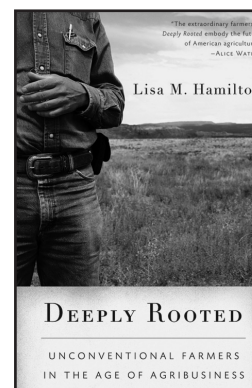
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Letters

Spread it around

After reading the Winter 2009 *Land Stewardship Letter*, I felt enriched with new facts and ideas. I also felt I had met people doing extraordinary things. Good literature and good teaching also brings us to that point.

Being a Land Stewardship Project member and then a board member for many years, can there really be new things to learn? You betcha!

Former LSP board member Jim VanderPol clued us in on the science of pig genetics, in an almost poetic way. Farmers I know such as Bonnie Haugen are getting recognition for doing the right things for all of us. I have been lobbying to repeal Green Acres changes, but after reading the article in the *LSL* I feel like I know the subject much better. New farmer Karen Haverinen has a story that should inspire us about the future of farming in Minnesota. And did

you know that red cabbage is being grown in high tunnels to determine if nutrition can be achieved with light manipulation? And I sure would love to live with the Warthesens on their West Indian Creek farm.

The *LSL* always ties me to stories of farming and people. Please share your copy (or sign up new members) and spread the magic around.

— **Charlotte Brooker**
Maplewood, Minn.

Charlotte Brooker was most recently the Chair of LSP's Board of Directors.

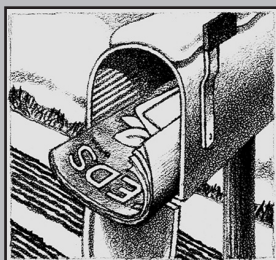
Reigniting the flame

You people at the Land Stewardship Project are exciting me all over again, rolling my age back to those years when Ron Kroese and I first began dreaming of land stewardship. A few days ago, I got *LIVE-WIRE*. Terrific! And now I have been reading the new issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter*. I hadn't noticed lately just how original and exciting it is. I can't remember when I have written a letter of praise to an editor. If I could roll back a few years, I believe I would apply for a job where I belong—with LSP. Alas, I passed 90 last week.

— **Victor Ray**
Little Rock, Ark.

Victor Ray co-founded LSP in 1982.

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 issues we cover. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Commentaries and letters published in the *Land Stewardship Letter* do not necessarily represent the views of the Land Stewardship Project.

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Will Allen: Everybody has a right to good food

Will Allen has fired the imaginations of people across the country who are working toward a future where urban agriculture reclaims vacant lots, makes young people entrepreneurs and plays a major role in the local food supply.

Allen is the co-founder and CEO of Growing Power (www.growingpower.org), a Milwaukee-based nonprofit that is proving that food production can be carried out on a viable scale in the city. A sharecropper's son, former pro basketball player and recent recipient of a MacArthur Genius Grant, the highly energetic Allen focuses on reaching out to young people through internships, tours and workshops. He is particularly interested in getting kids of color interested in producing food as a profitable business.

Excerpted here are comments made by Allen on episode 64 of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast (www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=4):

Racism in the food system

It really goes back to slavery days, where people were oppressed and today people still

reflect on those days. And so to really inspire people of color to go back into food production is much more difficult.

We want to create a situation where regardless of what color you are, you can work in any community and be treated with dignity and respect. Everybody has a right to the same food, the same good food, and unless we make that happen, we can't have sustainable communities or a sustainable country. It's to everybody's benefit that all of our citizens have an opportunity to be successful.

Getting young people excited about food production

When you start with them as 8-year-olds it's easy to hook them, because they have such curiosity. But as you get into their teens, their heads are full of so much today. So to get them engaged, it's really about a job, at first. But there's really something very magical and spiritual about touching the soil over and over again. It's something I can't really explain, but kids get connected to the soil and if they're able to make money at something they realize this isn't so bad, this work—and I'm able to eat good food.

The 7 "Ps" Allen uses when working with youth

1. **Pride:** Your pride drives you along a continuum.
2. **Patience:** You have to have patience to grow passion.
3. **Passion:** We don't start out by being passionate about this stuff—you have to grow it.
4. **Performance:** Even though you have passion, you have to perform.
5. **Perseverance:** It speaks for itself.
6. **Partners:** You need partners in this endeavor.
7. **Play:** You've got to have some fun. You've got to sit back and look at your accomplishments to reenergize yourself and celebrate successes you have around food. And that puts you back into the continuum so you can do this over and over again.

Will Allen and Growing Power are featured in the new film Fresh (see page 6).

Plowing Through the Numbers

Every five years, the USDA releases its U.S. Census of Agriculture, a statistical compilation that provides a snapshot of trends in this country's food and farming system. The 2007 Census was released to the public earlier this year, and Land Stewardship Project member Chris Vanecek recently combed through the numbers for us. The *Land Stewardship Letter* will periodically feature summaries of some of that combing. The 2007 Ag Census is available at your local library, or by visiting www.agcensus.usda.gov.

Direct food sales

Direct food sales are defined by the 2007 Census of Agriculture as a direct transfer from the farmer to the consumer via such avenues as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations, roadside stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own sites, etc.:

- ◆ Farm income from direct food sales increased from \$812 million in 2002 to \$1.2 billion in 2007—a 33 percent increase.
- ◆ In 2007, 136,817 U.S. farms were involved in direct sales, a 15 percent increase from 2002.
- ◆ A side note related to direct sales of foods: As of August 2008, there were 4,385 farmers' markets in the U.S., which is almost 3,000 more than there were two decades ago, according to the USDA. □

Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

→ Myth:

Country of Origin Labeling will make it impossible for farmers to market their products through local stores and restaurants.

→ Fact:

Country of Origin Labeling, also known as COOL, is a federal law that requires retailers to inform their customers of the country where certain agricultural products originated from. Family farm, consumer, environmental and health advocacy groups have long called for such a requirement, arguing that eaters deserve to know more about the source of their food. Recent food recalls and health scares have made such labeling even more imperative.

After years of delays, COOL was implemented in March 2009. Products covered by COOL include: muscle cuts of beef, lamb, chicken, goat and pork; ground beef, ground lamb, ground chicken, ground goat and ground pork; perishable agricultural commodities (generally fruits and vegetables); peanuts; macadamia nuts; pecans; ginseng; and wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish.

There have been a lot of misconceptions about the impact of COOL on the farm level. For example, one myth being propagated is that COOL will create an insurmountable regulatory/paperwork nightmare for farmers who want to direct-market to consumers, local retailers or even restaurants.

In fact, under COOL farmers are not considered “retailers” with respect to the

sale of products they raise themselves. So farmers who sell only their own products do not have to label the country of origin. Farmers who sell directly to consumers, including at farmers' markets, are not subject to regulations under COOL. And COOL does not apply to “food service establishments” — restaurants, cafeterias, lunchrooms, food stands, saloons, taverns, bars, lounges, salad bars, delicatessens, etc. So a farmer selling tomatoes or beef to the local café will not be affected.

However, nothing in COOL prevents retailers such as grocery stores from requiring a farmer to pre-label his or her products as a condition of doing business. And if a farmer has livestock processed at a custom facility, for example, and then sells the resulting meat products to a retailer, then COOL regulations apply.

But documenting where, for example, a steer or hog came from should not be a paperwork quagmire for most farmers. It can be done through a relatively simple affidavit system. And COOL allows the use of “continuous affidavits” which are valid for an indefinite period of time until they are cancelled by the producer, helping to reduce the paperwork load.

Under the COOL law, USDA cannot require farmers to keep records other than those maintained in the normal course of business to prove the country of origin of their products. For example, for livestock, animal health papers, import or customs documents, birth records, purchase records and sales receipts are considered acceptable documentation under COOL. For fruits and vegetables, country of origin can be verified via sales records, harvest

records, delivery tickets, purchase records, production and sales contracts, and pick tickets, among other documents.

It should be noted that as part of COOL documentation, USDA cannot require a farmer to participate in the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), a trace-back initiative that is controversial for many producers. But — and this is a big but — as part of their efforts to comply with COOL, packers may insist that farmers providing livestock to their plants participate in NAIS.

→ More information:

- Farmers' Legal Action Group has developed a fact sheet called, “The Country of Origin Labeling Program: A Snapshot of How the Program Affects Farmers” (www.flaginc.org/topics/pubs/arts/COOL_FactSheet20090423.pdf). For more information, visit www.flaginc.org or call 651-223-5400.

- Additional examples of the types of documents that may be used to verify a product's country of origin are available at www.ams.usda.gov/cool.

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 612-722-6377 or bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.



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LSP News

the farm has hosted numerous field days over the years. Tom frequently speaks and writes about sustainable agriculture and their family's use of Holistic Management. The farm has been featured in numerous national media outlets over the years, including *Newsweek* and *National Geographic*.

Morlock joins LSP board

Heidi Morlock has joined the Land Stewardship Project's Board of Directors. Morlock, a graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings program, farms in Scott County south of the Twin Cities. She and her husband Hans Peterson raise produce for local markets and have re-established wetlands, native prairie and hardwood trees on a former dairy farm over the past decade.



Heidi Morlock

Morlock has been very active in LSP's recent efforts to fix Minnesota's Green Acres program (see page 9), testifying at the state Legislature and providing media interviews during this past session, as well as organizing farmers and

rural citizens in her home county. Morlock is also working with the Local Harvest Alliance, a group of farmers and rural residents in Scott County that is attempting to protect family farms and establish a stronger local food economy in the area, which is being threatened by sprawl.

To listen to a recent podcast (episode 61) featuring an interview with Morlock, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=3. □

Vang conducts LSP interviews

Mai Choua Vang worked for the Land Stewardship Project's southeast Minnesota office this spring conducting interviews with Hmong farmers and potential farmers in the region. This is part of LSP's efforts to learn more about the Hmong community's farm pro-



Mai Choua Vang

duction, marketing and land access needs.

Vang has degrees in political science, public service and women's studies from Hamline University, and has worked in leadership roles at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity. In May, she left for Thailand, where she will spend a year teaching English. □

Bihls & Barnier win SFA awards

Land Stewardship Project members **Marvin and Laura Bihl** and **Chris Barnier** were honored in February during the 18th Annual Conference of the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota.

The Bihls, who were given the SFA's Sustainable Farmer Emeritus Award, operate Homeplace Beef Organic Farm near Clearwater, Minn. They have long been involved with organic livestock production, hosting numerous field days and educational events over the years.

Barnier, of Little Falls, Minn., was given the SFA's Distinguished Service Award. He serves as the organization's treasurer. □

Frantzens named Organic Farmers of the Year

Land Stewardship Project members **Tom and Irene Frantzen** were named the MOSES 2009 Organic Farmers of the Year during the 20th Annual Organic Farming Conference in February.

The Frantzens own 300 tillable acres and rent an additional 85 acres near the northeast Iowa town of New Hampton. They raise crops, hogs and beef cattle. The farmland has been certified organic since 1998. The pork was certified organic in 1999, followed by the beef herd in 2003. Their beef and pork is marketed through Organic Prairie Meat Company.

In 2001, the Frantzens launched a company that supplies organic hog, poultry and dairy feeds to farmers in the Midwest.

The Frantzens have long been recognized as pioneers in sustainable agriculture and

To read an excerpt of one of Tom's recent speeches, see the Spring 2008 *Land Stewardship Letter*. To listen to an LSP podcast featuring the farmer, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=7 (episode 45). □

Alex Roberts garners Beard nomination

Land Stewardship Project member **Alex Roberts** was a 2009 nominee for a James Beard Foundation



Alex Roberts

"best chef in the Midwest" award. Roberts owns Restaurant Alma and Brasa Premium Rotisserie, Twin Cities restaurants that are committed to organic, sustainably-produced local food. He works with various local farmers to source his food, and has been a featured chef during

the annual Food Alliance Midwest Minnesota Cooks event at the Minnesota State Fair.

Restaurant Alma has won numerous awards and 2009 marks the third time Roberts has been nominated for the Beard Foundation's best chef in the Midwest honor. Deemed the "Oscars of the food world" by *Time* magazine, the James Beard Foundation Awards (www.jamesbeard.org) are the country's most coveted honor for chefs, food writers, restaurant designers and others involved in the food and beverage industry.

The winners of the 2009 James Beard Foundation Awards were announced in New York during a banquet in May. The night before the banquet, LSP member Lucia Watson of Lucia's Restaurant in Minneapolis (also a three-time James Beard best chef in the Midwest nominee) prepared food during the Foundation's media awards dinner. □



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LSP News

Alliance, publisher of the *Twin Cities Daily Planet*. Joanes is the director of *Fresh* (www.freshthemovie.com), a documentary that uses character-driven narratives to show how people are working in their communities to create a healthy, sustainable food system.

Spring panels: Terra Madre & *Fresh* screenings

The Land Stewardship Project partnered with the Bryant Lake Bowl in Minneapolis this spring to offer consumers, farmers and other participants in the local foods movement a chance to discuss the challenges and opportunities involved in the issue.

Lori Callister (*right photo, third from right*) spoke about her experiences at the most recent Terra Madre “Slow Food” (www.slowfoodmn.org) conference in Turin, Italy, during an LSP panel discussion March 29 at the Bryant Lake Bowl. Callister and other Minnesota farmers who participated in the Terra Madre meeting discussed the challenge of developing community-based food systems that are sustainable and humane, and how efforts here and worldwide are meeting these challenges.

Joining Callister at the March 29 panel discussion were her husband Alan and daughter Molly, as well as Laura Frerichs of Loon Organics, Gardens of Eagan’s Atina Diffley, Jim and LeeAnn VanDerPol from Pastures A’ Plenty, and Moonstone Farm’s Audrey Arner and Richard Handeen.

On June 2, (*bottom photo, right to left*) Kristen Tombers, Rhys Williams and Sandy Dietz were among the participants in a panel discussion that took place between screenings of the movie *Fresh*. Tombers is

the owner-operator of Clancey’s Meats and Fish, a Minneapolis business that specializes in locally-sourced food. Williams was one of the founders of Featherstone Farm CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and is currently working with Co-op Partners, an organic and sustainable foods distributor. He is an LSP board member and is active



on urban agriculture issues. Dietz and her husband Lonny grow CSA vegetables and herbs, as well as a small number of beef, pigs and ducks at Whitewater Gardens in southeast Minnesota.

Also participating in the panel were Jeremy Iggers and Ana Sofia Joanes. Iggers is a long-time Twin Cities food writer and executive director of the Twin Cities Media

LSP Twin Cities cookout July 30

The Land Stewardship Project’s Twin Cities office will hold a summer cookout/potluck for LSP members and friends Thursday, July 30, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., at its Powderhorn Park office in South Minneapolis (821 E. 35th St.).

For more information, e-mail LSP’s Mike McMahon at mcmahon@landstewardship-project.org or call 612-722-6377. □

LSP SE MN cookout Aug. 16

The Land Stewardship Project’s southeast Minnesota office will hold its annual “Food, Family and Farming” hogroast/potluck/celebration Sunday, Aug. 16, south of the community of Rushford. This year’s event, which runs from noon to 4:30 p.m., will be held at the dairy farm of Lori and Jon Peterson.

For details, call 507-523-3366 or e-mail lsps@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Farm Beginnings milk parlor tour



Three approaches to constructing and operating efficient milk parlors were featured during an LSP Farm Beginnings tour May 7 near the central Minnesota community of Long Prairie. During the tour, Hans Kroll (*above*) showed his low-cost swing-six parlor. The Krolls built the parlor for approximately \$16,500 with used supplies and mostly their own labor. It takes about 45 minutes for Hans and his son-in-law Adrian Murth to milk their 32-cow certified organic herd.

Farm Beginnings graduate Nolan Lenzen (*left*) has about \$10,000 invested in his single-eight parlor, which he uses to milk a 40-cow seasonal herd. When building his parlor, Lenzen used the Tans Iowa Parlor Design, an online parlor construction resource (see page 15 for more on Lenzen).

Also featured at the tour was a parlor operated by Jeff Rinde, who farms with his parents Roger and Bonnie. They milk 92 cows in a “Double-A” swing 16 parlor, which cost approximately \$55,000 to build and equip.

