

The Land Stewardship

Keeping the Land & People Together

Letter



LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT

Vol. 27, No. 1

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Winter 2009



How one farm has developed a “wildly successful” mix of food production and natural habitat restoration (see page 25).

—*Reverse Engineering the Hog*—

—*Green Acres in Trouble*—

—*The Season of the Beginning Farmer*—

—*Tunneling Our Way to a Longer Season*—

— *A Guide to the Post-Oil Transition* —



Vol. 27, No. 1—Winter 2009

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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KITCHEN LITERACY



How We Lost Knowledge of
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Genetic de-engineering

Hogs aren't machines & farmers aren't mechanics

By Jim VanDerPol

The packing industry has in recent decades increased its control over the entire production chain in pork. Farmers, if any by that name could be said to exist in the hog business, think of the packer as the market. The packer wants a hog that is mostly lean meat, long enough to almost reach the floor from the hook in the slaughterhouse, and that is big and as standard as possible, or as standard as genetics can make it.

Nobody has asked the hog about any of this. In the best circumstances, at least the farmer would be asked, for it is the farmer who should be there to cope with the wild intersection of nature, animal genetics, human preference and economics. Yet the farmer has been mostly replaced by immigrant labor, legal or not, whose main concern is to keep the job and/or hope INS doesn't show up. This state of affairs would be nearly unthinkable if it were not true.

The result of this situation, where genetics are manipulated to solve several of what should be the simplest of problems, is a lack of ability to respond to changing conditions in hog production, including increasing consumer disgust with modern production and housing practices and the skyrocketing price of grains.

Hog genetic improvement has gotten us into a situation similar to that of the grass dairy farm and the Holstein cow. The Holstein is a bundle of genes that doesn't cope very well with reduced grain feeding and production from grass. Hogs have been produced in crossbreeding systems, but the intense pressure on improvement of very few traits had its effect across all the major breeds, so that the breeds now pretty much look the same under different skin colors. The modern hog is a genetic creation that does not do well in extensive production systems such as pasture farrowing and deep-saw bedding, and it produces large quantities of meat that doesn't taste good. These characteristics are closely related.

The taste characteristics of the meat are linked with fat, both external and intramus-

cular. What this means is that when the decision is made to breed for larger quantities of lean meat, the selection is inevitably against taste. The packing company has filled its hook with marketable product, but to do so it has pressured the development of a certain kind of hog farm to handle the production, as well as convince consumers that this meat is really what they want.

Farm production of these hogs is truly miserable. Animal scientist Temple Grandin stated flatly in the *New York Times* that these bubble-butt pigs are going to be short-tempered and hard to deal with. In her book *Animals in Translation*, she theorizes that the reduction in body fat may affect the presence of myelin in a sheath around the nerve cells. Myelin is essential for the proper functioning of the nervous system, so anything that reduces its presence may inhibit the pig's ability to calm itself.

These ultra-lean pigs run in mobs, regularly designating a victim and killing it. Farmers who check their pigs by walking among the feeding group had better be steady on their feet and quick about it. This is no place for children or the elderly.

The sows won't settle in with their pigs, and they cannot milk well for the litter without milking down to cull status. Too often they savage the pigs. They are a nightmare to breed. The boars are often not interested in breeding or cannot seem to figure out how

to investigate to see which sows are receptive. And they are not strong, tiring very quickly.

You can hear it in the patter of the judge at the county fair: "I like the way this pig comes at me, wide at the shoulders and level across the top." Folks, a hog carcass does not want to be "level across the top." If it is level, the problem will always show in a defective hindquarter. These ultra-leans walk as if they had a loose hobble tied across their hind legs, so that they cannot properly stride. Any increase in speed will have them using both hind legs together, hopping like some kind of ungainly rabbit.

That level top ends with the animal, if she has been saved as a sow, tucking her hind legs more and more under her as she walks. Eventually she will sit instead of stand under the stress of normal everyday pig life, and need to be sent to the meat truck. And even at market weight, these animals look exposed and in pain across their back, with the obvious lack of fat cover, almost as if they were standing there without skin.

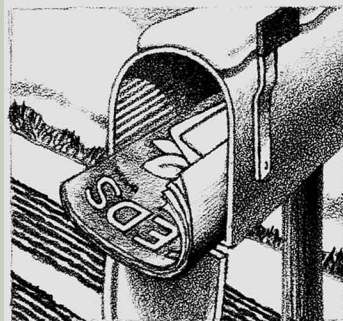
The lack of options in the genetic pool came home to us recently in looking at a group of Berkshire feeding pigs. The Berkshire breed has done us a lot of good in our production and marketing in recent years, but it is plain to see that the breed is being hurried along in the direction of the conventional breeds.

They, too, show the lack of fat cover. They, too, start tucking their hind legs under and breaking down when they are sorted out to breed and expected to maintain a rougher diet. They are a far cry from the first Berk gilts to come on the yard 15 years ago, who calmly passed their first day finding corn out of a snow bank while the white sows shivered in the doorway and watched.

Behavior, ruggedness and durability have

Genetics, see page 4...

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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Commentary !?!?!?

...Genetics, from page 3

everything to do with the usefulness of a hog in a pasture/free stall/straw system such as ours, where animals must provide some of their own environment, find some of their food, live together in large groups, and farrow without help in what the trade thinks of as an undercapitalized system.

But we are facing now an even bigger question having to do with the high price of inputs. And in this, as in all other aspects of animal production, the first and most economical approach must always be to observe nature, to see where natural selection is heading with the species in question

under the conditions on our particular farm, and then to carefully intervene and begin to push forward that goal with the principles of selective breeding. Good genetics don't rust, rot or depreciate. They are a better investment than any tractor.

Thankfully there are places to start, and those Berk gilts peacefully rooting through the snow banks 15 years ago are one such place. The Berkshire breed has not been thoroughly unraveled yet, and some of that traditional genetics is still around, I think.

Some of the exotics are said to do well on non-grain feeds; the Tamworth is called a grazing hog, the Gloucestershire Old Spot is an orchard hog. I wonder if the tendency not

to need as much grain will be as linked to better behavior and more ruggedness, as is the taste of the pork.