For more information on upcoming Farm Beginnings classes, see page 17. (*LSP photos*)

Greenhouse workshop

Forty-five people attended a Land Stewardship Project greenhouse workshop May 7 on the Brian and Lisa Peterson farm north of Rochester, Minn. The Petersons are graduates of LSP’s Farm Beginnings program and use a low-input greenhouse to produce vegetables, herbs and bedding plants.

During the workshop, the Petersons talked about designing and budgeting for a greenhouse, as well as picking the best location for such a facility. There were also presentations on markets by University of Minnesota Extension horticulturist Karl Foord, and on soil fertility and food nutrition by Jon Frank of International Ag Labs.

LSP has developed a fact sheet called, “10 Things to Re-Think as You Build a Greenhouse and Grow.” For a free copy, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/10_Things_To_Rethink_Greenhouse.pdf, or contact Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366; caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. There will be a second LSP greenhouse workshop in southeast Minnesota this fall. For more information, contact van Schaik. (*photo by Caroline van Schaik*)



Legislative Roundup:

MDA's sustainable ag gutted; local control & U of M organic farming initiatives remain intact

By Bobby King

MDA's sustainable & organic ag programs funding slashed

Casting a long shadow over the 2009 session of the Minnesota Legislature was the budget crisis at the state government level.

The budget for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) alone needed to be reduced about 8 percent in light of the budget deficit.

So it's not surprising that funding for sustainable and organic agriculture programs at the MDA took a hit. However, when all was said and done, budgets for two key sustainable and organic ag programs ended up undergoing cuts of up to 90 percent.

The Senate and House Agriculture Finance Conference committees shaped an Agriculture Finance Bill that slashed the annual budget of the MDA's Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program from \$160,000 a year to \$100,000. That was bad enough. But before signing the bill, Gov. Tim Pawlenty took a line-item veto pen to it and vetoed one year of funding, making it an almost 70 percent overall reduction. This is a crippling blow to a program that has been a major driver of sustainable farming innovations in the state over the past several years. Farmers who qualify for these grants are able to do the kind of on-farm research that they would never have the resources to undertake normally. The innovations that have come out of this program have helped a broad cross-section of farmers—sustainable and conventional alike. The results of this research are reported in the internationally-respected *Greenbook*. This has marked Minnesota as a leader in researching and promoting innovative farming systems.

Other cuts were even more extreme. The annual budget of the MDA's popular Organic Cost Share program was slashed 90 percent, from \$100,000 to \$10,000, mostly as a result of pressure from Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar), Chair of the House Agriculture Committee. This program provides

funds to help farmers cover part of the cost of organic certification, and has been used extensively across the state during the past few years. It may be one reason Minnesota is now one of the top states for certified organic acreage.

While two sustainable agriculture programs that have a track record of success were all but eliminated, \$1 million was found for a new initiative that could provide grants and loans to factory farm livestock operations. The money is for a so-called "Ag21 fund," and is an expansion of the MDA's livestock loan program, a program that favors large-scale livestock operations with existing environmental problems. The details of how this \$1 million will be spent are largely left in the hands of Commissioner of Agriculture Gene Hugoson, who has been a proponent of corporate ag interests and hostile to sustainable and organic agriculture.

It is interesting to note that just a few weeks before these cuts were made, Rep. Juhnke told the *Agri News* newspaper that agriculture as a whole would make out relatively well, with only about 8 percent of its budget being cut. Demand for sustainable and organic food continues to grow and meeting this demand is providing an avenue for farmers to maintain and increase profitability while not only protecting, but improving, our environment. That sustainable and organic agriculture fared so poorly is due to a lack of vision on the part of Gov. Pawlenty as well as House and Senate leadership, especially the Chairs of the Agriculture Finance Committees: Senator Vickerman (DFL-Tracy) and Rep. Juhnke.

Local government control in Minnesota remains strong

Yet again the Land Stewardship Project was able to ward off legislative attacks on

local government's ability to control the placement of controversial developments such as factory farms. Specifically, two bills that would weaken local control were introduced during the

2009 session. House File 764 was pushed by development interests and introduced by Rep. Larry Hosch (DFL-St. Joseph). This bill would have severely weakened the right of townships to enact a moratorium on unanticipated developments that posed a risk to the community. Senate File 859, introduced by Sen. Steve Dille (R-Dassel), was a bill that weakened township control of factory farms. LSP was able to work with our allies to prevent both bills from receiving a hearing and they died in committee.

In addition, Rep. Andy Welti (DFL-Plainview) included language in the Higher Education Funding Bill that ordered the University of Minnesota to do a study on "livestock siting issues." Whenever the term "livestock siting issues" is used in policy-making language, usually it's an attempt to undermine local control of factory farms. LSP was able to get this language removed from the final bill in conference committee.

U of M sustainable & organic ag funding reaffirmed

Two years ago LSP successfully pushed the Legislature to increase funding at the University of Minnesota for organic and alternative livestock agriculture. Ultimately, the University committed to increasing funding for this work by \$400,000 annually. Indeed, the U of M has made strides towards meeting that goal by increasing funding in organic and sustainable agriculture, including making the alternative livestock position at the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) permanent, funding two graduate assistantships in organics, and completing the creation of an organic dairy herd at the U of M's West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris. However, the U of M has not met the commitment entirely.

Both Senate and House Chairs of the Higher Education Finance Committee — Sen. Sandy Pappas (DFL-St. Paul) and Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia)—were supportive of seeing that the University live up to this commitment. Sen. Pappas even included a specific appropriation of \$1.5 million a year towards organic and alternative livestock in the Senate bill. The University opposed this, arguing that it does not like the Legislature directing funding to specific initiatives. Joining in the opposition were corporate ag interests and commodity groups such as the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association, Minnesota Barley Growers Association, Minnesota Association of Wheat

Legislature, see page 9...

Growers, Minnesota Turkey Growers Association, Minnesota Cattlemen's Association and Minnesota Pork Producers Association.

Two legislators ended up taking the lead on defending this funding—Sen. Sharon

Erickson Ropes (DFL-Winona) and Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield). Both legislators have a significant number of sustainable and organic farmers in their districts. Ultimately, language was crafted that made it clear that the appropriation was to stay the same as it had been two years ago, and that the University would be expected to live up

to that original commitment. □

Bobby King is an LSP Policy Program organizer who focuses on state and local issues. He can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

Green Acres reforms pass—are they enough?

By Bobby King

Legislation to deal with the disastrous changes made to Minnesota's Green Acres program in 2008 became law this spring. The Land Stewardship Project, along with 21 conservation groups and most of the state's farm groups, worked for a full repeal of last year's changes, which had caused major problems for landowners across the state and had threatened stewardship of natural areas.

Green Acres is a tax equalization program that allows farmers whose land value is being pushed up by non-farm development to have their property taxes lowered to an agricultural rate. In essence the program's goal is to equalize property taxes on farmland throughout the state. An article in the winter issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter* detailed how the changes made to the Green Acres program penalized stewardship farming practices and made it more difficult to preserve farmland. The 2008 changes were the result of an "inside the beltway" mentality at the Capitol, where legislators attempted to make changes at the Capitol without getting input from the farmers using the program. The result was that instead of fixing problems, the Legislature created more.

While a full repeal did not happen in 2009, legislators claim that the reforms that passed address all of the concerns voiced by landowners, and that the worst of the 2008 changes were fixed. The jury is still out on that assessment.

Among the 2009 legislative changes:

- Repealing the change of the payback period from three to seven years.
- Repealing the exclusion from Green Acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) acres.
- Amending the distinction between "productive" and "unproductive" acres.

While these changes are welcome, it's

become clear since the law's passage that problems with content and interpretation of the new Green Acres program remain. LSP has been working with farmers, county assessors and legal experts at the Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG) to clarify how these changes are affecting landowners and

Green Acres fact sheet

LSP's new Green Acres fact sheet is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/green_acres_2009_factsheet.pdf. The free fact sheet can also be obtained by calling LSP's Twin Cities office at 612-722-6377.

stewardship of the land.

As part of this work, LSP and FLAG have created a four-page fact sheet (see box) detailing the reforms and how farmers and landowners can use them to keep land used for conservation enrolled in Green Acres. LSP mailed the fact sheet to hundreds of farmers and landowners across the state in April.

LSP members lead Green Acres reform push

At every Green Acres hearing held in the House and Senate during 2009, LSP members, including farmers and other landowners, were there to speak to the importance of the program and how the 2008 changes were harmful to stewardship of the land and preservation of farmland. Through calls, e-mails and letters, hundreds of LSP members made their concerns known to legislators. Although a full repeal was not executed, these efforts were critical in bringing about key reforms.

Rep. Ann Lenczewski (DFL-Bloomington) and Sen. Thomas Bakk (DFL-Cook), Chairs of the House and Senate Tax Committees, along with Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Glyndon) and Sen. Rod Skoe (DFL-Clearbrook), Chairs of the House and Senate Property Tax Division Committees, opposed a full repeal.

One aspect of the changes to the Green Acres program that has received little attention is an expansion of the type of

corporations that can qualify for the program. Before the 2008 changes, enrollment was limited to actual people or family farm corporations. Last year's changes expanded eligibility to all legal entities allowed to own farmland in Minnesota. This includes a form of "limited liability company." A limited liability arrangement in essence limits the amount of damages that a firm can be held accountable for—essentially shielding it from accountability and shifting the cost of environmental damages to the public.

This year, Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar) successfully added a last-minute amendment that expands eligibility even further to any legal entity as long as one of the shareholders homesteads the land and one of the shareholders "resides on the land or actively operates the land."

It is not clear how many factory farm operations these changes will expand the Green Acres benefit to and how much reduced county revenue this will result in.

The next step: proper implementation

LSP is now calling on the Minnesota Department of Revenue to work aggressively with counties to communicate to farmers and landowners about the Green Acres reforms. These changes were made law April 3, but as of early summer few landowners knew the basics of these changes, such as that they create a grace period until the 2013 assessment to comply with the new law.

"The reforms didn't go as far as we wanted, but they are a big improvement over the harmful changes made last year to the program," says LSP member Heidi Morlock, a Scott County farmer who is enrolled in Green Acres and who worked to reform the program during the 2009 session of the Minnesota Legislature. "Now the changes need to be communicated to farmers — and communicated quickly." □

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A new Rx for the health care debate

By Paul Sobocinski

For 18 years Curt and Bertha Lou Tvedt walked a dangerous tight-rope: working a farm with no health insurance coverage. Paying insurance premiums had fallen by the wayside for the Byron, Minn., dairy producers during the farm crisis of the early 1980s. "It's scary," says Curt. "It kind of sits in the back of your mind knowing that one slip is going to cost you everything you worked for."

And then one morning Curt was fixing a TMR (total mix ration) machine on the farm when that "one slip" occurred. "Boom. I looked down and there are three fingers

ers reporting financial difficulties spent on average 42 percent of their income on insurance premiums and out-of-pocket health care costs, according to the study, which was conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The health care-related problems reported by the farmers and ranchers included using up their savings, being forced to take off-farm employment and delaying investments in their operations, as well as difficulty paying mortgages and other bills.

As a crop and livestock farmer myself, I've seen firsthand how lack of affordable health care has become a major impediment not only to keeping farmers on the land, but to allowing beginning farmers to get established in the first place. It can be particularly

difficult when launching a livestock operation, which requires year-round daily management, something that's quite difficult when at least one spouse is forced to work in town in order to qualify for health coverage.

Because this has emerged as such a critical issue for our members, the Land Stewardship Project recently launched a health care reform initiative by joining forces with more than two-dozen other organizations participating in TakeAction Minnesota's Affordable Health Care for All Campaign. TakeAction is part of a national campaign involving groups in some 25 states.

On April 2, LSP launched our initiative in a rural Winona County fire hall when some 50 of our members gathered to discuss the issue. At the meeting Liz Doyle, Public Policy Director for TakeAction Minnesota, described how the major entities that control the public debate over our health care system—insurance companies, health maintenance organizations, drug firms and medical equipment suppliers—have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Because its goals are so profit-driven, the industry is not interested in reforms that make people healthier, said Doyle. "The sicker we are, the better off they are."

However, it's become increasingly difficult in recent years to ignore a basic fact: the health care system is broken. "Here we are today with a health care system that's

gradually gotten worse and worse over the last 25 years," she said, adding that even when people do have health insurance, often the deductibles and co-pays are so high they can't afford to use something they already pay monthly premiums for.

In Minnesota, 5 percent of the state's white population lacks coverage, and 10 percent of Minnesota farmers have no health insurance, according to the state Health Department. Twenty percent of African-Americans in the state have no health insurance; 30 percent of Latinos lack coverage.

Nearly 77,000 Minnesota children are living without health insurance, and nine out of 10 of those children have parents who work. Almost one million Minnesotans spend more than 10 percent of their income on health care, and 240,000 spend more than a quarter of their incomes on health care.

A report released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in May projected that if federal health care reforms are not enacted, the number of uninsured Americans could reach 65.7 million, with middle-income families hardest hit.

"When you do polls asking people whether they think everyone should have access to affordable health care, 80 to 85 percent of the people say, 'yeah,'" said Doyle.

Such statistics have increased calls for a major overhaul by creating a "single payer" system where everyone is covered, whether they have a job or not.

Alan Hoffman, a physician at the Mayo Clinic and a member of LSP's new Health Care Task Force, talked at the April 2 meeting about the importance of disconnecting jobs from insurance. In some European countries, health care coverage is not linked to one's employment.

"How did we come up with this strange system where your health insurance is connected to where you work?" Hoffman, a member of LSP's Board of Directors, said.

Doyle said the health care industry has responded to these calls for reform by developing variations on a simple, well-crafted message: "It's your fault."

For example, a lot of insurance company advertisements focus on what individuals can do to take care of their own health.

"While it's an important concept for all of us to take care of ourselves, these ads are more about us as individuals than how we are working to take care of our health



LSP members discussed possible ways of reforming the health care system during an April 2 meeting. (LSP photo)

missing on my left hand," he recalls of that fateful day. "When it happens, you get a pit in your stomach. Sixty cows to milk. What am I going to do now? What's going to happen to the cows? What's going to happen to me? How am I going to pay the bill?"

Tvedt's experience is an extreme one, but throughout rural America similar choices and questions arise everyday as farmers and other small business owners struggle with access to affordable health care.

A recent health care insurance study conducted in Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota found that while 90 percent of the 2,000 farmers and ranchers surveyed said they had some sort of health coverage, nearly a quarter of them reported that the cost of health care was causing them financial problems. The farmers and ranch-

Health Care, see page 11...

as a community,” said Doyle. “These are the kinds of arguments that the health care industry puts out: it’s individuals that are to blame. If you don’t have decent health care, it’s your fault. You must not be taking care of your family. This is your problem to solve as an individual.”

Overall, the industry wants to push people out of group plans and into individual plans. As farmers, the self-employed and other people utilizing individual plans have discovered, such plans make it easier to be denied coverage for pre-existing conditions. People not under group plans are also more vulnerable to significant restrictions on what will not be covered by insurance.

That’s why TakeAction is working on telling the story of the people who are actually affected by a profit-driven health care industry. Through these individual stories (see sidebar), an overall argument can be made that lack of access to affordable health care has a negative impact on the entire community, not just a few unlucky individuals, said Doyle. When the health care industry argues that a single payer system would be expensive, it must be made clear that the current, dysfunctional system costs more

than anyone can imagine. For example, people are putting off preventive health care because they can’t afford to go to the doctor. By the time they go for emergency reasons, the costs can be astronomical. Under a single payer system premiums are paid to a single entity like the government, rather than numerous middlemen like HMOs and insurance companies, so the administrative costs are slashed, according to Doyle.

During the 2009 session of the Minnesota Legislature, TakeAction and LSP supported two proposals related to health care reform in the state. The Minnesota Health Plan would create a single payer system that covers everyone in the state. The Minnesota Health Security Act would provide health care to every child in the state, and would eventually phase in coverage of adults.

Neither proposal passed into law, but the fact that they were moved forward in legislative hearings helped bring about the new “Cover All Kids” bill that was signed into law by Gov. Tim Pawlenty. This bill, among other things, provides coverage to 22,000 uninsured children in Minnesota through the reduction of current barriers. It also provides a public option for families who do not qualify for MinnesotaCare due to income eligibility restrictions. This is a big step compared to a few years ago, when

there was basically no legislative activity related to health care reform.

“The only way we’re going to move an agenda on health care that really addresses the needs of all is to make sure that we’re building our strength at the grassroots,” Doyle said. “So it’s more about us, rather than the industry, driving the debate.”

Initiatives like the Health Security Act and the recently passed Cover All Kids Law are good places to start, because they attempt to improve things for some of the most vulnerable in society first. We have to win this thing one step at a time.

The LSP members that filled that fire hall April 2 were a testament to citizens becoming engaged in a campaign to make our health care system one in which no one is left out, the costs to families and society are reduced, and quality is improved. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for updates on LSP’s health care work. □

Paul Sobocinski is an LSP Policy Program organizer who is focusing on health care issues. He can be reached at 507-342-2323 or sobopaul@redred.com. For more on TakeAction’s Affordable Health Care for All Campaign, see www.takeactionminnesota.org, or call 651-641-6199.

Health scare stories

During LSP’s April meeting on health care reform, several southeast Minnesota citizens told their own stories about how the inability to access affordable health care is affecting them and others:

• **Curt Tvedt**, 66, ended up spending approximately \$30,000 of his own money to have his mangled hand treated after a farm accident, and was able to eventually return to dairying. But he was recently reminded of how close he came to losing it all when a young dairy farmer he was mentoring had a piece of metal fly into his eye while working on a silo. The eye became infected and complications set in, calling for some expensive treatment. If the young farmer’s wife wasn’t working in town at a job that provides health care coverage, his ability to follow his dream of milking cows would be in serious jeopardy, said Tvedt. But both the husband and wife would like to be on the farm fulltime, so they could give the dairy their complete attention.

“I really feel for the young farmers that are starting out in a capital-intensive business, particularly the animal business,” said Tvedt.

• **Inga Haugen**, 27, recently left a job in the Twin Cities so she could return to southeast Minnesota and farm with her parents, Bonnie and Vance. Her parents welcomed her back on one condition: that she have health insurance. The insurance company Haugen applied to said her weight made her too risky to insure, even though she is not obese. Now she has coverage, but it’s with a \$3,000 deductible. In addition, if she gets pregnant, the plan will not cover medical expenses associated with childbirth. “And I pay more every month for my insurance than I do for my rent,” said Haugen.

• **Katie Wera**, 27, is a Winona State University nursing student. After graduating from Mankato State University she had a job that provided no insurance coverage. She applied twice to an insurance company and was denied both times because of a pre-existing condition of hypertension. She eventually qualified for a policy after working through an insurance agent and providing detailed medical records.

“But it’s under their conditions,” she said. “Anything in that first year would not be covered if I had a cardiac situation or a complication related to that.”

• **Kaye Huelskamp’s** husband John was employed by Randall Foods for 26 years when they read in the newspaper that the firm was closing in eight days. John not only lost his job,

but full health, dental and optical coverage for Kaye and him.

John eventually became self-employed, and they went out on the market to buy their own insurance. At one point the couple was paying \$1,365 a month (with a \$1,000 deductible) for insurance.

“If we had kept with that plan, we would have been at \$16,387 a year for two people,” recalled Kaye. In 2004 they switched insurers, which lowered their monthly premium to \$308 a month and raised their deductible to \$3,600. That soon changed.

“We are now at \$673 a month with a \$4,600 deductible,” said Kaye. “It more than doubled in four years. Our fear is if we double our premium again in four years and the deductible keeps going up, we won’t be able to afford health insurance anymore. We are in our 50s and that’s a scary prospect for us. I don’t think I know anyone who’s not struggling with the health care system. It’s outrageous. It should be a right, not a privilege, to have coverage.”

An LSP podcast (episode 63) featuring Huelskamp, Tvedt and Wera is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=3.

A busy post-Farm Bill season

By Adam Warthesen

Much of the Land Stewardship Project's federal policy work this spring has focused on making sure positive elements of the 2008 Farm Bill are being fully and properly implemented. We've been doing this by meeting directly with lawmakers and federal officials, developing fact sheets and reaching out to the media and LSP members.

In March, LSP helped lead two fly-ins to Washington, D.C. Before meeting with Washington officials, LSP members and staff helped set policy priorities for the two main coalitions we do our federal policy work through: the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. During the fly-ins, our farmer-members met with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Dave White, Office of Management and Budget officials, and members of Congress such as Sen. Tom Harkin and Rep. Collin Peterson, Chairs of the Senate and House Agriculture Committees, respectively. Key players in planning and executing these fly-ins were members of LSP's Federal Farm Policy Committee, including brand new committee member Tom Nuessmeier (see page 13), a crop and livestock farmer from Saint Peter, Minn.

Since those fly-ins, there has been a flurry of farm policy activity, with the USDA making several announcements related to Farm Bill initiatives LSP helped develop and improve. Here's a rundown:

→ **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP):** The USDA accepted applications for the BFRDP between March 13 and May 13. Nearly \$18 million was made available for this initial round of grants, and nearly 280 proposals were submitted. While some troubling issues persist in how this program is structured, it is exciting to see real dollars being made available to groups across the country that are taking direct steps to get more farmers established on

the land. Organizations who are awarded grants will be notified in August.

→ **Value Added Producer Grants Program (VAPG):** In May, the USDA announced it was accepting applications for VAPG, a program targeted at farmers who want to add value to what they produce on their farms prior to going to market.

With approximately \$18 million in funding this year, VAPG is available through a competitive grants process offered by the Rural Business-Cooperative Service of USDA. Eligible applicants include farmers and ranchers, groups of farmers and ranchers, farmer or rancher cooperatives, and farmer- and rancher-owned agricultural entities.

The deadline to submit applications was originally July 6 for most funding and June 22 for applications that target "mid-tier value chains" and those which serve beginning farmers and ranchers and



U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack (sixth from the left) met with LSP members and other farmers during a fly-in this spring. (USDA photo)

socially disadvantaged farmers. However, in June the USDA withdrew its request for proposals temporarily to tinker with the program, and new deadlines are expected to be set this summer.

→ **EQIP-National Organic Initiative:** Also this spring, the USDA announced that it was making available \$50 million to organic farmers and those transitioning to organic who are seeking financial assistance and technical expertise to plan and install conservation measures. The National Organic Initiative is being offered through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which is coordinated by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Funds for this program focus on six core practices: conservation crop rotations, cover crops,

nutrient management, pest management, prescribed grazing and forage harvest management.

Criticized for devoting an inordinate amount of resources to subsidizing large-scale factory livestock operations that are putting in environmentally dangerous manure facilities (see the Winter 2009 *Land Stewardship Letter*), EQIP is still in need of reform like stronger payment limitations. However, the National Organic Initiative is a step in the right direction.

The original application window for the National Organic Initiative funds was extremely tight, with the deadline initially set at May 29. However, LSP worked with other groups to successfully call for an extension of that deadline to June 30 in Minnesota. In future years the National Organic Initiative will be included in the ongoing EQIP sign-up, rather than as a special sign-up.

→ **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):** The 2008 Farm Bill represents a rebirth of this innovative initiative for rewarding farmers who are being good stewards of the land and are producing real results. CSP has undergone several

positive changes as a result of the Farm Bill, including removing watershed boundary restrictions to determine which farms are eligible from year-to-year. All farmers across the country are now eligible for CSP and acceptance is not contingent on the types of crops or livestock a producer raises. However, there has been a troubling delay in announcing the 2009 sign-up period for CSP. As of this writing, no dates had been set, although the end of the federal government's fiscal year (Sept. 30) is fast approaching. LSP is pressuring USDA officials to announce the CSP application timeline soon.

• • •

What makes a successful program is not just its passage and whether it gets funding. The usage and on-the-ground results are the real bottom line. LSP is dedicated to following through and making sure Farm Bill initiatives are implemented in such a way that they benefit family farmers and the land.

For more on these programs, check www.landstewardshipproject.org and watch our e-letter, the *LIVE-WIRE*, for updates. □

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Stop counterproductive USDA-backed loans to hog & poultry industry

The pork and poultry industry has been hit by low market prices caused in part by massive overproduction from large-scale concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). As a result, some in the industry have asked the USDA to spend millions of dollars of tax money to buy up animal products in order to stabilize prices. For example, on March 31 the USDA committed to a \$25 million bonus pork buy.

Here is the kicker: the USDA continues to guarantee loans to new and expanding specialized hog and poultry facilities, the

very operations contributing to the overproduction, which are then bailed out by taxpayer financed buy-ups. This vicious cycle has to stop: it's not good public policy, it's not good for family farmers, and it's not good for rural communities and the environment.

The Land Stewardship Project and other members of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment have launched a campaign to suspend government backed loans to new and expanding specialized hog and poultry facilities (facilities used solely

for the production of hogs or poultry). When similar situations arose in the past, USDA suspended loan programs for the construction of specialized livestock facilities. Such a suspension is needed now to end this wasteful, and damaging, use of tax money.

As part of the campaign, an online petition drive has been launched at www.iowacci.org/whatcanido/stopUSDAloan.html. For more information, contact LSP's Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Nuessmeier joins LSP federal farm committee

Saint Peter, Minn., farmer **Tom Nuessmeier** has joined the Land Stewardship Project's Federal Farm Policy Committee.

Nuessmeier operates an organic crop and livestock farm with his brother Tim. In addition to direct-marketing pork to consumers, the farm raises

hogs for the Niman Ranch Pork Company.

Over the past year, Nuessmeier has participated in district meetings with Congressional leaders, a fly-in to Washington, D.C. (see page 12), events at the Minnesota state Capitol and other LSP activities.



Tom Nuessmeier

Justice for immigrants

By Sarah Claassen & Melissa Rudnick

New Americans working to provide for their families often find employment in industrial agriculture, and end up facing disproportionately low wages, dangerous working conditions and employers who are willing to sacrifice the rights of human beings to subsidize their industrial operations. In order to build sustainable agriculture systems and strong rural communities, we must work for justice for all people.

As part of this work, the Land Stewardship Project co-sponsored "Immigration and Food Justice: A Multi-Faith Dialogue" March 29 at Faith Mennonite Church in Minneapolis. This forum brought four faith and agricultural leaders together onto a panel to discuss the relationships of immigrant people and immigration policy to the food and agriculture system in the U.S. The panelists—Rabbi Morris Allen from the Beth Jacob Congregation, Tisha Rajendra from the University of St. Thomas, Owais Bayunus from the Islamic Center of Minnesota, and Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin from the Rural Enterprise Center—spoke about how their faith traditions guide them to respond to the racial and economic inequities that exist in the agricultural system.

Rabbi Allen spoke about the im-

migrant rights work that has developed in the Jewish community in response to a government raid last year of what was then the largest kosher meat packing plant in the nation. After Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents raided the Agriprocessors plant in Postville, Iowa, the owners of the facility were charged with over 9,000 counts of child labor violations and with knowingly supplying workers with false identification documents.

Jewish Community Action—a local Jewish social justice organization—looked at the

events in Postville as further confirmation of the need to continue its work on immigrant rights and on Magen Tzedek. Hebrew for "Shield of Justice," Magen Tzedek is a national campaign to encourage excellence and ethics in kosher food production, with particular concern for working conditions, environmental impact and animal welfare.

The campaign will provide the Magen Tzedek seal for kosher food products that meet a high set of standards relating to worker wages and benefits; health, training and safety; environmental impact; animal welfare; and corporate transparency. Magen Tzedek will ensure that kosher food is produced in accordance with Jewish ethical

law and social justice values. The campaign is a joint project of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Rabbinical Assembly.

LSP will continue working with Jewish Community Action on how fair food standards can work for laborers, farmers and consumers. □



LSP member Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin spoke at the "Immigration and Food Justice: A Multi-Faith Dialogue" meeting about how his Rural Enterprise Center is working with Latinos to help build farm-related businesses in Minnesota. (LSP photo)

Sarah Claassen is an LSP organizer working on food justice issues. She can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or sarahc@landstewardshipproject.org. Melissa Rudnick is an organizer with Jewish Community Action. For more information, see www.jewishcommunityaction.org or contact Rudnick at melissa@jewishcommunityaction.org; 651-632-2184.

Farm Beginnings

Jody & Mike Lenz

On second thought...

Ag physics question of the day: What happens when an object in motion meets an immovable force?

First, meet the object in motion: “I just felt I needed to farm. I had this undying need to farm,” recalls Jody Lenz emphatically.

Now, the supposed immovable force: “I wanted *nothing* to do with farming,” says her husband, Mike, with an equal amount of certainty. “I grew up in a farming community and I enjoyed it, but I went to school to be an engineer.”

Today the Lenzes are in their third year of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farming — a system where eaters buy a “share” in a farm and in return get a weekly delivery of naturally raised produce throughout the growing season. CSA farming is not like raising corn or soybeans—it’s the kind of endeavor where you not only have to raise the food, but become the face behind that food for the people who consume it. They’ve purchased a former dairy farm near the western Wisconsin community of Star

Prairie, established a walk-in cooler in the garage for vegetables and are planning on using the ruins of a dairy barn as the basis for a new greenhouse. Mike, 40, is still working as an engineer (he is a project manager for a sheet metal fabricator), but he and Jody are already planning on how they can make farming a full-blown career for both



Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

of them. “I’m ready to be a fulltime farmer,” says Mike.

What happened? The immovable force began to give a little a few years ago when the couple took the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings® course.

“I went kicking and screaming to the first class,” says Mike on a frigid day in early April while sitting in the couple’s kitchen, surrounded by their three children: Jonas 2, Malcolm 5, and Claudia 7.

“I didn’t want to be in there with a bunch of tree-hugging, hippie-freaks, I found out after an hour I was one of them.”

Well, maybe not the hippie-freak part. But Mike admits he was hooked by the course’s focus on practical, hands-on financial planning, and impressed by the diversity of backgrounds the other students represented. He came out of that class officially a wannabe farmer.

Twice-a-month during the winter of 2006-2007, the Lenzes made the six-hour round trip from western Wisconsin to Winona in southeast Minnesota for the Farm Beginnings course. During the course, established farmers and other ag professionals shared insights on low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course also provided workshops on goal-setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and innovative production techniques. In addition, class participants had an opportunity

to network with established farmers and utilize them as mentors.

“The networking through Farm Beginnings is phenomenal,” says Mike. “Once you say, ‘Farm Beginnings,’ it opens up all sorts of doors.”

“...had to do something...”

Jody, 35, grew up on a dairy farm in northeast Wisconsin but, like many farm kids, the yen to get back to the land didn’t strike her until she had started another career. After leaving the home farm she went to college and became a teacher. “I didn’t really consider farming an option,” she recalls. But while teaching at a school near her hometown, she worked on an uncle’s dairy operation and got bit by the agriculture bug. She and Mike eventually married and Jody got a job teaching in western Wisconsin. But she never lost that passion for getting back to the land. She eventually met Margaret Pennings and Dan Guenther, who operate Common Harvest, a pioneering CSA farm in the region. Common Harvest has hosted Farm Beginnings field days in the past, and Guenther recommended the Lenzes take the class.

“I just had to do something to deal with this desire to farm, even if it was just take the Farm Beginnings class,” says Jody. She was committed to the course despite what she and Mike call the “unending list of reasons not to take the class.” Namely, Jody was pregnant with their third child, attending the class required a lot of hours on the road and it began during hunting season (a major downside for Mike, an avid outdoorsman). Oh yeah, and then there was the issue of Mike’s less-than-enthusiastic desire to become an agrarian.

“I filled out the paperwork and I don’t think Mike talked to me for two weeks,” Jody concedes with a laugh. “He said, ‘I don’t want to be broke all my life.’”

That first class, plus follow-up sessions on established, successful farms, laid to rest Mike’s fear that to farm is to take a vow of poverty. Jody says she also probably needed a dose of good practical business planning to balance her passion for farming. “I didn’t need someone to dig in the dirt with me,” she says. “I needed that business knowledge.”

“We did a tremendous amount of business planning on that drive to Winona,” says Mike.