We are moving away from the time when the phases of the meat business that do the simplest work will be able to call the shots for the entire chain. What to feed a hog in a world of volatile input prices is not a question to be solved in the packing plant. It must be solved on the farm. The honest to God farmer is coming back again. Hallelujah! □

Former LSP Board member Jim VanDerPol's Pastures A Plenty farm (www.prairiefare.com/pastureshp.htm) produces pork on pasture and in deep-bedded straw systems near Kerkhoven, in western Minnesota. He originally wrote this commentary for Graze magazine (www.grazeonline.com; 608-455-3311), where he is a regular contributor.

*The Land Stewardship Project writes weekly on food and sustainable agriculture issues for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership's Loon Commons blog. Below are a few excerpts of recent blogs. To view the blog, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org and click on the **Read This Week's LSP Blog** link under **Take Action**. You can sign up for an RSS feed at <http://looncommons.org/category/food-and-sustainable-agriculture/feed>.*

The Farmer as Natural Resource Professional

Kevin Solberg says that natural resource professionals are starting to come around on the "working lands conservation" concept as they increasingly see firsthand how farmers can balance production and conservation. It doesn't hurt that science is starting to back up this idea with some solid research results. Even state and federal government is beginning to see that farmland and wildland shouldn't be two unrelated entities locked away in their own separate boxes.

Perhaps what's the most exciting recent development is that consumers are recognizing the connections between sustainable farming, their own health, healthy economics, and the health of the land, and are encouraging such interactions with their food



The Blog Barn

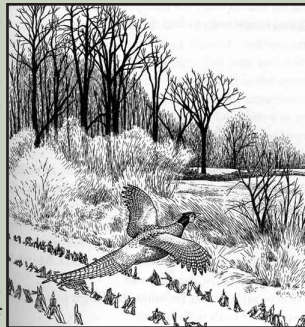
dollar. Hunting ducks on Sunday and buying your pork chops at Wal-Mart on Monday are two acts doomed to contradiction—kind of like driving a Hummer to a meeting on global warming. — **Oct. 31, 2008**

Is the Customer Always Right?

Recent charges that the MPCA has been giving proposers of an Olmsted County ethanol plant most favored customer status need to be taken seriously: putting up a facility that will pump millions of gallons of water out of karst aquifers is no laughing matter. And it's not just the direct environmental impacts of this facility that warrant scrutiny. One indirect impact of a giant ethanol plant in the region—more corn on the landscape—is of particular concern at a time when corn fertilizer pollution is already a major problem in the region. — **Nov. 6, 2008**

Gutting Green Acres

On a philosophical level, the remodeled Green Acres program sends the message that conservation acres are not a "productive" part of society. That's an archaic view that ignores all the ecological services provided by odd, "wild" parcels here and there, as well as the economic activity produced on "non-traditional" ag acres like woodlots (a lot of valuable hardwoods are harvested and sold off of southeast Minnesota woodlots, for example). — **Nov. 14, 2008**



EQIPing Factory Farms With Your Taxes

This isn't just about a direct subsidization of a type of agriculture that has been passed off as more "efficient" than sustainable, family-farm based food production. This is also about sending a certain message to farmers and the general public. Take note: the government prefers the industrial model, and so it's going to use public funds to support it, even when it's been proven to be a drag on societal good. This is similar to the message the Minnesota Department of Agriculture is sending farmers via its biased application process for the Livestock Investment Grants Program. — **Dec. 8, 2008**

Atrazine's Ace in the Hole

...CropLife, a lobbying group for chemical companies, recently pushed for an amendment to the 2008 Farm Bill that would have prevented conservation money from going to state programs that help farmers transition from atrazine to a less toxic herbicide. Such programs would have been considered "discriminatory" against atrazine, according to the proposed legislation. Taken to its extreme, federal conservation money would have been denied to programs that promote organic production systems, for example. The amendment eventually failed, but the fact that it got any traction in Congress at all is frightening, to say the least. — **Dec. 12, 2008**

Myth Buster Box

An ongoing series on ag myths & ways of deflating them

→ Myth:

Organic and sustainable farming systems are a luxury only well-fed countries like the U.S. can afford.

→ Fact:

It's long been argued by the conventional agriculture community that food production systems that rely on organic methods and sustainable, low-input techniques are only viable in nations where there are not large numbers of starving people. This argument is based on the assumption that organic/sustainable systems are inherently low-yielding. This belief has gained even more traction in recent years as it's become clear we have more chronically hungry people than ever in the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the number of hungry people has increased by 20 percent since 1990, according to the United Nations. Recent food riots in places like Haiti and Egypt provided a glimpse at how dire the situation could become as the world population continues to grow.

The theory is that since chemical- and energy-intensive agriculture has given us immense yield increases in places like the U.S., the only way to fill all those hungry bellies in impoverished countries is to redouble efforts to industrialize agriculture. In fact, in places such as much of Africa, industrialized agriculture is a humanitarian necessity, goes this argument. Promoters of large-scale industrialization of agriculture say organic food is a "lifestyle choice" for communities that have surplus food, and that only pesticides and genetically modified organisms can save starving people in developing countries.

But a growing body of evidence is

showing that the current problems with food insecurity are proof that a total reliance on conventional production systems will not fulfill the needs of Africa. This is particularly true when maximum productivity of a few export crops is emphasized. Recent studies have shown that in fact organic and sustainable farming systems are not as much of a luxury as some would have us think. In fact, such natural systems may be the only hope for attaining food security in places like Africa, concludes a recent report put out by the United Nations.

"Organic and near-organic agricultural methods and technologies are ideally suited for many poor, marginalized smallholder farmers in Africa, as they require minimal or no external inputs, use locally and naturally available materials to produce high-quality products, and encourage a whole systemic approach to farming that is more diverse and resistant to stress," concludes the report.

The report is based on an extensive analysis of 286 projects covering tens of millions of acres in 57 countries. These projects found that in general sustainable systems increased per-acre productivity of food crops in Africa. In fact, when sustainable agricultural practices covering a variety of systems and crops were adopted, average crops yields increased by 79 percent, according to the UN. In one study, crop yields in East Africa rose on average of 128 percent under organic and near-organic systems.

The UN report credits organic and sustainable systems for helping make local farm operations more resilient in the face of disease and weather problems, while reducing the cost of purchasing expensive fertilizer and pesticides.

This could be good news for small farmers in developing countries, who make up the

majority of the chronically hungry in the world. But the UN report says sustainable farming systems are not only good for subsistence producers who are only raising enough to feed their own families. The growing demand for food produced under organic and other sustainable systems opens up new, lucrative markets for these farmers, offering hope for pulling them out of poverty.