Before taking the class, the Lenzes didn’t know what farming enterprise they wanted to pursue. But they had always had a big garden and the class helped the couple decide that CSA farming was a good fit for



Jody and Mike Lenz, with their children Jonas, Malcolm and Claudia. (LSP photo)

Second Thought, see page 16...

Nolan & Vanessa Lenzen

Using grass to cure burn-out

By the time he was 20, Nolan Lenzen had already completed a dairy management course at a local college and launched a farming career in partnership with his father and grandfather. They were milking 90 cows in a tie-stall barn and cropping 300 acres near the south-central Minnesota community of Watertown. Some might say it was a family-farming dream come true.

“We had three generations on the farm and way more work than we knew what to do with,” recalls Nolan seven years later. In fact, barely two years out of high school, the young farmer was already feeling a bit burnt out. So he rented his own farm in hopes of busting out of the rut. He even took the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings course in hopes of picking up some innovative business management tips as he struck out on his own. On his rented farm, he implemented all of the latest dairy management techniques he had learned in college: milking in a tie stall, keeping the cows off pasture and using a grain-rich total mix ration system to boost production. On paper it looked good. In reality, it became the same old trap Lenzen thought he had escaped.

“I chased production. I was up to almost 24,000 pounds rolling herd average and won awards for milk production,” Lenzen recalls. “But at the end of the day, an award hanging on the wall doesn’t put food on the table.”

There he was, still on the south side of 25, and he was on the verge of burn-out once again—not on farming, but the way he was going about it: pushing production, pushing the herd, pushing himself, all the while going further into debt and leaving little room for life outside of the parlor, the cows and the crop fields.

“We had no family time,” recalls Vanessa, Nolan’s wife. “It was all work and farm.”

But on a recent spring day, the Lenzens seemed to have struck a more sustainable balance. They had taken time out to host a Farm Beginnings field day on milking parlor alternatives (see page 7), and after the tour participants had left, Nolan, Vanessa and their four children—Evan 1, Brody 3, Ty 5, and Haile 8—planted a few trees around their farmstead before the evening milking.

During the tour, Nolan, now 27, recounted how he spent the previous cold months: “I spent most of last winter going back and forth to the library.”

“Now he’s around all the time,” says Van-

essa, also 27. “If I need help he’s around, and if we want to spend family time or do something with the kids together we can go do that. We’ve been a lot happier as a family and a lot closer.”

What gives?

After his second flameout while attempt-



Vanessa and Nolan Lenzen, with their children Evan, Brody, Ty and Haile. (LSP photo)

ing to dairy conventionally, Nolan realized it was time for something completely different. So in 2004 he finally did what he had wanted to do since high school: launch a grass-based milking operation. Instead of confining the cows and spending time (and money) hauling grain and other feed to them while hauling manure in the reverse direction, he converted to a system based on rotationally-grazed paddocks. The cows are moved at least once a day to a new paddock, allowing them to harvest their feed in the form of grass while spreading manure in a manner the soil and plants can make use of sustainably. The cows are fed no grain and get dry hay in the winter. It’s a low cost way of producing milk — one estimate is that on a per-cow basis it can be done for a third of the price of a confinement system. Managed rotational grazing systems don’t require expensive manure management systems, cropping equipment or housing facilities.

Because of its low cost and efficient use of resources, grass-based dairying not only saves money, but it can also be quite profitable.

“I always wanted to graze, but then I went to school for dairy management and got brainwashed into thinking I wanted free stalls and big equipment and all of that,” says Nolan. “Since I converted to grazing, I’ve made more money this way than I ever did with conventional. Even with my 24,000-pound rolling herd average Holsteins, I was to the point where I couldn’t even afford to fix my truck. Once I switched to grazing, I paid off all my loans and took it from there.”

The Lenzens are in their second year on a 140-acre farm they’ve purchased in the northwest part of Minnesota. The 40-cow dairy herd is in transition to being certified organic and the family plans on selling milk for a premium to Horizon Organic starting a year from now. When they moved to the farm, milk cows had not been on the place in four years, and a lot of work was needed to make it a Grade A dairy. The thin soils had been cropped extensively, and the Lenzens spent most of 2008 establishing a rotational pasture system on former cornfields while Nolan milked cows on his dad’s farm. They were able to use cost-share money from the USDA’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (see page 12) to get their rotational grazing fencing system set up, and the county paid to have a tunnel put in beneath the road that runs by the farm so the cows can safely access pastures on the other side.

One of the biggest projects was adding a low-cost eight-cow parlor to the back of an existing tie-stall barn. The parlor is an example of the Lenzens’ do-it-yourself approach to farming. Using a lot of sweat equity, Tans Iowa Parlor Design Internet plans and second-hand materials and equipment, they’ve built a “pit-style” parlor for around \$10,000. The design of the parlor allows the farmer to stand in a pit at eye-level with the udders of the cows, saving knees and backs and speeding up the milking process.

Saving labor is a key part of the Lenzen operation. During the farm tour, Nolan shows off everything from a simple pulley system for opening the cow door in the parlor and a quick-coupler system for attaching paddock watering lines, to what he jokingly refers to as the “Lamborghini of fencing reels”—a device for stringing out and rolling up portable electric fence quickly and efficiently. He talks excitedly about a device

Burn-out, see page 16...

...Second Thought, from page 14

them. For one thing it appeared easier to work with on a trial basis than say, raising livestock. Since graduating from Farm Beginnings, they've dipped their toes into the CSA farming system gradually. While still living in town during the summer of 2007, they plowed up their own yard as well as a neighbor's, and sold 10 shares in their trial CSA for \$100 a piece. That went well so they bought the former dairy farm (it was originally 160 acres, but the Lenzen bought 10 acres along with the house and outbuildings). During the summer of 2008 they doubled their CSA share offering and expanded their plantings. Things went well that first year on the old dairy farm, although they had a rough start to the season: a Memorial Day storm leveled a planting of brassicas.

"I looked out and saw a moonscape," recalls Mike. "Our first season on this farm was decimated." In the end, the plants bounced back, and the rest of the season went well. "We grew awesome onions," says Jody, showing off a Christmas card featuring a photo of Jonas holding an onion the size of



Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

a softball. "The only thing we couldn't raise was peas."

As they get their operation started, having a close relationship with Common Harvest has been invaluable, says the Lenzenes. When they were considering farming, they were willing to travel up to two hours to work with a mentor, so having Common Harvest just 15 miles away has been a real bonus. That first summer, Mike says, he often stopped at Common Harvest around 4:30 some mornings and worked there until he had to go to the metal fabricating plant at 8 a.m. "No matter how many times I visit Dan and Margaret's, I learn something new," says Mike. "I think I owe them, or blame them, for my current lifestyle."

In their third season of CSA farming, the Lenzenes are holding their membership at a little less than 40 for now, but plan on expanding to 100 eventually. They do deliv-

eries to two nearby towns, as well as have on-farm pick-up for members.

The family is active in their church, community and schools, and they want to extend that involvement to providing food to local people. "We really want our market to be in this area," says Mike. "People out here need to eat good food too." Their operation, Threshing Table Farm, is also a partner in *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Saint Croix River Valley, an LSP-led initiative in the region that is helping promote production and consumption of local foods (see page 18-19).

On this day in April, their customers are ready for a new season to begin. Toward evening a family pulls into the driveway to buy some eggs and drop off their first CSA check of the year. There's a lot of pent-up energy present on the farm. The kids bike around in the mud under lead-colored skies. Canada geese wing overhead as the Lenzenes check out plots full of last year's tomato vines and kale.

"I was surprised how lost I was at the end of the season last year," Mike says. "I was a real cob because I wasn't farming all of a sudden. But now the battery is recharged again. We get to recharge again, just like the soil." □

...Burn-out, from page 15

he ordered out of Canada that will open the gates between grazing paddocks automatically, allowing the cows to move to fresh grass in a more timely manner.

Perhaps the ultimate labor-saving strategy implemented on the farm is that the cow herd is not milked 12 months a year—since the winter of 2004-2005 they've been milked on a seasonal basis. The Lenzenes time the breeding of their diverse mix of cows ("I counted the other day and I have over 12 breeds in our herd," quips Nolan; they are chosen for their ability to make good use of grass, not win Dairy Herd Improvement Association awards) so that the cows calve in spring. That means the animals stop producing milk from approximately February to April.

In preparation for drying the cows off, the Lenzenes start milking them mornings-only along about October. This means lower production, but Nolan says in the end, it's a money-maker. He's spending less on electricity and other inputs to run the parlor twice a day. Also, valuable components like milk fat increase in the cows' milk when they are milked once a day. This can produce quality premiums in the milk check.

"I hate to say it, but I make almost more

money milking once a day," says Nolan. "And you have a life. I'll get done milking and I'll get done with chores about 9 o'clock in the morning, and I'll have the rest of the day that I can go do whatever with the family and I don't have to worry about getting a hired hand out here or being back for milking. They're done for the day and so am I."

Getting the dairy operation off the ground hasn't been without its challenges: dry weather and a soil that's much lighter

Give it a listen

To hear a podcast (episode 65) featuring Nolan and Vanessa Lenzen, visit LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html.

than what the Lenzenes had near Watertown can make grazing a challenge. And dairying seasonally means the family has to pay particularly close attention to their farm and household budgets—they are basically going without a paycheck for a few months out of the year. But both Nolan and Vanessa say they've learned to set aside part of their milk checks while they are coming in to hold them over during the winter.

"I make sure all my expenses are either pre-paid or paid in advance," says Nolan. "You learn right away you need to start

setting money aside when you are getting your milk checks, and I think it makes you a better manager because you're not buying stuff on credit all the time thinking the next milk check will cover it."

Lenzen took the Farm Beginnings course in 2001-2002. He said its emphasis on business planning and creation of networks with existing farmers doing things out of the mainstream gave him the confidence to eventually pursue a system of farming he had been attracted to since high school.

"I don't think I would have started on my own if I hadn't gone to the class," he says. "It kind of gave me the push to go off on my own and do things my way."

Vanessa is finishing her photography degree, and has plans to establish a studio in the farm's original barn. Nolan has plans of his own, as he continues his search for ways to reduce labor while maintaining a profitable dairy operation.

"I don't want to be low input," he says with a smile. "I want to be *no* input." □

More profiles online

To read more Farm Beginnings profiles, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html. Podcasts featuring Farm Beginnings graduates are at www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=2.

Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland? Or are you an established farmer/landowner who is seeking a beginning farmer to purchase or rent your land, or to work with in a partnership situation? The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program has simple application forms available for people seeking farmland or farmers. Once the form is filled out, the information can be circulated by LSP via the *Land Stewardship Letter*, the *LIVE-WIRE* and online at www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/land_clearinghouse.html. To obtain a form and for more information, e-mail LSP's Parker Forsell at parker@landstewardshipproject.org or call 507-523-3366. You can also download the forms from our *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse* section on the LSP website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/resources.html#land. Here are the latest *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse* listings:

Farmland needed

Tony and Becky Mathews of Byron, Minn., are looking to rent 20-plus acres of land with a house and dairy barn. Minnesota or Wisconsin is fine, with southeast Minnesota preferable. They can be contacted at 507-398-8959.

Farmland needed

Fremont Gruss is seeking to buy at least 640 acres of certified organic land for small grains production. Land in western Minnesota, Nebraska, eastern North Dakota or South Dakota is fine. A house and outbuildings on the land are needed. Gruss is also looking for machinery and would like to begin farming the land in 2010. Contact: Fremont Gruss, 3360 Shavers Lake Rd., Deephaven, MN 55391.

Farmland needed

Christine and Kevin Ballman are seeking land to rent or buy in southeast Minnesota or western Wisconsin. They are looking for as little as 40 acres up to a few hundred acres that has a mix of tillable and pastured land. The Ballmans want to eventually set up a livestock grazing operation. A house and outbuildings would be nice, but they are negotiable on that point. For more information, contact the Ballmans at: 1321 W. 5th St., Red Wing, MN 55066; phone: 651-385-0321 or 651-764-1871.

Farmland needed

Laura Hedlund is seeking to buy approximately 40 acres of farmland in the Minnesota counties of Dakota, Rice, Goodhue, Scott,

Mower, Fillmore, Blue Earth or Houston. Hedlund can be contacted at 651-405-9751 or LJHedlund@gmail.com.

Farmland needed

Peter and Madeline Kastler are seeking to rent or buy three to five acres of farmland in Minnesota's Washington County. They want land with water (either a well or pond), and would like it to have not been sprayed and for it to be separate from conventionally-farmed land. To contact the Kastlers, call 612-382-9385 or e-mail peter.kastler@gmail.com.

Farmer needed: NW Iowa

David Zahrt has for sale 270 acres of farmland in western Iowa's scenic Loess Hills. The farm, which is near the community of Turin, consists of a house, several outbuildings, 25 acres of cropped land and 160 acres of pasture. It is adjacent to a 370-acre nature preserve, and a bed and breakfast currently exists on the property (www.country-homestead.com). Zahrt is interested in selling *in toto* or as parcels. For more information, call 712-353-6772 or e-mail chbnnb@netins.net.

Farmer needed: NW Minn.

Shannon Malzahn has a 31-acre farm in northern Minnesota (near Park Rapids) that she would like to rent or sell. The property consists of seven tillable acres, several outbuildings (including a 30 x 50 dairy barn) and a three-bedroom home that was updated less than 10 years ago. The land abuts Smoky Hills State Forest and Wolf Lake Forest Road, and has not had pesticides used on it for over six years. For more information, contact Malzahn

at 612-396-1647 or jsmalzahn@izoom.net.

Farmer needed: SE MN

Carole Kroc has an 80-acre certified organic farm for sale in southeast Minnesota's Goodhue County. The farm was a dairy operation up until three years ago and has outbuildings and a house. For details, call Kroc at 612-703-3081 or cgkroc@yahoo.com.

Farmer needed: western WI

Sweetland Farm (www.sweetlandfarm.com/home.html) in western Wisconsin has available a 20-acre certified organic farming operation that is set up for small-scale agriculture and direct marketing. The farmstead consists of, among other things, a newly constructed commercial building with retail store space, meeting room and commercial kitchen. The property is located an hour from the Twin Cities and 30 minutes from Eau Claire, Wis. For details, visit www.andalerealestate.com and view property number 812565. More information is also available by e-mailing sweetland@wwt.net or calling 715-232-8785.

Farmer needed: Twin Cities area

Marie Ward has 9.5 acres of land for sale one mile north of Minnesota's Twin Cities. This farm has not been sprayed in eight years and includes a house, outbuildings (44 x 32 pole barn and 32 x 26 machine shop) and pasture. Ward can be contacted at 763-439-7484 or marie.ward@earthlink.net.

Farm Beginnings course deadline Aug. 26

Applications are being accepted for the 2009-2010 edition of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course. Classes will begin Oct. 24 in River Falls, Wis. (University of Wisconsin), and Nov. 7 in Spicer, Minn. (Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center).

The deadline for applications is Aug. 26. For more information on the course, visit www.farmbeginnings.org. You can also get more information by contacting LSP's offices in southeast Minnesota (507-523-3366) or western Minnesota (320-269-2105).

In recent years, Farm Beginnings courses have been launched in Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota and the Lake Superior region. In addition,

Farm Beginnings initiatives will be launched in South Dakota and the Hudson Valley of New York this fall. Check the Farm Beginnings web page for details on other courses.

FB field days in 2009

From now until fall, Farm Beginnings is holding a series of public on-farm educational events. See page 32 for a listing of these events and watch the *LIVE-WIRE* electronic newsletter for details. Details are also available at www.landstewardshipproject.org in our **Press Releases** and **Calendar** sections. □

Stewardship & local food

By Dana Jackson

Soon after Chris Stein became the National Park Service Superintendent of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway this year, he was asked what surprised him the most about the assignment. “My biggest surprise was that I was overseeing a polluted river within the Park system,” he replied.

In 2008 both Minnesota and Wisconsin declared Lake St. Croix (the 25 miles of river between Stillwater, Minn., and Prescott, Wis.) to be “an impaired water” under the Federal Clean Water Act because of excess phosphorus. Then in April 2009, the American Rivers Association named the Lower St. Croix one of the 10 most endangered rivers in the United States because of uncontrolled urbanization.

“This river is a national treasure but it is in danger of dying a death from a thousand cuts. Poorly planned development is slowly killing the very qualities that make the Lower St. Croix so special,” said Rebecca Wodder, President of American Rivers.

Eutrophication from phosphate and urban sprawl on a National Scenic River? How can that be?

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 gave special protection to the river and a narrow corridor of land either side of it in Minnesota and Wisconsin. However, unrestricted land use outside the boundaries of the riverway such as agriculture, mining, logging and construction for a soaring population have degraded this national treasure.

Of course, the St. Croix River is still beautiful today; its northern reaches offer fishing and canoeing in nearly pristine waters, and the lower St. Croix is a prime recreational area with scenic and cultural attractions in close proximity to about three million urban residents. But future generations might not be able to enjoy this beauty.

Stewardship of the land

The Land Stewardship Project’s primary purpose in organizing the St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapter was to promote local food using the colorful designs trademarked by the national Food

Routes Network. But LSP’s mission—to foster an ethic and practice of stewardship for farmland and to promote sustainable agriculture and sustainable communities—was also clearly in mind as we established our goals for this initiative. Like the other *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapters in the United States (there are now 74) we set out to expand local markets for local growers, increase the consumption of local, healthful food and diversify the economy. But our fourth goal, to protect the ecological and scenic resources of the St. Croix River Valley, was established within the context of LSP’s mission: stewardship of farmland.

Driving from Stillwater to Taylors Falls,



The Lower St. Croix was named one of the 10 most endangered rivers in the U.S. earlier this year. (National Park Service photo)

Minn., and St. Croix Falls to River Falls, Wis., this spring I watched rolling hills along the highway turn brown as they were disked, then planted in corn (and probably some soybeans), with very few terraces or grassy waterways to slow the flow of water during hard rains, and little residue to hold onto soil during the dry windy days we had this May. The 2007 Agricultural Census shows a total of 254,198 acres of harvested corn in the three Minnesota counties and four Wisconsin counties that make up the St. Croix *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapter territory. Compared to some of Minnesota’s Corn Belt counties (Renville County alone has 285,045 harvested acres) these seven counties in the St. Croix River Valley don’t raise much corn. But the whole St. Croix River basin is larger than these seven counties, and when cropland in corn degrades water quality in a National Scenic River, that reduces the scenic and ecological value for Ameri-

can citizens, who are its owners.

Corn & phosphate

Officials with Minnesota and Wisconsin water quality regulatory agencies set a goal in 2006 to reduce phosphate in the river by 20 percent and return Lake St. Croix to the ecological and water quality conditions that existed before 1950. Phosphorus causes growth of algae, which eats up oxygen when it decays and causes eutrophication. Information wasn’t available for 2007-08, but census data shows that during the 1990s, from 82 percent to 95 percent of corn acreage in Wisconsin was treated with phosphorus fertilizer. Excess phosphorus attaches itself to soil particles, which are washed off fields by rain and blown off by wind.

Studies show that the two largest sources of phosphorus in Lake St. Croix are from agricultural runoff—both crops and livestock manure—and wind deposits. Land classi-

fied as highly erodible and enrolled in federal farm commodity payment programs must have conservation plans, but small farms not enrolled in farm programs aren’t required to do anything, and when fertilizer is relatively cheap, there’s no economic penalty for soil loss. Of course, as Michelle Wohlers, who helps farmers for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Minnesota’s Dakota and Washington counties points out, “Some farmers will always implement conservation practices because it’s the right thing to do.”

Even the best conservation practices can’t protect soil as well as permanent living cover from forests, prairie and well-managed pastures, and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was designed to encourage transitions to such land uses. However, rising corn prices driven by the highly subsidized ethanol industry have provided a greater incentive to keep land in corn or even take land out of CRP. Commodity subsidies ensure that land stays in corn, even when prices fall.

Ironically, while cornfields contribute to water quality problems in the St. Croix, higher prices for corn and the economic recession have kept fields from transitioning into something even worse from a land use point of view: houses, shopping centers and parking lots.

Community food & stewardship

Although some of the corn and soybeans will be fed to livestock in the area, most will be sold in the global market. These crops

Stewardship & Food, see page 19...

aren't grown for direct human consumption and are not intended to be part of a community based food system. But what if many of those fields could be diversified into feeding people in the region? *Buy Fresh Buy Local* asserts that greater availability of fresh fruits and vegetables would make people healthier, and that increased business among local producers, processors, retail businesses and consumers would benefit local economies. But how could more locally produced food and community based food systems reduce phosphate runoff, slow urbanization and help protect the St. Croix River?

Community based food systems have the potential to diversify landscapes as they diversify local economies. Money earned on fruits and vegetables can exceed per-acre returns from commodity crops and provide many more regional jobs in processing and distribution.

As food produced in the region becomes more important to the economy and way of life, people will value land for growing food they can eat rather than for growing grains to be fed to livestock or made into corn syrup and ethanol—or to build another shopping mall.

Existing apple orchards and berry patches contribute to landscape beauty and quality of life in the St. Croix Valley, and many more acres would be needed to supply the whole population with local fruits. In a community based food system, land use zoning decisions would not automatically favor a shopping center or another housing development as a “higher use” than an apple orchard, although it would probably require citizen involvement to sway local officials. Fruit farms would buffer existing housing developments and preserve open space.

Vegetable farms in a community based system would range from five to 50 acres in size and could not replace all the cornfields.

Dine Fresh Dine Local Sept. 10-11

For the second year in a row, the Land Stewardship Project's St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapter will sponsor “Dine Fresh Dine Local,” a special culinary celebration of good local food served in St. Croix Valley eateries. Dine Fresh Dine Local St. Croix Valley will be held over two days: Sept. 10-11. Minnesota and Wisconsin restaurants in the valley that participate will feature items on their menus made from locally produced vegetables, fruits, meats, dairy products and bakery goods. Valley residents and visitors are urged to dine out at restaurants serving local foods on Sept. 10 and 11.

Dine Fresh Dine Local 2009 will be co-

sponsored by the St. Croix Falls Buy Local Initiative and the Farm to Community Alliance, and is being vigorously promoted in the St. Croix Falls and Taylors Falls area by local organizers. What We Need is Here and the River Market Community Cooperative will support organizing efforts in and around the cities of Hudson and Stillwater. Cafes and restaurants in other valley towns, as well as additional co-sponsors, are also invited to be part of Dine Fresh Dine Local.

For more information, contact LSP's Dana Jackson at 612-722-6377 or danaj@landstewardshipproject.org, or visit www.dinefreshdinelocal.com.

But small scale farms are places where people live and plant trees and gardens. They are more likely to allow room for natural areas, such as woods, prairies, wetlands on edges where cultivation is impractical. Plant diversity, in addition to crop diversity, would soar if five small farms replaced a 250-acre cornfield. More acres with permanent living cover instead of cornfields or parking lots would keep the St. Croix River clear.

Organic methods are often used on vegetable farms, even when not certified as organic, because production costs are lower than chemical-based systems. Compost and manure for fertilizer improve soil structure and its capacity to hold water. Cover crops and crop rotations keep soil covered more months of the year.

Farms in a community based food system will have faces and names of owners and operators identified with certain foods. Closer identification will put more responsibility on producers to be environmentally friendly and handle food safely. Consumers aren't able to know or find out if growers in Florida, California or Central America are stewards of the land that produces the to-

matoes we eat in winter, and they probably don't care. But they can question the grower in the farmers' market about fertility management on her land and visit the local dairy to watch cows coming in from pasture, and judge whether these farms contribute to agricultural eutrophication in Lake St. Croix.

Perhaps the biggest change could come if the St. Croix River Valley produced much more locally-consumed meat and dairy products using forage-based livestock systems. Grasses and legumes in well managed, rotationally-grazed pastures are proven sponges that hold soil and water. Perennial alfalfa and clover hay crops protect soil. Currently people value the rural ambience created by the many hobby horse farms, even though too many horses on too small pastures contribute to phosphate runoff. The aesthetics of larger green open spaces rotationally-grazed for milk and meat would maintain the ruralness inhabitants value and also protect soil from runoff.

Replacing cornfields with a great diversity of crops and forage-based livestock systems to produce food for the region will require solving the access-to-land problem for new farmers and jumping over enormous economic and social hurdles. That's why it's exciting that LSP will begin holding Farm Beginnings classes in the St. Croix River Valley this fall (see page 17). Stewardship farming systems are emphasized in this course.

Along with fostering an ethic and practice of stewardship, LSP's mission includes promoting sustainable agriculture and sustainable communities. If we are serious about protecting water quality in the St. Croix River, we must also be serious about building community based food systems. □

Dana Jackson coordinates the St. Croix River Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign out of LSP's Twin Cities office.

Buy Fresh Buy Local

Buy Fresh Buy Local is a national campaign to promote local foods and community based food systems. In 2007, the Land Stewardship Project formed the St. Croix River Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* (BFBL) chapter. Since then, the campaign has gained momentum through the partnership of over 60 farmers, businesses, farmers' markets, organizations and consumers.

For information on becoming a St. Croix River Valley BFBL partner, contact LSP's Dana Jackson at danaj@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377. More information is also available on the recently revamped BFBL

section of LSP's website (www.landstewardshipproject.org/bfbl).



Local foods for all

By Sarah Claassen

In March, the Organizing Apprenticeship Project (OAP) released two important publications related to social and economic justice: the *2008 Minnesota Legislative Report Card on Racial Equity* and *Pocket Guide: Racial and Economic Equity Assessment Questions*. The *Report Card* assesses the racial and economic equity of Minnesota legislation in 2008, and this year it found, among other things, that while legislators sent 15 racial equity bills to Gov. Tim Pawlenty's desk, only seven of those bills were signed into law. The *Pocket Guide* offers a series of questions (see sidebar) that help policy makers, community leaders, and organizers analyze the equity impact of policy, and ensure that the outcome will have positive outcomes for people and communities of color and working poor communities.

The Land Stewardship Project has had a long relationship with OAP—many of our organizers have been trained through the initiative. I am the latest LSP organizer to have the opportunity to take OAP training. As part of my work trying to make local, sustainably-produced food available to people in the Twin Cities no matter what their income level, I have been using the *Report Card* and *Pocket Guide* as organizing tools. Specifically, we've been engaging with a program called Homegrown Minneapolis and assessing whether it is adhering to acceptable levels of racial equity. Homegrown Minneapolis is an initiative by Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak to build local food systems that make a positive difference in the city's economy, health, food security and environment. Homegrown Minneapolis' steering committee is in the process of developing

recommendations for city officials to build a sustainable local food system. Following the release of the *Report Card* and *Equity Assessment Questions*, I delivered these tools to members of the Homegrown Minneapolis steering committee and met with several members of the committee to discuss how the tools might be applied when forming the recommendations.

LSP also joined up with Valerie Martinez of the Indigenous Peoples Green Jobs Taskforce to push for a racial equity assessment of the Homegrown Minneapolis steering committee's policy recommendations around job creation and training. The Indigenous Peoples Green Jobs Taskforce is a growing statewide initiative that empowers indigenous people, people of color and working poor people to rebuild healthy and sustainable communities through green jobs, including jobs in sustainable agriculture and community food systems.

In late May, Martinez and I met with Mayor Rybak's top policy aide, also a Homegrown Minneapolis steering committee member, to present the *Equity Assessment Questions* and engage the aide in that assessment. We asked that the city's recommendations on green jobs reflect the goals presented by the *Equity Assessment Questions*, and that

Homegrown Minneapolis use the *Pocket Guide* to assess racial equity impacts of all their recommendations, beyond jobs.

Homegrown Minneapolis is an opportunity to create better care of the land and improve the well-being of the city's residents, but to do that it cannot just focus on where a garden is planted or how many farmers' markets are placed in a community. A truly comprehensive initiative must address racial and economic disparity and consider the experiences of those who have the closest relationship with the problems of our current system. The initiative, and the city of Minneapolis, will be stronger when that is done. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* for updates on how this important work is progressing. □

LSP's Sarah Claassen recently graduated from the Organizing Apprenticeship Project. For information on getting a copy of the *Legislative Report Card* or the *Pocket Guide*, see www.oaproject.org or call 612-746-4224.

Racial & Economic Equity Assessment Questions

- How does the proposed action (policy, budget or investment decision) impact racial and economic disparities?
- How does the proposed action support and advance racial and economic equity in such areas as education, contracting, immigrant and refugee access to service, health, workforce and economic development?
- Have voices of groups affected by the proposal, budget or investment decisions been involved with its development? What solutions were proposed by these groups and communities?
- What do you need to ensure that proposals are successful in addressing disparities—what resources, what timelines and what monitoring will help ensure success of the proposal for achieving racial and economic equity?
- If your assessment shows that a proposed policy, budget or investment decision will likely increase disparities, what alternatives can you explore?
- What modifications are needed to maximize racial and economic equity outcomes and reduce racial and economic disparities?

LSP receives healthy food funding

The Land Stewardship Project has received funding from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota's tobacco settlement proceeds to promote healthier eating.

LSP was chosen to receive the funding to work with local groups and citizens in west-central Minnesota who have limited access to a green grocer. This initiative will explore how local farmers, gardeners and community gardening projects can help people improve the community's access to

good food.

The project will include working with University of Minnesota Extension, the University of Minnesota's West Central Sustainable Development Partnership and the Crossroads Resource Center to help area residents assess the strengths and challenges of access to good food in their communities. LSP's staff in Montevideo will partner with communities to plan how access to good food can be improved through a variety of

methods, including community gardening, improving produce preservation skills and building markets and venues for locally produced food.

For more information, contact Terry VanDerPol, Director of LSP's Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program, at 320-269-2105 or tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org. You can also contact LSP organizer Tom Taylor at ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org. □

The year of eating locally

Bringing the campus & community together around food

By Caroline van Schaik

Surely sustainable food has arrived when a university announces a yearlong focus on it. “Arrived” might be ambitious in southeast Minnesota. But the subject will certainly enjoy a boost in airtime when area school Winona State University (WSU) takes on the topic during the upcoming 2009-10 school year. Planning was launched earlier this spring and Land Stewardship Project staff members have been at the table since.

But what does this mean, really? Here’s what WSU staff leaders said in an official statement: “The intent ... will be to educate our community and engage our students in relevant work about this topic, but also to celebrate and enjoy sustainable foods with each other.”

What WSU officials are hoping for is a bigger profile shaped by what they term, “authentic, engaged partnerships between the university and community members working in the areas of sustainable food systems.” According to a recent campus publication, WSU seeks learning opportunities that transcend the classroom to solve real problems, provide service and/or address societal challenges.

And we on the community end have plenty to share if we can just find the right keys to open up the academic world to this messy, universal, organic need called food. LSP staff sit on the steering committee and serve on subcommittees directed to organize student farming internships, help professors integrate agriculture into their curricula, and investigate local meals options.

We planned a faculty farm tour this summer to introduce a variety of issues that food systems, farms and students could share. In addition to hosts Jennifer and Mike Rupprecht—LSP members who farm near the southeast Minnesota community of Lewiston—speakers included other LSP members who represent some of the wealth of knowledge working in the shadow of WSU.

This fall, Jennifer has arranged for the Winona Farmers’ Market to move to campus for Parents Weekend. We’ll also be organizing a locally-sourced Harvest Meal then—with help from students, who will hopefully be enjoying that “engaged learning opportunity” by menu planning, food sourcing, budgeting, advertising, counting linens, chopping and dicing, serving, and dealing with leftovers. There are other already-planned community events that could well serve as learning opportunities—if faculty members rise to this occasion.

This presents a big challenge for those of us on the community end. How can a professor integrate it and how can students access the lessons? My mind spins with the possibilities: the farm and art, the farm and soil biology, the farm and literature, the farm and economics, etc. I see students composing music behind the barn, digging around fence posts for worm counts or taking soil probes into Mike Rupprecht’s fields. There are food economics and moral issues related to food insecurity to contemplate. Of course, along with paintings to be painted there are truck routes to calculate and software to design.

Several professors have responded to a WSU mini-grants opportunity for student engagement in food systems and graphic arts, soils research, cooking/health, composting drums, and elementary school curriculum. These are sound expressions of our community-based food system at work. The campus is no different a microcosm than any other gathering of busy people—it’s going to take more than a few of those people to make the changes we all want. □

Caroline van Schaik, an organizer with LSP’s Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program, is based in our southeast Minnesota office. She can be contacted at caroline@landstewardshipproject.org or 507-523-3366.