Interestingly, one major impediment to adopting more sustainable (and more management/information intensive) farming systems in the developing world is lack of good information and research, according to UN investigators. This is also often cited as a major roadblock to widespread adoption of such systems in places like the U.S. Decades of university and government agency focus on high-input conventional systems has left little room for alternatives, whether you're in Iowa or Ethiopia.

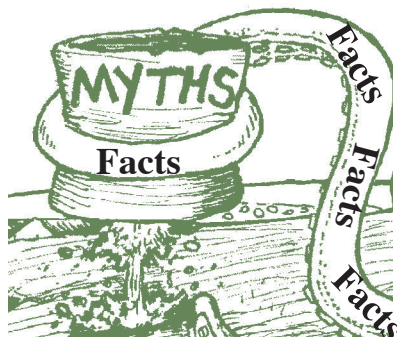
"...this calls for a shift of emphasis in research and science budgets, and for the creation of better linkages between scientists, agricultural training and extension providers and farmers," says the UN report.

Sound familiar?

→ More information:

- To read the UN report, *Organic Agriculture and Food Security in Africa*, see www.unep.ch/etb/publications/insideCBTF_OA_2008.pdf.

- To read the article, "Organic farming 'could feed Africa'," see www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/organic-farming-could-feed-africa-968641.html.



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

Westra. The paper is based on work LSP and others have done recently on how agricultural systems based on perennial plants can improve water quality, among other things.

A copy of *Farming with Grass* can be ordered at www.swcs.org/en/publications/farming_with_grass. SWCS can also be contacted at 515-

289-2331. For more information on LSP's research related to perennial plant systems and multifunctional agriculture, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_mba.html. □

Twin Cities LSP open house March 6

Now that the Land Stewardship Project has settled into its new Twin Cities digs, we'd like to invite our members and friends to an open house celebration Friday, March 6, from 4 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The office is at 821 E. 35th St., Minneapolis, MN 55408. It houses LSP's administrative office, Policy and Organizing Program, Twin Cities elements of its Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program, and its communications operation.

The open house will be a great opportunity to get acquainted with LSP's new Twin Cities office and its staff while enjoying light refreshments. LSP's Twin Cities office will also host a summer open house/cookout later in the year.

For more information, call 612-722-6377 or e-mail lsplib@landstewardshipproject.org. □

LSP contributes to grass publication

Several people with connections to the Land Stewardship Project recently contributed a chapter to a special Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) publication on the role grass-based agriculture plays in improving the landscape. *Farming with Grass: Achieving Sustainable Mixed Agricultural Landscapes in Grassland Environments* is based on papers presented at the "Farming with Grass" conference, held in October.

The chapter, "Multifunctional Grass Farming: Science and Policy Considerations," was written by, among others, LSP Executive Director George Boody and LSP staff member Caroline van Schaik, as well as LSP Board members Dennis Johnson and Bruce Vondracek. Other co-authors were Prasanna Gowda, Patrick Welle and John

LSP 1 of 100 Reasons

The Land Stewardship Project has been picked by *Twin Cities Metro* magazine as one of the "100 Reasons to Love the Twin Cities."

The magazine lauded LSP's efforts to "create positive change in our food and agriculture systems." In particular, *Metro* (www.metromag.com) highlighted LSP's efforts to connect farmers and consumers through our annual *Twin Cities Community Supported Agriculture Directory* (see page 23) and the Community Food and Farm Festival, which LSP co-sponsors each year (see below). □

Food & Farm Fest May 2-3 in Saint Paul

The Land Stewardship Project is helping put on the 2009 Community Food and Farm Festival, which will be May 2-3 at the Grandstand of the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in Saint Paul. As in past years, the Festival will be held as part of the Living Green Expo (www.livinggreen.org).

This is a great opportunity for consumers to meet with farmers who are direct-marketing sustainably produced food.

If you are a farmer who would like a booth at the Festival, contact LSP at 612-722-6377. More information on the Community Food and Farm Festival is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/cfff/cfff.html.

Chris James of Fresh Earth Farms talked about Community Supported Agriculture with interested eaters during a recent Community Food and Farm Festival. (LSP photo)



O'Neil receives Binger Award

Land Stewardship Project member and former staffer **Steve O'Neil** has been awarded a 2008 Virginia McKnight Binger Award in Human Service. The \$10,000 award honors Minnesota residents who give their time to improve the lives of people in their communities.

O'Neil has worked for social justice in Duluth, Minn., for almost two decades. The community organizer has co-founded two local nonprofits: Loaves and Fishes and Northern Communities Land Trust. These organizations provide support to homeless and low-income families and individuals.

Since 1985, the Binger Award has been given out annually to recognize Minnesotans who demonstrate the difference one person can make in helping others. "Steve embraces community engagement as a way to carry grassroots advocacy to action," stated a McKnight Foundation press release announcing the award.

O'Neil began working for LSP when the organization was launched in 1982 and organized some of the organization's first stewardship meetings in southeast Minnesota. He worked as an LSP organizer until 1992. □



Steve O'Neil

Lesnar & Claassen serve LSP internships

Sarah Lesnar and **Sarah Claassen** are serving internships with the Land Stewardship Project this winter.



Sarah Lesnar

Lesnar grew up in the southeast Minnesota community of Spring Grove. In December, she received a degree in environmental science from the University of Minnesota. Lesnar is interested

in working with sustainable agriculture and local foods efforts. She wants to pursue a career in the type of food security work that makes local foods more available.

While at LSP, Lesnar coordinated LSP's Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol on Feb. 17. She can be contacted at slesnar@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377.

Claassen is serving an internship with LSP through the Organizing Apprenticeship Program (OAP). OAP (www.oaproject.org) works to advance racial, cultural, social and economic justice in Minnesota through organizer and leadership training, policy research and strategic convening work. It has a long-standing relationship with LSP.

Claassen has a bachelor's degree in environmental studies from Macalester College and has worked with LSP's Policy and Organizing program in the past. She is currently working on urban food systems and social justice in the Twin Cities area. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or sarahc@landstewardshipproject.org. □



Sarah Claassen

LSP farmers honored for conservation work

Five farmers with Land Stewardship Project connections were recently honored for their stewardship work by the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD).