Community Food & Farm Fest

Jackie Diehlmann/Kujak of Sylvan Hills Farm talks to consumers about Community Supported Agriculture during the 2009 Community Food and Farm Festival May 2-3.

As in past years, the Food and Farm Fest was held as part of the Living Green Expo (www.livinggreenexpo.org) at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in Saint Paul. The Food and Farm Fest, which is sponsored by the Land Stewardship Project, provides an opportunity for consumers to meet and talk to farmers who are direct-marketing local, sustainably-raised foods through various means.

This year’s Fest featured 17 farms. See www.landstewardshipproject.org/cfff/cfff.html for a list of exhibitors. (LSP photo)



Pollinators in peril

Farms with natural habitat could help ensure bees keep buzzing & plants keep propagating.

By Brian DeVore

This spring, Juan Carlos Cervantes was given a harsh reminder about timing, bugs and the sex lives of plants. When approximately three rows of cucumbers began flowering in his greenhouse, they didn't set fruit. It seems that the vegetables had not been pollinated by passing bees or other insects. No pollen. No fruit. No cucumbers for Celestial Harvest, the 150-member Community Supported Agriculture farm Cervantes operates with his wife Chantel.

"I'd say if they aren't pollinated in two weeks it's going to be too late," said Cervantes one evening in early June, soon after he had discovered the barren plants. "We need to get them pollinated. We're talking about now. Without pollinators, you don't have fruit."

In fact, without pollinators, we don't have a lot of things. Pollinators—wild creatures and domesticated honeybees—help 70 percent of the world's wild and cultivated flowering plants reproduce. Every third bite of food is directly or indirectly the result of an insect carrying a few grains of pollen from one flower to another. Honeybees alone pollinate approximately \$15 billion worth of American crops each year, according to the USDA.

Bees purposefully collect pollen to feed on its rich protein, but a variety of creatures participate in pollination, often accidentally, when they travel between plants. Butterflies, moths, wasps, flies, ants, bats, hummingbirds, and yes, mosquitoes, play a role in plant pollination, although they do not feed on pollen.

Without pollinators we would have to say goodbye (or at least do with less) tomatoes, squash, melons, cranberries, almonds, blueberries, cherries, asparagus, broccoli, carrots cucumbers, onions, and various tree fruits like apples, to name a few. And because pollinating insects are needed to produce seeds for forage crops like alfalfa, our meat and milk is partially reliant on their services.

"Pollinators are really the keystone group of organisms that other organisms rely on," says Eric Mader, adjunct assistant extension professor with the University of Minnesota's Department of Entomology and the outreach coordinator for the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. "Losing pollinators is

probably equivalent to the ramifications of losing all our oxygen. I don't want to be an alarmist, but these are keystone species."

That's why farmers, environmentalists and even consumers should be concerned by this troubling fact: pollinators—everything from the domesticated European honeybee to the wild bumblebee—are quickly declining.

But this agro-environmental crisis offers

Wildly Successful Farming



An occasional series on farms & their role in the natural environment

a sweet opportunity for farms that contain diverse habitats full of flowering plants and other natural areas. Such wildly successful farms could serve as pollinator havens while remaining productive. Because pollinators are such critical species, doing things that benefit them could provide multiple ecological services: from improved water quality and carbon sequestration as a result of more perennial plant cover, to habitat for birds and mammals. And the perils facing pollinators provides an opportunity for average consumers to take part in the solution.

"Most people can't go in and put in habitat that will protect the Sumatran Tiger, but anybody can plant a few wildflowers," says Mader.

What's bugging the bugs?

If it weren't for "Colony Collapse Disorder," also known as CCD, showing up in this country a few years ago, the importance of pollinators would probably have gone unnoticed by the public. Over the past half-century, honeybee numbers in the U.S.

have dropped almost 60 percent. Disease has played a role, but market forces have also been a major factor—beekeepers left the business in droves as cheap honey from China flooded the market. Now that CCD has arrived on the scene, it may represent a death blow to a U.S. industry already on the ropes.

Honeybees have experienced massive die-offs in the past, but CCD is particularly troubling because it occurs when worker bees leave the hive and don't return, a behavior quite unusual for the highly organized domestic honeybee, says Marla Spivak, a University of Minnesota entomologist and nationally-recognized expert on bees.

Almost 30 percent of beekeepers reported that they lost as much as three-quarters of their bees from CCD during 2006-2007. The losses sent beekeepers and scientists scrambling for solutions. It's of particular concern to the California almond industry, which has become increasingly reliant on the pollination services provided by honeybees. In February and March each year, half of the nation's 2.5 million hives are in California providing pollination services for almond groves.

The health food industry's skyrocketing demand for almonds has made hives from top beekeeping states like Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota high demand items, with hive rental rates at least tripling in just two years.

Today, most commercial beekeepers no longer rely on honey sales to make a living—rather they move their hives around to various parts of the country to provide pollination services, making their bees an insect version of migrant workers.

In fact, the collapse of honeybee colonies may be the result of expecting too much from these apian workhorses. After all, since the 1950s in the U.S. alone, the number of crops we need pollinated by bees has doubled, while the number of honeybees has dropped by at least half. It's like a factory where half the workers have been laid off while the assembly line has been sped up.

"People ask why are the bees dying? Well, they are overworked and overstressed and they can't provide all the pollination services we demand of them," says Mader. "We have half the number of honeybees doing twice the amount of work."

And all of that traveling and concentration of hives in a feedlot-like environment exposes the bees to an alphabet soup of diseases they aren't used to dealing with. In her cramped office next to the bee lab at the University of Minnesota, Spivak shows a computer graphic illustrating the migra-

Pollinator, see page 23...

tion patterns of beehives each winter. Large swooshing arrows represent the movement of Midwestern hives South and West in the winter, and back again in the spring.

"This huge movement horizontally has increased the disease transmission significantly," says Spivak.

It's likely to get worse. The USDA estimates that by 2010 increased consumer demand for almonds will raise the number of bee colonies needed annually by California producers from 1.3 million to 1.5 million.

Chemical killers

There are also concerns that honeybees are being hurt by pesticides, which have dogged wild and domestic pollinators since they became ubiquitous after World War II. Bees and other pollinators are notoriously sensitive to pesticide poisoning. And because bees are natural born collectors, they often bring contaminants such as pesticides back to their hives. A Penn State University study released in August 2008 showed that low levels of over 70 pesticides and metabolites of those pesticides were present in hives. Most of them were common insecticides and herbicides, including atrazine, used in agriculture and around the home. Penn State researchers are particularly concerned that when the pesticides combine in a hive, they can have a synergistic effect hundreds of times more toxic than any of the pesticides individually.

The good news is that labeling restrictions (no spraying during the middle of the day when bees are most likely to be foraging) and a transition to chemicals of lower toxicity have made it less likely bees will be outright killed by spraying. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship recently published a new "Bee Rule" that limits applications of insecticides labeled as dangerous to bees. In areas near registered Iowa apiaries, applications must occur prior to 8 a.m. and after 6 p.m.

However, recent research has shown that a new class of pesticides could offer a more insidious threat to bees and other pollinators. In recent years, organophosphate insecticides, which are toxic to mammals and birds, have been replaced by a class of pesticides called neonicotinyls. Derived from nicotine, these bug killers are systemic, meaning they are put on a plant's seed, or injected straight into the roots or stem. They work their way up to the leaves, killing insect pests that feed on the plant. The advantages to these kinds of bug killers are

many: for one thing farmers, greenhouse keepers and homeowners aren't spraying toxins in the open air, reducing the chance of the chemical going where it's not supposed to. In addition, it works specifically on insects, offering little threat to other creatures, including humans. That's the main reason neonicotinyls have become one of the most widely used pesticides—particularly in greenhouses, by landscape companies and in homes. If you bought a potted plant recently,



Bumblebees, with their furred bodies and muscular wings, are extremely efficient at pollinating a variety of plants. (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources photo)

likely it's been fortified with neonicotinyl.

"I can't impress on you how common this is on everything," says University of Minnesota entomologist Vera Krischik, adding that these types of pesticides can stay in a plant for up to a year.

A few years ago Krischik noticed that after feeding on some potted plants that were in her backyard, bumblebees would become disoriented, and fall to the ground where they would suffer from tremors before dying: a classic sign of neonicotinyl poisoning. She later did research and found that plants containing neonicotinyls caused high death rates in beneficial insects like pink lady beetles, green lacewings and parasitic wasps. Krischik is now taking steps to study more thoroughly the impacts these pesticides have on bees that feed on plant nectar and pollen.

The effects of neonicotinyls on non-target species such as bees is of particular interest now that the emerald ash borer, a devastating killer of ash trees, has arrived in the Midwest. This class of pesticides is an effective tool for controlling the borer.

"This pesticide isn't all bad. It's just not a good idea if it finds its way into plants insects use for nectar," says Krischik.

Some types of neonicotinyls have been banned in France and Germany after honeybee die-offs were connected to the pesticides, but it's too early to tell if these

restrictions will help bee populations bounce back, say entomologists.

Spivak says it's unlikely pesticides are the only cause of CCD or other mass bee die-offs. Typically in a CCD situation, one colony will collapse and a neighboring one won't, although the bees often forage in the same areas where pesticides were applied.

"But the pesticides are a problem, and we need to pay attention to them, whether they are the root of the problem or not," she says.

Bringing in wild help

One way to reduce stress on honeybees—whether it's from disease, overwork, pesticide poisoning or a combination of all three—is to tap into help from the wild. Wild insects already provide roughly 15 percent of food crop pollinator services. In the Upper Midwest, the potential for native species to transport pollen is huge—Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan alone have more than 500 species of native bees. In many ways, native bees are superior pollinators to domesticated honeybees. Bumblebees will fly in bad weather when their domestic cousins are holed up. As few as 250 orchard mason bees—native metallic-tinted bees present throughout the country—can pollinate an acre of apples, a job that could require 40,000 honeybees.

A bumblebee can cling to inverted flowers such as blueberries and efficiently buzz pollinate—shake pollen off by vibrating its wings. On vegetable farms in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, wild bees visited flowers more frequently than did honeybees in three out of four crops studied, according to the *Journal of Applied Ecology*.

"Bees are the apex pollinators," says Mader. "Bumblebees are the most efficient of the efficient."

But wild pollinators are having their own problems.

The National Academy of Sciences reported in 2007 that long-term population trends for North American wild pollinators are "demonstrably downward." At least four dozen species of wild bees in this country are on the Xerces Society's "red list" of at-risk pollinators.

The yellow-banded bumblebee and the rusty-patched bumblebee haven't been officially sighted in Minnesota since 1999 and 2003, respectively, according to the Xerces Society. The American bumblebee may also be in trouble. "When you think about three bumblebees declining in a state where you have 12 to 13 bumblebee species overall, that's major," says Mader.

In the United Kingdom, a decline in bee

Pollinator, see page 24...

diversity has resulted in the diminished distribution of 75 species of wild plants that require insects for pollination, according to the journal *Science*.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has gotten so concerned about the loss of native pollinators that it recently created "Pollination Coordinators" for each of its regions. Not only are insects like bumblebees important for propagating wild flowering plants, but their sensitivity to the environment makes them key ways of monitoring what's going on in the ecosystem, says Wedge Watkins, the Fish and Wildlife Service's Pollination Coordinator for the Midwest. "Pollinators are like amphibians in that they are indicators of larger processes going on," he says.

Habitat problems

On a recent fall day, entomologist John Luhman is standing next to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's biological control greenhouse in Saint Paul, grappling with the question of how many insects, including pollinators, are in trouble. But entomologists warn against focusing too much on the state of individual insects; that can be difficult to track given the sheer numbers of bugs out there.

"Rather than look at individual insects that are threatened, just look at their habitat," says Luhman, who works for the Agriculture Department. "If the habitat is in trouble, chances are the insects that like that habitat are in trouble."

The issue that overshadows every other threat to wild and domesticated pollinators is lack of natural habitat to forage on and live in. Diverse landscapes can go a long way toward making beneficial insects more resilient in the face of disease, toxic chemicals and general stress, say entomologists and ecologists. And this is where diverse, sustainable farms can play a role.

Because wild bees are integral to a healthy ecosystem, any conservation initiatives that help them could have a positive effect on other parts of the environment.

Research shows that farms with woods, meadows and other natural areas growing flowering plants have a larger number of insect pollinators. But monocultures of corn, for example, are deserts to pollinators. In addition, heavy tillage disrupts wild bee habitat—two-thirds of native bees nest underground. Beekeepers often get panicked calls from vegetable producers who are trying to

raise melons and other pollinator-dependent crops in the midst of corn country.

Darrel Rufer can vouch for how natural habitat benefits pollinators. The Waverly, Minn., beekeeper and president of the Minnesota Honey Producers Association winters his honeybees in a part of east Texas where natural habitats such as woodlands predominate. The bees return to Minnesota in May rejuvenated, and do well during the first part of the summer, when blooming plants like dogwood and basswood provide plenty of healthy nectar. By the end of June and the first part of July, the bees are forced to begin



Beekeeper Brian Fredericksen says "single source honey" may help consumers connect habitat protection with pollinator conservation: "Everybody can pitch in on this one." (LSP photo)

foraging in cornfields, which offer them little nectar and can be full of pesticides. That's when the bees start to lose their vigor.

"Progressively with each trip to the beehive you have fewer and fewer bees," says Rufer. "You'll have clusters that will have instead of 10 frames you'll have three. Plus you'll have more dead bees around."

Habitat & biofuels

Entomologists and beekeepers say the problem has gotten worse in recent decades as federal farm programs encourage more plantings of row crops such as corn, and discourage diverse rotations, forages and pasturelands. And if the demand for corn-based ethanol continues to provide incentives to plant more land to corn, it could get even worse. On the other hand, if biofuels makes a transition to cellulosic sources of energy such as native prairies, it could be a different story, says University of Wisconsin entomologist Claudio Gratton.

"It could be quite positive," he says. "You can imagine if that's the way we do biofuel, pollinators might actually do better."

Gratton and other University of Wisconsin researchers are in the midst of a study where they are estimating pollinator numbers and diversity in various rural habitats: corn, prairie and switchgrass. One major concern in a place like Wisconsin is whether there are enough pollinators—honeybees as well as wild insects—around to support flowering cranberries.

"If these little cranberry bogs in central Wisconsin are surrounded by corn and switchgrass, what impact on pollinators will it have?" Gratton asks. "Honeybees are actually very poor pollinators of cranberries—very lazy, weak. So we suspect that native pollinators are actually important pollinators of cranberries."

Already Gratton's research has shown that wild bee abundance is positively related to forest habitat found around cranberry bogs.

Government concern

Congress, prompted by concerns over the loss of honeybees, made pollinator research and protection a priority in the recently passed 2008 Farm Bill. CCD's impact on domesticated hives may have been the impetus behind these recent policy initiatives, but efforts to increase habitat for wild pollinators could receive a boost as well.

For example, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been directed to make pollinator habitat restoration and protection a key part of such farm programs as the Conservation Reserve Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program. As a result, the NRCS is already training staffers on how to help farmers establish and maintain pollinator-friendly habitats on their farms: hedgerows, dead snags, bare ground for bee nesting and native plant systems. The Minnesota NRCS has published *Native Pollinator Plants for Conservation Practices in Minnesota* for its field offices.

"As long as you're planting pasture anyway, or as long as you're putting in wildlife plantings, why not put in things that improve pollinator habitat? There are just some small things you can do," says Robin Martinek, Minnesota state agronomist for the NRCS.

In Michigan, the NRCS recently launched an effort to enroll 2,500 acres of land in wildflower plantings throughout the state's western fruit growing region. Participating landowners there receive annual rental payments for plots of land as small as two acres

under the Conservation Reserve State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Program. In many cases, marginal areas of land such as fence-rows, field borders and ditches qualify.

And for producers raising pollinator-dependent crops such as apples, blueberries, pumpkin, canola or sunflowers, there's an added bonus.

"Growers will have a way of creating a healthy population of their own pollinators, reducing dependency on rented hives," says Mader, adding that much of this habitat restoration can be done on marginal land that wasn't producing much agriculturally anyway. For example, Mader just worked with a Wisconsin apple producer who established a "bee pasture" on hilly, rough land using purple prairie clover and forbs.

Current NRCS guidelines in many states recommend at least one to two acres of pollinator habitat for every 25 acres of pollination-dependent cropland. And it needs to be relatively close. Bumblebees will range up to a mile from their nest to forage, while for tiny solitary bees (some species are small enough to ride on a bumblebee's antenna), a flight of 200 yards would be a major undertaking.

Botanists and entomologists say careful planning is needed when planting for pollinators. The peak of pollination may be August, but insects need nectar throughout the growing season, particularly during the fall as they prepare for winter. That means diverse plantings that bloom throughout the spring, summer and fall are key.

"You have to think of the entire life cycle of the insects," says Krischik. "You plant a flower in August, well that's not going to do that bumblebee any good when it comes out in May and doesn't have anything to eat."

Flowering trees such as willows can be critical to bees when they emerge in the spring, while asters, goldenrod and sunflowers are key sources of food in late summer and fall. Even allowing vegetables like broccoli to bolt late in the season can help.

Beneficial habitat can be had in some surprising places. Research out of Kansas has shown that "linear habitat corridors"—native prairie plantings along roads—can produce major habitat benefits for pollinating insects. Over twice as many wild bees were found along roads planted to native prairie as compared to weedy roadsides, according to one University of Kansas study. In Iowa, over 45,000 acres of roadsides have been planted to native plants during the past few decades, providing pollinator habitat as well as other benefits such as natural snow fences.

But it doesn't necessarily take thousands

Give it a listen

To hear LSP *Ear to the Ground* podcasts featuring beekeeper Brian Fredericksen (episode 54) and entomologist John Luhman (episode 60) talking about domestic and wild pollinators, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=11.

of acres of wild habitat to help pollinators—sometimes just a little splash of diversity will help. Juan Carlos Cervantes, the CSA farmer, provides pollinator habitat by interspersing plants such as sunflowers with his vegetable plots.

"It's the idea of sharing a bit. In a lot of systems, it's bare beyond the crop fields," says Cervantes, who recently received a USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant to experiment with establishing beneficial insect habitat within his vegetable plots. "You may have to have a blemish here and there."

Pollen & the plate

The beauty of pollinator conservation is because these creatures play such a key role in the food chain, anyone that eats can play a positive role by creating a "demand" for diverse habitat. Beekeeper Brian Fredericksen has developed a business model based on such a relationship. On a late summer afternoon, Fredericksen is checking on his honey processing facility west of Minnesota's Twin Cities, near the town of Watertown. A counter on one side of the climate-controlled room holds meticulous records of the work Fredericksen's bees have been doing during the previous months. Documented are where the hives are located and the type of plant the bees collected pollen from. The beekeeper pulls out a few jars of the finished product to show how that data is put to use. One label makes it clear that some "Dutch Clover" honey was collected from Hive 609A at Parley Lake. Another was collected on the Blue Earth River (Hive 354A), yet another from Meadow Wood (Hive 504A).

The list goes on. Fredericksen's Ames Farm business currently has 18 different labels, representing hive locations that range from south-central Minnesota all the way down to near the Iowa border. Such a diversity of locations means a lot of work is invested in maintaining the hives, but it's worth it, says Fredericksen.

"If some feedlot bee guy moves in next door, I won't get wiped out by disease because I am diversified in location," he says.

This isn't just a hive-survival insurance policy. Fredericksen sees "single source honey"—being able to track the product back to one hive from one location representing one type of plant—as a viable way to make a living from bees without shipping them all over the country. This artisanal method of honey production results in a flavorful product consumers are willing to pay extra for—providing a direct, market-based mechanism for supporting healthy habitat for local pollinators—both wild and domesticated honeybees.

"The idea is that honey produced in one geographical location, off of one hive, in one time period, is really a special sort of moment," he says.

But the beekeeper also sees it as a way for consumers to do things on a bigger, landscape scale and support the overall natural infrastructure required for a type of honey production that preserves wild habitat. If eaters are more aware that top-quality honey requires diverse habitat, they may be more likely to do everything from establish native plantings on their own property to encouraging local governments to reduce chemical-intensive landscaping. They may also see the importance of supporting government policies that encourage, rather than discourage, farmers who diversify out of corn and soybean monocultures.

"Maybe while they're spreading honey on their toast people will be reminded that it takes a certain habitat to produce this product locally," says Fredericksen as he leaves the honey packing facility. "Everybody can pitch in on this one." □

More information

- The Xerces Society has several good resources for making farms and homes more pollinator friendly: 503-232-6639; www.xerces.org.
- You can find native plants by ecoregion at www.pollinator.org.
- *Managing Alternative Pollinators: A Handbook for Beekeepers, Growers and Conservationists* is a step-by-step, full-color guide for rearing and managing bumblebees, mason bees, leafcutter bees, and other alternatives to honeybee pollinators. More information is available on the Natural Resource, Agriculture, and Engineering Service website at www.nraes.org/nra_map.html, or by calling 607-255-7654.
- For more information on Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) initiatives that help farmers establish and sustain pollinator habitat in conjunction with programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program, contact your local NRCS office, or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.



Holy Ground A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation

Edited by Lyndsay Moseley &
the Staff of Sierra Club Books
2008; 352 pages
(hardcover & compact disk)
Sierra Club Books
www.sierraclub.org

Reviewed by Dale Hadler

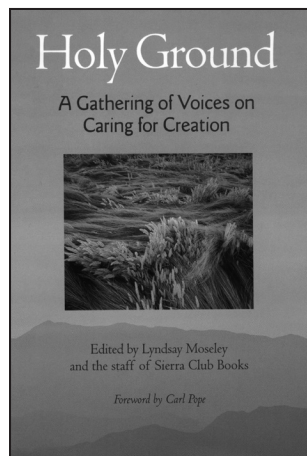
Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation is a collection of 30 pieces addressing religious responsibilities for creation care from a variety of theological perspectives, including Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Native American and Hindu. The contributors include Pope Benedict XVI, who argues in his 2007 Christmas homily that Christ's coming was not just for the benefit of humanity, but to "restore beauty and dignity to creation." The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew writes that we are all called by God to be caretakers of creation. Patriarch Bartholomew's sentiments are echoed by other contributors, such as the Reverend Sally Bingham, an Episcopal Priest and founder of the Regeneration Project, a non-profit organization that created the Interfaith Light and Power Campaign. She writes that there is hope for humanity's understanding of the various environmental issues facing the world, especially as humanity comes to understand that we are also part of the family called creation and that we have an impact on that family.

This book also contains the insights of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Iranian-born American Shiite Muslim commentator and educator who believes that modern science has alienated us from "nature as a sacred and spiritual reality." He writes that current environmental problems are the result of a spiritual, not scientific, crisis, and that we need to seek more spiritually-based paradigms to interpret modern sciences and their impact on creation. In addition to Nasr's Muslim voice, Rabbi Zoe Klein provides a Jewish perspective on the environmental crisis in her chapter, "Splitting the Sea, So What." Rabbi Klein describes the environmental crisis as being the result of human arrogance, in effect seeing ourselves as

being God-like. She describes a hypothetical argument between humanity and God where humanity challenges God by saying in effect, you split a sea, big deal—we destroyed seven of them. In effect, Klein calls for humanity to be humble in its relationship with nature, remembering that even though we are powerful we are not God. We need to caution ourselves against finding paradise in the material things that, when abused, damage creation and only serve to separate us from God and creation.

In addition to the voices of clergy and religious academics, included in this book are the thoughts of Wendell Berry, a favorite of many Land Stewardship Project members. He writes that, in many ways, the Gospels are incomplete, a position supported by the Gospel of John, which acknowledges that if all the things that Jesus did were written down, "the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

Berry sees this incompleteness as a way of opening the Gospels to many interpretations, including ecological ones. This is especially true when one considers that many accounts in the Gospels take place in natural areas such as wilderness, mountains and seas, implying that Jesus was certainly familiar with and comfortable in the natural world of First Century Roman-occupied Palestine.



In a sense, Berry is calling on us to use our imagination, especially our ecological imagination, when reading the Gospels.

This volume does an excellent job of explaining humanity's religious or spiritual connection with creation and how we are called as believers to care for it. It also clearly provides a strong argument that this connection and call for creation care is a common theme in all the religious traditions included. This book is also an excellent resource for environmental groups in faith communities as it theologically challenges us to see ourselves as stewards of creation. It does this without a lot of academic theological language, thus making it a useful resource for anyone concerned about the connection between faith and the environment.

Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation is edited by Lyndsay Moseley, rated as one of *Sojourners* magazine's emerging Christian leaders. Moseley also helped create the Sierra Club's National Faith Partnership initiative and is a former staff member of The National Religious Partnership for the Environment. □

LSP member and frequent volunteer Dale Hadler has a masters degree in religion and philosophy from United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities. His area of study emphasized environmental theology and ethics, and the theological implications of agricultural policy.

Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol



More than 200 citizens and legislators turned out Feb. 17 for the fourth annual Land Stewardship Project Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol. The breakfast featured food produced by LSP member-farmers and gave people a chance to discuss with lawmakers issues related to family farming, sustainable agriculture, local democracy and community based food systems. (LSP photo)

Deeply Rooted

Unconventional Farmers in the Age of Agribusiness

By Lisa M. Hamilton

2009; 304 pages

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Reviewed by Brian DeVore

Once served on a land grant college committee that was trying to figure out ways to develop a marketing manual for farmers involved in alternative production practices such as organic vegetables or grass-fed livestock. Being the only journalist on the committee, I suggested that the publication take the form of a series of stories describing how different farmers had tackled alternative marketing endeavors and what they had learned from the experiences. A no-nonsense university extension educator sitting on the committee responded as if I had just suggested we all put on hemp shirts and dance around the room waving prairie flowers: “I don’t want to read a bunch of stories. I want practical information.”

Lisa Hamilton’s new book, *Deeply Rooted*, would probably be that extensionist’s worst nightmare: at first blush it’s simply a trio of stories describing some of the colorful characters in the sustainable agriculture movement. Hamilton provides detailed character sketches of a grass-based dairy farmer from Texas, a New Mexico beef producer and a family of farmer/gardeners in southeast North Dakota. There are times when these pieces, which are divided neatly into three sections, are pure page-turning entertainment. When Hamilton describes in the introductory piece how Harry Lewis left the farm, got involved with drugs in the city and eventually returned to the land to become a leader among his fellow African-American farmers, it’s clear the reader is in the presence of a larger-than-life figure. Hamilton reports that the first time she had a conversation with the charismatic farmer, he talked for two hours straight. It turns out he had more to say:

“The third time I met Harry Lewis (and this I could not believe): five hours straight. For five hours we sat on the porch of his house in Sulphur Springs, Texas, side by side in wicker chairs, facing the yard and the pasture beyond. It was ninety-one degrees and the man didn’t sweat, didn’t drink, didn’t unlace his heavy, black boots, didn’t even stand

up. He just talked. Had I not stopped him I swear he would have gone long past sundown.”

Even as I was thoroughly enjoying Hamilton’s profile of Lewis, I had that same guilty feeling I get when I eat only ice cream for supper. Is there any bigger story to be told here beyond the entertaining experiences of one innovative dairy farmer? That practical, “extension educator” voice was nagging me for something more.

Not to worry—the book ultimately delivers on the promise hinted at in its subtitle, *Unconventional Farmers in the Age of Agribusiness*, by providing a big picture view of how the ag industrial complex motivates (and infuriates) these personalities.

For example, soon after introducing Lewis, the author launches into one of the most succinct, clear descriptions I’ve read on how we ended up with all these mega-dairies in places where water, forage and all the other resources supposedly needed to raise milk cows are so short.

This proves to be a well-balanced pattern throughout the book: a description of a colorful personality interlaced with the agricultural/political/economic worlds these people live in. Hamilton as a writer shines when she describes someone like New Mexico cattleman Virgil Trujillo and how his mixed Spanish-Native American ancestry influences his stewardship ethic, or North Dakota farmer David Podoll’s obsession with observation and record keeping. She rounds out these portraits nicely with almost sublime descriptions of the landscapes these people make their living in. Hamilton describes how North Dakota corn is so uniform that it can provide a glimpse of the land’s almost imperceptible undulations: “...altogether they record each vague motion like a heart monitor, like a picket fence.” Such descriptions remind the reader of what keeps these agrarians plugging away despite it all: a love of the land.

Hamilton isn’t just a writer; she’s also a reporter. Her journalistic skills shine when delving into farm policy and the basics of food economics or plant genetics and the demise of farmer-controlled breeding. She also knows how to do the gumshoe “street” reporting that provides a glimpse of perhaps one of the biggest barriers to being innovative in farm country (especially if the innovator is outspoken, aggressive and maybe a little obnoxious): the larger community’s

unwillingness, or inability, to change. Hamilton peppers her writing with short asides gleaned from, for example, an out-of-work meat worker, a local parade, coffee shop talk, and a custom grain harvester belled up to the bar. This field reporting provides insights into the lack of hope that permeates rural communities ruled by the corn-bean-feedlot machine. At times it can come off a bit heavy-handed, as when she observes that, “Probably there are happy people, strong families, and pride of ownership in Clovis, as in any town, but from my vantage point I can’t see it.” But for the most part the author is empathetic to the people who are being crushed by a system the stars of the book are fighting so passionately.

And that’s important, because the book recognizes that the Harry Lewis’s of the world can only lead the charge so long. Charisma, stubbornness and an inhuman capacity for hard work will only take one so far. Will the Podoll family’s revolutionary ideas about plant breeding have a life beyond their corner of LaMoure County?

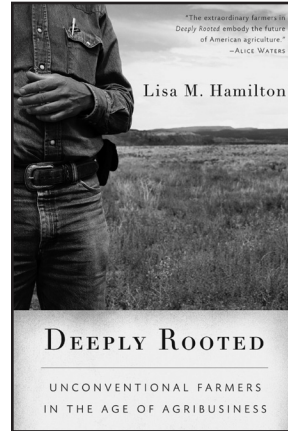
The “unconventional farmers” featured here recognize the importance of connecting to a wider community. Harry Lewis does this through his membership in the

Organic Valley Co-op, and Virgil Trujillo is involved with the Quivira Coalition, which is attempting to bring ranchers and environmentalists together. It’s not surprising that David, Dan and Theresa Podoll are involved in Seed Savers Exchange and the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society.

But toward the end of her book, Hamilton describes the kind of community-building that is often neglected in an attempt to change the world. Theresa Podoll, who has done her share of attending national conferences, has helped launch a small farmers’ market in the local community of LaMoure. She does it although selling her own family’s garden produce at the market doesn’t pencil out. But in a sense, it’s a cost of doing business, the kind of business that reminds people it is not natural to be surrounded by some of the richest soil in the world, all the while being reliant on tomatoes from Florida and bread from Colorado. It’s not as sexy as destroying racial stereotypes, developing a new strain of disease-resistant wheat or rotating cattle on the wide-open range, but ultimately, it’s where all real innovations must begin and end: at home.

You can’t get much more practical than that. □

Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.





Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land listings

Check out the Land Stewardship Project's latest listings of farmers seeking land/land available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/land_clearinghouse.html. See page 17 for more information on the new *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse*. □

A user-friendly Ear to the Ground podcast

For the past few years, the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast has been showcasing the voices of the farmers, consumers, scientists and activists who are working to create a more sustainable food and farming system. We now have over 65 episodes online and have recently re-organized our podcasts by category and year to make them easier to peruse.

The categories are: **Ag and Food Policy** ♦ **Beginning Farmers/Farm Beginnings** ♦ **Culture and Agriculture** ♦ **Global Ag** ♦ **Grassroots People Power** ♦ **Innovative Farming and Farmers** ♦ **Innovative Marketing** ♦ **Local Food Systems** ♦ **Multifunctional Farming** ♦ **Stewardship Farming/Farming with the Wild**.