Vance and Bonnie Haugen were given the 2008 MASWCD Education Award during the group's annual convention in December. Bonnie is a member of LSP's Board of Directors and she and Vance farm near Canton, in southeast Minnesota. They use managed rotational grazing to produce milk on a former crop farm that had experienced high levels of erosion in the past. The Haugens worked over the years to make a connection between sustainable food production, soil quality, clean water and good wildlife habitat. Their stewardship farming methods qualified them for the highest tier of the Conservation Security Program (recently renamed the Conservation Stewardship Program) and they've worked with local conservation officials to educate the public about the role stewardship farming can play in improving the environment.

The Haugens have hosted numerous tours, made themselves available for media



Vance & Bonnie Haugen

interviews and mentored beginning farmers over the years. Bonnie is a regular contributor to *Graze* magazine.

Paul and Candy Sobocinski were named Outstanding Conservationists of the Year by the Redwood County SWCD. Paul is an LSP Policy organizer and he and Candy farm near Wabasso, in southwest Minnesota. Over the years they have converted their conventional hog operation into a sustainable system that utilizes deep-straw bedding and pasture farrowing. The Sobocinskis also utilize managed rotational grazing for their cattle herd and diverse crop rotations to protect the soil.

The have planted trees as well as prairie grass on their farm to provide wildlife habitat and protection from erosion. Paul has long been active in promoting sustainable farming practices through articles, commentaries and testimony before the Minnesota Legislature as well as Congressional committees.



Paul Sobocinski

LSP member **Tony Thompson** was named Outstanding Conservationist by the Cottonwood SWCD; he was also a finalist for the statewide Outstanding Conservationist award. Thompson raises corn and soybeans using conservation tillage near Windom, in southwest Minnesota. He has worked over the years to restore native prairie and wetlands on his family's land, and has hosted numerous educational events over the years. His Willow Lake Farm has hosted the "Agro-Ecology Summit" for the past nine years, where policy and innovations related to stewardship farming are discussed. □



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LSP News

Field day highlights farming, food & feathers

The relationship between local food and wildlife habitat was showcased by Land Stewardship Project members Jon and Lori Peterson when they hosted a tour of their southeast Minnesota farm in November.

The tour was led by wildlife experts Richie Swanson and Ed Legace. Swanson studies and writes extensively about wild bird populations in the upper Mississippi River watershed, and Legace is a Winona District Park Ranger with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Petersons have a pastured certified organic milking herd, a beef cow herd and a flock of sheep. They sell their milk through Organic Valley Co-op.

The event was co-sponsored by LSP and Bluff Country Co-op in Winona. For more information on LSP's work to connect local food systems and environmental sustainability, contact Caroline van Schaik in our Lewiston office at caroline@landstewardshipproject.org or 507-523-3366.

For a list of tips developed by bird expert Melissa Driscoll on how to provide habitat for grassland birds on livestock operations, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pr/04/newsr_040618.html. □



During the tour, wildlife expert Richie Swanson described how people's food choices affect birds and the health of the land in general. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)



The Petersons raise cattle and sheep on grass. (photo by Caroline van Schaik)

A new, user-friendly LSP *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 and activists who are working to create a more sustainable food and farming system. We now have over 60 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**. □

‘Pricing & Profits’

Farmer and business consultant Jim Munsch (*standing*) led a Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings financial short course in December.

The course, “Pricing and Profits: Making the Right Financial Decisions for Your Farm,” helped participants examine the financial aspects of their farming operations. Topics included: deciding what to sell; defining costs of production; identifying costs, sales and marketing; determining profit/loss on each product; and understanding how to make money.

The course was offered at a reduced rate through a partnership with the USDA’s Risk Management Agency and Farm Service Agency, as well as the University of Minnesota’s Experiment in Rural Cooperation.

For more information, contact LSP’s Parker Forsell at 507-523-3366 or parker@landstewardshipproject.org. (*photo by Caroline van Schaik*)



Alternative dairy panel

The Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings Program brought together three certified organic milk producers in December for a special panel discussion on alternative dairy farming.

The panel, which took place in the central Minnesota community of Paynesville, was convened because several Farm Beginnings participants, as well as other farmers in the area, have recently shown an interest in dairying alternatives.

Participating panelists were (*pictured below, left to right*) Hans Kroll, Karen Haverinen and Joe Molitor. The farmers represented a range in sizes and experience.

Kroll has 33 cows, Haverinen 71 and Molitor around 300. Haverinen, a Farm Beginnings graduate, is in her first year of dairy farming, while Kroll and Molitor have several decades of farming under their belts. Kroll is bringing his daughter and son-in-law into his operation, and has recently remodeled



his milking parlor on a tight budget by doing much of the labor himself and utilizing secondhand materials.

Molitor has struggled with drought the past few years and his family recently installed irrigation for their pastures. Haverinen has found that despite her youth, the fact that organic milk production cash flows well made her operation attractive to lenders.

All three farmers emphasized that no matter the size or make-up of an operation, setting goals and monitoring progress towards those goals is important.

“You have to set the goals, but then you have to advance toward those goals,” said Molitor.

For more information, contact LSP’s Nick Olson at 320-269-2105 or nicko@landstewardshipproject.org. For more on Karen Haverinen and Farm Beginnings, see page 18. (*LSP photos*)

2009 MN Legislative preview

Fixing Green Acres, protecting sustainable/organic ag programs & defending local control LSP priorities this session

By Bobby King

Repealing the changes made to the Green Acres program that discourage stewardship and the preservation of farmland is at the top of the Land Stewardship Project's list of priorities for the 2009 session of the Minnesota Legislature.

Last-minute changes made to the farmland preservation program during the 2008 legislative session have threatened environmentally sensitive acres across Minnesota (see "Gutting Green Acres," starting on page 11). LSP wants a repeal early in the legislative session so that farmers will not be penalized by the poorly designed changes. After the repeal, there should be public hearings that allow for ample input from farmers. This means rural hearings in areas where Green Acres is heavily used.

The changes to Green Acres last session were made with almost no public input. When policy at the Legislature is made without public input, not surprisingly, it often does not serve the public interest. The citizens of Minnesota deserve a transparent process that allows for public scrutiny and accountability. This did not happen with the changes to Green Acres and the Legislature needs to rectify this mistake.

LSP members are encouraged to express

Tracking the session

To get information on the latest developments in the 2009 Minnesota Legislative session, check LSP's State Policy web page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_state_policy.html. For details on how to help influence policy at the statehouse, contact LSP organizer Bobby King at 612-722-6377 or Paul Sobocinski at 507-342-2323.

their concerns to legislators about the closed door tactics used to make the Green Acres changes and to ask them to support a repeal.

Budget shortfall

Our state is facing a financial crisis with a projected \$4.8 billion deficit. There will inevitably be cuts made to programs that are important to many Minnesotans' quality of life. The debate over spending needs to be public and allow for meaningful public input. Unfortunately, more and more legislation is being passed the way the modifications to Green Acres were—quietly, late in the session during conference committee meetings and with little public input. This

type of legislating favors corporate interests, not the public interest.

With this looming budget deficit of \$4.8 billion, maintaining the already meager funding for sustainable and organic initiatives will be tough but critical. The Energy and Sustainable Ag Grant Program (ESAP) receives \$160,000 annually, providing grants for sustainable and organic farmers to conduct on-farm demonstration projects and research. The results are then published annually in the *Greenbook*. This program creates innovative farmer-driven solutions and facilitates farmer-to-farmer education. Minnesota's Organic cost share program is funded at \$100,000 per year. Both of these programs create economic opportunity in Minnesota.

Local control

And of course, LSP will be vigilant in protecting local control and township rights. Over the past decade, LSP has successfully preserved the right of townships and counties to put restrictions on factory farms. Other states—Iowa, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania—have seen these rights weakened, but in Minnesota they have remained strong. Over the years, LSP has organized over a thousand township officers, farmers and rural residents to stand up for these rights.

Maintaining these rights by encouraging their use and articulating their value is important, ongoing work. It is a key way for rural citizens to stand up to corporate abuse and to enact local ordinances that represent their desire for social justice in their community. □

Bobby King is an LSP Policy Program organizer. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

LSP survey: pesticide maker not trusted

By Bobby King

In September the Land Stewardship Project mailed a letter and survey to our members to gather information on their feelings/experiences related to the pesticide atrazine and Syngenta, which is the primary manufacturer of atrazine. As we've reported in past issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter*, atrazine is a common weed killer that has become highly controversial in recent years because of concerns over its effect on human and environmental health. The pesticide is also controversial because of the often heavy-handed tactics Syngenta and its government allies have taken to

squelch research related to its impacts. (For more information, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/atrazine_whistleblower.pdf.)

We received 365 responses to our survey, which was a high response rate of just over 10 percent. Based on the responses, two obvious conclusions can be drawn: 1) there is strong support for LSP moving forward on work related to pesticide education, research and regulation; 2) LSP members do not trust Syngenta to do the right thing.

Farmers made up 170 of the responses. One of the most interesting results was the strong response to the question of whether or not Syngenta would voluntarily stop production of atrazine if it proved to be

harmful to the environment or human health. The overwhelming answer was "No." Many respondents went on to elaborate with comments such as, "Do chickens have lips?" There were dozens of comments along the lines of this response: "\$ drives corporations, not concern for people."

Seventeen farmers and 21 non-farmers answered "Yes" to the question about whether Syngenta would voluntarily stop production of atrazine. Even among farmers that use chemicals, the "Yes" rate was only 18 percent. The lowest "Yes" rate (5 percent) was from farmers who no longer use

Atrazine, see page 11...

chemicals. It is clear that most LSP members—including LSP farmer-members—do not believe that Syngenta can be relied on to supply accurate information about its product or to put ethics before profits.

So what's next? Many of you requested

more information about Syngenta and atrazine, as well as information about alternatives to atrazine. Look for that in the mail in the next few weeks. Also, LSP is planning meetings on the issue to engage members directly and to get more input. We are planning for one in southeast Minnesota and one in the southwestern part of the state. Finally, we are developing fact sheets on atrazine

and alternatives to its use. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* and the *LIVE-WIRE* for more information on our atrazine work. If you have ideas or input you want to share, contact me at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Bobby King is an LSP Policy organizer.

The gutting of Green Acres

Farmer Mike Gilles has a succinct way of describing what a mess the 2008 Minnesota Legislature made of the popular Green Acres program: "Pretty much it's a slap in the face to anyone who is conservation-minded." It's a slap that could leave bruises on the state's landscape for decades to come.

Changes to Green Acres were passed toward the end of the 2008 legislative session as part of an omnibus tax bill. Almost no public input was included in the formulation of what has turned out to be some pretty major shifts in the implementation of this program. In one fell swoop lawmakers made wetlands, sloughs, woodlands, Conservation Reserve Program acres and other "non-productive" natural treasures ineligible for new enrollment in Green Acres as of May 1 of 2008. That means these areas can be taxed at the same levels as prime development acres. And in some cases, Green Acres now more than doubles the payback period on deferred taxes, a potentially significant disincentive for anyone considering enrolling, or re-enrolling, in the program.

Green Acres' track record

Green Acres, known officially as the Minnesota Agricultural Property Tax Law, was created by the Legislature in 1967 in an effort to equalize taxes on farmland. It's one way for farmers living in the midst of rapid, non-ag development to not be priced out of the region by property taxes that have nothing to do with the price of corn, beef or milk. The program allows those farmers to have their land's value based on its agricultural productivity, rather than how much it would fetch from the developer of a subdivision or shopping mall.

This can result in a significant reduction in taxes. Green Acres, combined with the Metropolitan Ag Preserves Act for the seven-county metro area and the Agricultural Land Preservation Program for greater Minnesota, reduced property taxes for enrolled landowners by \$40 million in 2007 alone, according to the Legislative Auditor.

Minnesota has 29.5 million acres of land classified as agricultural, which is 58 percent of the state's total land area. About 13 percent of that farmland is enrolled in Green Acres. For metro-area counties, Green Acres has been an invaluable tool for making sure farmers are paying taxes at levels similar to their counterparts in, for example, southwest Minnesota. In the Twin Cities area, the program in 2007 substituted an average agricultural use value of \$3,600 per acre for the average estimated market value of \$13,800.

Wright County, for example, has always faced significant development pressure because of its location along the I-94 corridor, and in recent years has consistently been among the top three Minnesota counties for growth and development. With its combination of crop acres, lakes, wetlands, woodlots and subdivisions, it's no surprise Green Acres is used on more than half of the parcels in the county. Wright County assessor Greg Kramber says that in the fast-growing Monticello area tillable land is valued at \$21,000 per acre. Green Acres allows farmers there to pay taxes based on an agricultural value of \$2,145 per acre, a significant savings.