We've also made it easier to listen online and download individual shows. To listen in, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org, and click on the **Listen to the Latest Podcast** link under **Take Action**. □

Greenhouse manual

The *Garden Goddess Passive Solar Greenhouse Manual* is a new publication developed by Farm Beginnings graduates Carol Ford and Chuck Waibel. Using an innovative, customized design, Ford and Waibel's Garden Goddess operation produces greens throughout the harsh western Minnesota winter with little artificial heat. The operation delivers the greens to a group of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscribers.

The manual describes how to build and operate a passive solar greenhouse for northern climates, as well as what to grow in such a system. For information on ordering the manual, contact: Garden Goddess Produce, 405 S. 4th St., Milan, MN 56262-2800; phone: 320-734-4669; e-mail: newworld@fedteldirect.net.

To read a Farm Beginnings profile featuring Ford and Waibel, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html. An *Ear to the Ground* podcast featuring their operation is

at www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=7 (episode 29). □

Livestock on the Land DVD

Livestock on the Land is an 11-minute DVD presentation about the economic and environmental benefits of livestock in south-east Minnesota. The DVD was co-sponsored by the Land Stewardship Project and was put together with the help of LSP Board member and dairy farmer Bonnie Haugen (her husband Vance narrates the DVD).

For more information, or to have someone present the *Livestock on the Land* information to your group, call Donna Rasmussen of the Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District at 507-765-3878, ext. 3, or e-mail donna.rasmussen2@mn.nacdn.net. □

Fruit & veggie marketing & farmers' rights

Understanding Farmers' Rights to be Paid for Fruit and Vegetable Crops is a new booklet available from Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG). FLAG also has available a list of answers to frequently asked questions about farmers' payment rights under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act.

Paper copies of these materials are available free of charge to financially distressed farmers in Minnesota. For all others, copies are \$12 (that includes shipping). To get a copy, call FLAG's office (877-860-4349 in Minnesota; 651-223-5400 elsewhere). The materials are also available free of charge at www.flaginc.org. □

MOSES seed swap

Farmers will have a chance to swap seeds during the 21st Annual Organic Farming Conference Feb. 25-27 in La Crosse, Wis. MOSES (Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service) will sponsor a Seed Swap/Farmer Showcase on Friday, Feb. 26, between approximately 5 p.m. and 8 p.m.

This event, which is open to all conference registrants, gives attendees a chance to swap seeds as well as sell farm products while networking with other attendees.

To reserve a table for selling your farm products at the swap, contact Jessica Tupa at 715-778-5775 or jessica@mosesorganic.org. If you want to participate in the seed swap only, no table or pre-registration is neces-

sary—just bring your seeds. More information on the Organic Farming Conference is at www.mosesorganic.org. □

Cry of the Marsh films

In the 1960s, Land Stewardship Project member Bob Hartkopf produced a short, but influential film called *Cry of the Marsh* in an attempt to draw attention to the importance of wetlands.

He was particularly concerned about a marsh that was drained near his family farm in western Minnesota to make room for more row crops. Armed with only a 16mm camera, Hartkopf created a stunning, award-winning portrait of drained wetlands, devastated wildlife, flood-prone conditions and the widening chasm between humans and the environment.

Echoes of Cry of the Marsh is a current documentary that explores the issue of wetland restoration through the experiences of Hartkopf, who went on to a long career as a teacher and ecologist.

Produced by University of Minnesota-Morris, the Upper Minnesota River Valley Watershed District and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (with cooperation from Pioneer Public TV), *Echoes* tells Hartkopf's story while describing the role economics and farm policy have played in the demise of wetlands. The film also describes the role policy changes and individual choices must play in protecting and restoring wetlands.

Both films can be viewed at www.morris.umn.edu/cryofthemarsh. Information on ordering DVDs is available at that website or by calling 320-589-6140. □

Atrazine report, fact sheets

Chances are over 70 million pounds of the controversial pesticide atrazine were applied across the nation by the time corn planting season wrapped up this spring. The Land Stewardship Project has an ongoing initiative that is studying the health and environmental effects of atrazine exposure, and alternatives to using the popular herbicide.

LSP has recently developed the first version of a working paper on atrazine and the Syngenta Corporation (www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/atrazine_working_paper.pdf), and has two fact sheets available on its website: "Syngenta & Atrazine—A Controversial Weed Killer & Agribusiness Come Under Scrutiny" (#17), and "Atrazine—Alternatives to a Controversial Herbicide" (#18). They can be downloaded from our fact sheets page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-factsheets.html.

For more information on LSP's atrazine work, contact Bobby King at bking@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-733-6377. □



LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Land Stewardship Project 2007-2008 Financial Update

Operating Revenue & Temporarily Restricted Net Assets Raised for Future Fiscal Years

Fiscal Year 2007-2008

Religious Grants	7%	\$91,000
Foundations & Corporations	44%	\$537,800
Government Grants	14%	\$165,046
Memberships & Contributions	26%	\$319,939
Fees & Sales	5%	\$66,173
Other	3%	\$34,019
Total	100%	\$1,213,977

Statement of Financial Position

As of June 30, 2008

Assets

Cash & Investments.....	\$469,744
Property & Equipment.....	\$405,663
Grants Receivable.....	\$401,054
Other.....	\$34,224

Total Assets.....\$1,310,685

Liabilities & Net Assets

Liabilities.....	\$209,800
Net Assets:	
Unrestricted.....	\$130,137
Temporarily Restricted Grants.....	\$604,348
Temporarily Restricted Farm.....	\$366,400

Total Liabilities & Net Assets.....\$1,310,685

Expenses by Operational Area

Fiscal Year 2007-2008

Organizing/Policy.	24%	\$311,226
Food Systems	22%	\$281,542
Farm Beginnings	15%	\$195,142
Multiple Benefits of Ag	0%	\$3,242
Communication	5%	\$71,548
Membership/Outreach	13%	\$171,681
Fundraising	8%	\$101,509
General Administration	10%	\$136,382
Other	3%	\$33,488
Total	100%	\$1,305,760

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

- Programs include payments for joint project-based work to other collaborating nonprofit or university organizations.

- Additional program expenses of \$22,856, including events, scholarships and livestock loans, are no longer included in the above expenses because they are now netted against revenue or assets, per audit rules.

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



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Membership Update

What your membership accomplishes

By Mike McMahon

The past several months have been a very productive time for the Land Stewardship Project. With your help, LSP has:

- Advanced the implementation of new and expanding sustainable agriculture policies at the federal level, especially through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (new) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (expanding).
- Expanded our Farm Beginnings program to provide continuing education to sustainable farmers and more opportunities for farmer-to-farmer education.
- Launched a new organizing campaign in the Twin Cities to increase everyone's access to healthful, local food, regardless of income.
- Opened a new office in South Minneapolis, bringing together the staff from the White Bear Lake and Policy Program office.

From meeting with decision makers in Washington, D.C., to helping move boxes into the new office, LSP members were critical to our success. So before I go on I want to say thank you.

Obviously these are hard times, yet I am hopeful about making positive change in our food and farming system. Every day I and other LSP staff are working with members who are committed to building a sustainable farming system. We're as busy as ever and making real gains.

I'm also hopeful because of the number of people who have made keeping their LSP membership current a priority. Every day I receive memberships from people who have made a commitment to advancing stewardship and justice by being an LSP member.

For those of you who have not yet renewed, now is a great time to do it — basic membership dues start at \$35 and go right to the work. Renewing your membership also renews your *Land Stewardship Letter* subscription, providing you with critical

information about the sustainable agriculture movement.

You can renew today by sending your membership dues using the envelope found in the center of this newsletter or by making a donation through LSP's secure website: www.landstewardshipproject.org.

As always, being a current LSP member provides you with opportunities to take coordinated, effective actions that will help build a sustainable food and farming system. With your membership renewal, you'll continue to receive action alerts on issues important to you, as well as invitations to meetings, events and on-farm field days. You will also receive access to information you can use and the support of a dedicated and experienced staff.

All of us are watching our spending more

closely these days and you may be thinking twice about renewing your LSP membership because of concerns over finances.

When I think about my own giving I try to keep in mind two things: first that this is an annual cost, not a monthly bill; and second, that if I make small changes to my monthly spending habits, I can afford to make a donation.

For example, LSP's basic membership dues are \$35—that's less than \$3 a month. Or taken another way, it's a couple of cups of coffee a month. A \$50 donation comes out to around a dollar a week.

If you can't join at the \$35 level this year, but would like to keep your membership current, send in a donation you're comfortable with and your membership will be renewed. And of course, if you can afford to give more than \$35, it really helps.

Again, thank you for being a Land Stewardship Project member and I hope you'll renew your membership. If you have any questions about your membership, please contact me at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Mike McMahon is LSP's Membership Coordinator.

Support LSP in your workplace

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

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

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



Support LSP with gifts of land

The Land Stewardship Project has launched an initiative that allows property owners to continue their family's legacy on the land while supporting the work of the



organization as well as beginning farmers.

Through *Land & Stewardship Legacies*, LSP can accept gifts of farmland and other real estate. The *Stewardship Legacy* secures financial resources to support the work of LSP now and into the future. The *Land Legacy* is distinguished by accepting gifts of suitable parcels of farmland to serve as incubators for beginning farmers, or sold outright to promising graduates of LSP's Farm Beginnings program. For details, check the *Land & Stewardship Legacies* web page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-joinus-land-legacies.html, or call 612-722-6377. More information is also available in the Summer 2008 *Land Stewardship Letter*. □

Give the gift of stewardship

Consider giving your loved ones and friends a one-year membership with the Land Stewardship Project. Gift members receive a membership packet and a special card acknowledging your gift. As new members, your friends and family will receive the *Land Stewardship Letter*, the *LIVE-WIRE*, action alerts and updates on important food and farming issues, plus opportunities to take part in on-farm field days, local food activities, meetings with decision makers and other events.

LSP is dedicated to creating an environmentally and economically sustainable food and farming system, and it is through the participation and financial support of our members that we create lasting change. Please consider giving an LSP membership this year to someone who shares our vision of keeping the land and people together.

Visit www.landstewardshipproject.org to donate online. If you have questions about gift memberships, please contact Mike McMahon at mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377. □

Fry your brain with

LIVE  WIRE

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* for monthly e-mail updates and news from the Land Stewardship Project. To subscribe, call Louise Arbuckle at 612-722-6377 or e-mail lsplib@landstewardshipproject.org, and put in the subject line, "Subscribe *LIVE-WIRE*." □

LSP fact sheets

The Land Stewardship Project's long-running series of fact sheets has been updated and is now available on our website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/resources-factsheets.html. The fact sheets cover a wide spectrum of topics, and more will be added in the future. □

Thank you

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received gifts made in the name of loved ones over the past few months:

- ◆ **Richard & Marjorie McManus**
In memory of Mark & Katie McManus.
- ◆ **Doug Nopar & JoAnn Thomas**
In memory of Margaret Redig Stephen.
- ◆ **Lynn Kidder**
In memory of Kenneth Kjar.
- ◆ **Harry Roers**
In memory of Kenneth Hammerschmidt.
- ◆ **Marge Hammerschmidt**
In memory of Kenneth Hammerschmidt.
- ◆ **Karen Bartig**
In memory of Phyllis Pladsen.
- ◆ **Gina Johnson**
In memory of Marilyn Adler.
- ◆ **Julie Essame**
In memory of James O'Neill.

For details on donating to LSP in the name of a loved one, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org. More information on donating special gifts to LSP is also available at www.landstewardshipproject.org. □

LSP breakfast volunteers



Over a dozen Land Stewardship Project members helped prepare and serve food during LSP's fourth annual Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol on Feb. 17 in Saint Paul. (LSP photo)



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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **JULY 19—LSP Farm Beginnings field day on mid-season vegetable production**, Gardens of Eagan, Farmington, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, parker@landstewardship-project.org; 507-523-3366

→ **JULY 20—WEI Organic Farm School Session: Our Precious Pollinators**, Midtown Global Market, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: 651-583-0705; www.w-e-i.org

→ **JULY 25—Field day on incorporating natural habitat into a farm**, One Step at a Time Gardens, Kanawha, Iowa; Contact: www.practicalfarmers.org; 641-495-6367

→ **JULY 26—Workshop on post harvest handling of vegetables**, Rock Spring Farm, Decorah, Iowa; Contact: www.rsfarm.com; 563-735-5613

→ **JULY 27—WEI Organic Farm School Session: Hmong Family Farming & Sustainable Ag in Minn.**, Midtown Global Market, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: 651-583-0705; www.w-e-i.org

→ **AUG. 3—WEI Organic Farm School Session: It All Comes Down to Humus**, Midtown Global Market, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: 651-583-0705; www.w-e-i.org

→ **AUG. 7—Field day on organic beef, carbon sequestration & organic weed control**, Frantzen farm, New Hampton, Iowa; Contact: www.practicalfarmers.org; 641-364-6426

→ **AUG. 8—Farm Beginnings workshop on multi-species grazing**, Fresh Air Farms, Sauk Centre, Minn.; Contact: Nick Olson, LSP, nicko@landstewardshipproject.org; 320-269-2105

→ **AUG. 10—WEI Organic Farm School Session: The Role of Mushrooms in Remediation & Sustainable Ag**, Midtown Global Market, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: 651-

583-0705; www.w-e-i.org

→ **AUG. 14—Farm Tour on grazing, biofuel production & working lands conservation**, Prairie Horizons Farm, Benson, Minn.; Contact: 320-239-4054 or 507-238-5449

→ **AUG. 15—4th Annual Minnesota Garlic Festival**, McLeod County Fairgrounds, Hutchinson, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org/garlicfest; 320-543-3394

→ **AUG. 17—WEI Organic Farm School Session: Wild Rice & Biological Patents**, Midtown Global Market, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: 651-583-0705; www.w-e-i.org

→ **AUG. 21—Field day on CSP, soil health & grazing**, Koether farm, McGregor, Iowa; Contact: www.practicalfarmers.org; 563-873-3385; 515-441-3062

LSP Celebrations July 30 & Aug. 16

The Land Stewardship Project's Twin Cities and southeast Minnesota offices will be hosting special cookouts/celebrations for its members and friends later this summer. The Twin Cities event will be July 30; the southeast Minnesota event will be Aug. 16. See page 6 for details.

→ **AUG. 21—Agroecology Summit**, Windom, Minn.; Contact: Tony Thompson, 507-831-3483; salix@rconnect.com

→ **AUG. 22—LSP Farm Beginnings field day on berry & vegetable production**, Natura Farm, Marine on St. Croix, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, parker@landstewardshipproject.org; 507-523-3366

→ **AUG. 25—Cooking with seasonal produce workshop**, Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn.; Contact: 763-694-2001; www.threeriversparkdistrict.org/parks/galewoods.cfm

→ **SEPT. 1—Preserving the harvest workshop**, Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn.;

Farm Beginnings registrations due Aug. 26

The registration deadline for the 2009-2010 session of the Land Steward Project's Farm Beginnings course is Aug. 26. See page 17 for details.

Contact: 763-694-2001; www.threeriverspark-district.org/parks/galewoods.cfm

→ **SEPT. 1—Seventh Annual Minnesota Cooks Event**, Minn. State Fair; Contact: Food Alliance Midwest, 651-209-3382; info@minnesotacooks.org; www.minnesotacooks.org

→ **SEPT. 3—Native prairie seed production workshop**, Wilder, Minn.; Contact: 507-238-5449; www.ruraladvantage.org

→ **SEPT. 10-11—Second Annual St. Croix River Valley Dine Fresh Dine Local event** (see page 19)

→ **SEPT. 26—LSP Farm Beginnings field day on beef grazing & beginning farmer troubleshooting**, Pieper Farms, Caledonia, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, parker@landstewardshipproject.org; 507-523-3366

→ **SEPT. 26—Barn concert fundraiser for Local Harvest Alliance**, Seven Story Farm, Belle Plaine, Minn.; Contact: 952-492-5314; sevenstoryfarm@gmail.com

→ **OCT. 24—LSP's Farm Beginnings classes begin in River Falls, Wis.** (see page 17)

→ **NOV. 7—LSP's Farm Beginnings classes begin in Spicer, Minn.** (see page 17)

→ **NOV. 12—St. Croix River Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local grower/buyer workshop**, Stillwater, Minn.; Contact: Dana Jackson, LSP, 612-722-6377; danaj@landstewardship-project.org

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