"It's been a big plus," Kramber says. "I know without Green Acres a lot of those

properties would have been forced to sell."

'Non-productive' natural habitat

But major changes have been made, changes that are forcing farmers to make some significant land use decisions. Owners with Green Acres property that had "non-productive" acres had to choose by the end of 2008 whether to have those acres grandfathered into the program for future years, or to withdraw all or some of the non-productive acres.

Some landowners may have had a major incentive to pull those woodlots, sloughs and meadows out of the program, thanks to another change the Legislature made to Green Acres. Originally, when land enrolled in Green Acres was transferred or subdivided, three years worth of back taxes were owed. But under the new Green Acres program, the payback period on back taxes has been increased to seven years for non-productive acres that are sold, transferred or subdivided after Jan. 2, 2009. For all other property, the eligible payback period remains at three years.

These changes not only upset a lot of conservation strategies, but also estate plans that are often years in the making. What happens if you pass on the farm to your children? Would a transfer—not a sale—of land trigger a payback of back taxes on so-called non-productive land? If so, that would mean a parent transferring a farm to a son or daughter may have to pay taxes even though they have no money coming in from the transfer.

What about rough pastures that could possibly be grazed? What's the difference between "productive" and "non-productive?"

"A lot of unanswered questions are floating around and not much time was given to answer them," says Bobby King, an LSP Policy Program organizer. "Many years worth of stewardship and estate planning is being undermined here."

Problems with Green Acres?

Do you have your own story about how the changes to Green Acres are affecting you? During the 2009 session of the Minnesota Legislature, the Land Stewardship Project will work to repeal the poorly thought out changes made to the Green Acres program. If you are being affected by the proposed changes, we want to hear from you. These stories are important to making the case for why a quick repeal is necessary.

To share your stories, contact LSP's Call Bobby King at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.

Green Acres, see page 12...

...Green Acres, from page 11

Changing the rules of the game

But one thing is clear: many farmers feel they've been let down by the state.

"We lived up to our end of the agreement and then they changed the rules," says Mike Gilles, who farms in Winona County.

Stephen Hacken is the Winona County assessor and president of the Minnesota Association of Assessing Officers. He says in his three decades of assessing property, this is the most significant curve ball he's seen thrown at farmers when it comes to Green Acres.

"It's like saying changes have been made to the fish after you've gutted and cleaned it," he quipped.



The farm of Mike and Joan Gilles has been enrolled in Green Acres since the mid-1990s. "It's one thing if they change the program, but then to make you pay a penalty based on what you did under the old program is really frustrating," says Joan. (photo by Doug Nopar)

Hacken says the two areas that have particularly gotten nailed by the changes are counties around the Twin Cities and in the southeast corner of the state. Old-fashioned sprawl is pushing land prices up in the Twin Cities region. But in places like Winona and Houston counties in southeast Minnesota, a different kind of non-ag development is pumping up prices: people from the Twin Cities and even as far away as Chicago are buying up land for their own private hunting preserves or slices of paradise.

"They are paying prices farmers couldn't afford in a thousand years," says Hacken.

As a result, in Winona County nearly 3,000 parcels, or two-thirds of the county, are enrolled in Green Acres. Forty-eight percent of Winona County's rural land is not tillable, which means a lot of non-productive land in the area could no longer be eligible for the program, or at least exposed to a seven-year tax payback penalty.

The changes have been a bureaucratic nightmare for counties. Letters have been sent out to all Green Acres enrollees, and because information on who has land in federal programs such as CRP is not always public, separate surveys are being done to ferret out that information. Thousands of dollars will have to be spent on new software in many counties at a time when many can barely afford to keep the roads graveled.

"It kind of crippled us for awhile," says Kramber, the Wright County assessor, noting that for a time 200 landowners a day were coming into his office to pepper him with questions about the Green Acres changes.

A closed legislative process

How did this come to be?

In February 2008, the Office of the Legislative Auditor issued a report on Green Acres that cited several problems with the program. Among other things, the Legislative Auditor concluded that Green Acres was not being uniformly implemented in all

counties (in some cases, it's not offered to landowners who are eligible, according to the report). In addition, the Auditor found that there were cases where landowners were using the program to avoid paying higher taxes until they could cash-out by selling the land for development.

These are serious issues that need to be dealt with, says LSP's King. Unfortunately, the solution was executed without opportunity for meaningful public input or by following the standard legislative committee process. This legislation never received a hearing in any agricultural or environmental committee, even though it will have profound impacts in both these areas. Instead it was rolled into a large omnibus tax bill, says King. Senator Rod Skoe (DFL-Clearbrook) and Rep. Lyle Koenen (DFL-Clara City) authored the bills and were on the conference committee that negotiated the tax bill.

The Land Stewardship Project testified against the changes when they were discussed before the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Committee (the only hearing the Green Acres revisions were given), but overall there was little opportunity to fix or stop the legislation, says King.

"You get this impression from legislators that they didn't even know what was in the bill," says Winona County's Hacken. A state legislative analyst admitted at a southeast Minnesota meeting in October that the full ramifications of the changes had not been vetted, according to the *Winona Daily News*.

This is a prime example of what happens when legislation is passed without being exposed to broad input and the standard legislative committee process, says King. And unfortunately, this legislation is affecting thousands of people—and thousands of acres of land, while placing a serious and undue hardship on many of our state's farmers, he says.

It appears that no special interest group was pushing for these changes, and everyone familiar with the program seems to have been caught off guard by where Green Acres has ended up.

"We knew they were talking about Green Acres, but this whole issue of productive versus non-productive acres seemed to come out of nowhere," says Hacken. "The Auditor's report seems to be more interested in consistency. Well, they've consistently removed non-productive farmland from eligibility."

And that could literally change the face of the landscape. In Wright County, which is second only to Stearns County in the number of Green Acres enrollees, roughly

Green Acres, see page 13...

40 percent of the land currently enrolled would no longer qualify under the new rules, according to Kramber.

"For me, I'm under the true belief that the whole farm is in fact of an economic unit, and you don't go separating productive and unproductive and causing us \$100,000 in paperwork," he says.

Often enrollment in a conservation program such as CRP or Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) constitutes the best agricultural use of the land, particularly if it is part of a larger acreage, says King. Adding language that prohibits this land from eligibility creates a serious burden for any responsible landowner who ordinarily and voluntarily will keep these sensitive lands in a lower intensity use.

"It is essentially punishing those that are and have been doing the right thing for the resource," says King.

Punished for doing the right thing

Mike and Joan Gilles are examples of farmers who have been doing the right thing. When they bought their Winona County farm in 1996, the county assessor recommended they enroll in Green Acres. The program has been a good fit for the Gilles farm, which produces milk with a 100-cow herd on rotationally grazed pastures. The whole operation is 230 acres, and only about 100 of that is tillable. The farmstead makes up about five acres; the rest of the untilled land is hardwood timber, rough pasture and open spaces the family has converted to native prairie. Green Acres has saved them a lot of property tax money over the years. Mike was reminded of that recently when they acquired 10 more acres of rough pasture—it was over three times the per-acre price they paid for the rest of the farm in 1996.

Mike Gilles finds it particularly galling that the Department of Revenue now considers farm timber pretty much worthless. In recent years, the Department of Natural Resources has put a lot of effort into convincing landowners like Gilles that woodlots are a productive part of the farm—they can produce valuable timber as well as firewood and recreational opportunities, not to mention ecological services such as reducing runoff. Gilles has been urging his neighbors not to graze their woodlands for fear of damaging the trees.

"Now the Revenue Department is saying, no, it's not productive land," Gilles says. "I'd be a fool to tell my neighbors now not to graze their woodlands because that means they're going to pay higher taxes. If I were smart, I'd get the bulldozer and take out the trees and put it in pasture. And that's going

to be the attitude of a lot of the farmers."

Gilles and Hacken also see as a real face-slapper the extension of the tax period payback from three to seven years for non-productive land. Hacken offers up an example of 200 acres of woods that through Green Acres was receiving a break on the tax assessment. In this particular case, if the landowner is required to pay back the amount of taxes that were deferred over a seven-year period, that could add up to as much as \$23,000 in penalties.

"That's a lot of money," says Hacken.

"It's possible some farms could pay back more than they benefited from Green Acres," says Wright County's Kramber.

"A farmer like Mike Gilles is not receiving a higher price for milk than he was a year ago, so why should he have to pay higher taxes on the land?" LSP's King asks.

If farmers know that seven years worth of back taxes are owed upon selling their land someday, they are more likely to sell it to the highest bidder, rather than a beginning farmer or neighbor. In many cases, the potential buyer with the deepest pockets is going to be a developer.

Such a shift will have a major impact on small- and medium-sized family farms that have a diverse mix of productive and non-productive acres—the kind of mix that creates edges and wild corners—a dream come true for hunters, birders, wildlife biologists and even watershed conservationists (see page 24). Like many such farmers, Mike Gilles does not separate out his productive and non-productive acres with clear lines of delineation. He sees it all as part of a whole, no matter what the taxman says.

"I keep these natural areas because it's the right thing to do," he says.

Indeed, the natural areas found on the Gilles farm have become a public good in the community. The family has built trails through their woods and meadows and they've created a hiking club for students at the nearby Ridgeway Community School. An area nature center has used the land for various activities, including a night-time owl watch this winter.

Gilles concedes there is a problem even in his area of wealthy landowners who aren't farmers using Green Acres as a way to reduce their tax bill. He agrees that better lines of eligibility need to be drawn up for Green Acres to make sure it's not being abused, but these recent changes were "a step backward that made the problem worse."

Not to worry: Mike and Joan Gilles aren't plowing up their wild acres yet—they love their woods and prairie meadows too much to do that. And Mike said many of his neighbors enrolled in Green Acres feel the same way and are hoping the Legislature "wises

up" during the 2009 session and fixes things. But some county assessors express concerns that landowners who recently acquired a farm and who do not have an emotional attachment to that small woodlot or slough in the back forty may not be so patient, and may decide to haul out the blade and plow to make natural areas into crop fields that can qualify for lower taxes with a minimal payback penalty.

Fixing Green Acres

Landowners enrolled in Green Acres were supposed to contact their county assessor's office before Jan. 2 and fill out a Green Acres Commitment Form outlining their choice to make no changes or expressing the intent to withdraw all program acres, withdraw some non-productive acres, or withdraw all non-productive acres.

This gets on the record a landowner's intentions as far as future enrollment in the program. Filling out such a form doesn't mean plans are written in stone. Statements on any tax payback amounts owed will be sent to Green Acres enrollees during the summer of 2009. Following this notification, landowners must make a final determination as to whether they wish to formally withdraw any part of their land from Green Acres. Any deferred taxes are not owed until November 2009.

King says it's critical for landowners to contact their Senators and Representatives and tell them to repeal the 2008 changes and begin the orderly process of reviewing the Green Acres program in a way that includes public input. LSP will be working on fixing Green Acres during the 2009 Legislative session (see page 10).

Citizens across the state have already been showing up en masse at meetings to complain about the changes, and lawmakers are getting an earful from farmers, conservationists and assessors. In Sherburne County alone, 450 people turned up at a meeting on Green Acres. In January, farmers and assessors testified about the problems created by the Green Acres changes during a hearing of the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division Committee. As the *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press, no action had been taken by the Legislature in regards to Green Acres.

"Before the fall election, some legislators pledged to fix the Green Acres mess. Let's make sure those promises weren't just made in the heat of battle to get a few rural votes," says King.

Mike Gilles has another piece of advice for lawmakers: "When fixing things, don't make it worse." □

New report exposes subsidies to industrial ag

LSP & other farm groups demand EQIP reforms

A report released in December exposes how industrial hog and dairy operations are subsidized through the federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The report, *Industrial Livestock at the Taxpayer Trough*, estimates that between 2003 and 2007, roughly 1,000 industrial hog and dairy operations captured at least \$35 million per year in taxpayer support through EQIP. The report was developed for the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment (CFFE), a coalition of family farm organizations to which the Land Stewardship Project belongs. CFFE representatives say the report provides further evidence that the factory farm industry is reliant on taxpayer funding.

"This report demonstrates what family farmers have known for years—this corporate-controlled, industrial model of livestock production can't survive without taxpayer support," says Rhonda Perry, a livestock farmer and member of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center. "Taxpayers should not have to foot the bill for this corporate welfare that is fueling the industrialization of the livestock industry at the expense of family farmers, rural communities and the environment."

EQIP was established in the 1996 Farm Bill as a cost-share program targeted at family farmers to help them incorporate conservation practices into their farming operations. However, the 2002 Farm Bill opened the program to factory farms, allowing them to use EQIP funds to help expand their operations to the tune of \$450,000 over five years.

"I have used the EQIP program and found it to be valuable," says Jon Peterson, an LSP member and dairy farmer from Peterson,

Minn. "I believe the focus has shifted from helping small- to mid-sized operations like mine find cost-effective solutions to environmental concerns. It now seems to be a production subsidy to help large confinement operations expand. It is as if the bigger the pollution risk an applicant can create, the greater his chances of getting funding."

In addition to highlighting factory farming's excessive use of EQIP funds, the report also points to a lack of disclosure within the taxpayer-funded program. A provision in the 2002 Farm Bill prohibits the USDA from releasing specific information about how participants in these taxpayer-funded programs are using the money.

"That means that the public can't evaluate whether program funds are being used effectively and whether they result in real environmental benefits," says Elanor Starmer, the author of the report. "There is no reason to restrict public access to conservation payment information when we can access information on other programs, such as commodity payments. As it stands, EQIP suffers from an unacceptable lack of accountability."

At the insistence of family farm organizations nationwide, the 2008 Farm Bill lowered the amount of funding operations can receive through EQIP from \$450,000 to \$300,000 over the life of the Farm Bill.

CFFE is urging Congress and President Barack Obama to reform the program based on the report's recommendations:

→ EQIP should be structured to deliver the maximum amount of environmental performance for the least amount of taxpayer money. The Natural Resources Conservation

Report in the news

The CFFE report on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program made national news in January, including stories in the *Boston Globe* and the *Chicago Tribune*. It was also featured on *Market to Market*, Public Television's weekly agriculture program. To check out the media coverage, go to the **LSP in the News** page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-itn.html.

Service (NRCS) should return to prioritizing contracts based on cost-efficiency, not on the level of pollution generated by the operation.

→ The amount of funding available to an individual operator should be capped at \$150,000 per operation.

→ EQIP should not subsidize the construction or expansion of industrial livestock operations. USDA and Congress should prohibit EQIP funding for waste facilities on all new and expanding industrial livestock operations.

→ Taxpayers and policymakers deserve to know how EQIP funds are being used. Legislators should strike existing language prohibiting USDA from releasing detailed information on the use and amount of conservation program contracts.

→ Congress should appropriate money to the Natural Resources Conservation Service and instruct the agency to use that money to track by size category and amount of manure generated EQIP funding given to livestock operations.

"During his campaign, President Obama said conservation programs like EQIP should help family farmers use good environmental practices, not fund corporate expansion," says Vern Tigges, a member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement and a family farmer from Carroll, Iowa. "He needs to make this a priority and stop factory farms from abusing taxpayer-funded programs like EQIP."

CFFE is leading the fight against the corporate takeover of the hog industry and working for policies supporting independent family farmers. Besides LSP, CFFE members include Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement and the Missouri Rural Crisis Center. □

Industrial Livestock at the Taxpayer Trough is available on LSP's website at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/eqip_report_12-08.pdf. For more information, contact LSP Policy Program organizer Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.

One state's EQIP experience

Before the 2002 Farm Bill's privacy provision went into effect, the Land Stewardship Project successfully obtained a list of EQIP payments made for animal waste systems in Minnesota in 2002 and 2003. Here are a few of the facts gleaned from the 2003 data:

- The average individual payment for animal waste systems that year was \$47,202.

- In Becker County, one producer received \$285,500 to build a manure lagoon nearly 1 million cubic feet in size.

- In Goodhue County, a producer received \$138,802 to build a 143,000 cubic foot manure lagoon.

- In Swift County, an industrial operation received \$125,000 to fix its roof structure.

- In Wabasha County, three producers received a combined total of \$619,000 to build manure storage ponds and tanks totaling 1,120,000 cubic feet in size.

Beginning farmer nation

EDITOR' NOTE: Since the 2008 Farm Bill was finalized in June, the Land Stewardship Project has been working to make sure positive elements of the legislation are fully implemented. One initiative, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), has groups like LSP particularly excited. BFRDP is a precedent-setting attempt by the federal government to support community-based programs that conduct beginning farmer education, training and mentoring. LSP played a key role in making BFRDP a reality, and is now recognized as a leader in making sure it is implemented as effectively as possible. As part of that work, we are visiting with groups across the country that are interested in helping get more farmers started on the land. Since April, LSP Policy Program organizer Adam Warthesen has met with 16 organizations in 11 states. He's seen firsthand beginning farmer initiatives in New England, the West Coast, the South and the Pacific Northwest, as well as the Midwest. Warthesen recently talked to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about why this ground-work is important in developing a successful BFRDP, and what groups are looking for in the initiative once it's implemented.

LSL: Tell us about these meetings with beginning farmer groups.

Warthesen: Some groups have beginning farmer programs already going, and some are just thinking about launching a program. Most of them are community-based organizations. I've also been working with people within institutions like universities, but our major focus has been with community organizations. We're meeting with these groups to gather input on what they would like to see in a fully implemented BFRDP, and also to help them prepare for the application process. What do they need to get these programs off the ground and keep them viable, and how do those needs relate to the legislative intent of the BFRDP? LSP will then take this information to USDA officials in D.C. to communicate to them how this program can best serve the needs of organizations that are out there on the ground helping beginning farmers every day.

LSL: Why is LSP taking the lead on this?

Warthesen: We are in a unique place in that we have the practical experience of working with beginning farmers through our Farm Beginnings® program, but LSP also has real strengths in organizing, in advancing policy that is good for people and the land. We've been able to connect Farm Beginnings graduates and other farmers with key agricultural policy makers like Collin Peterson, Chair of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee, and Representative Tim Walz, who is a member of that committee. These and other lawmakers were able to see that there are a lot of people who want to get into farming, and there are ways to be successful at it. That sent an important message during the Farm Bill debate.

LSL: What are these other beginning farmer groups telling you?

Warthesen: The main thing we're hearing is there needs to be support for current, ongoing efforts. There are a lot of great



Last April, LSP's Adam Warthesen (right) visited farmers and staffers involved with the California FarmLink beginning farmer program. (photo by Karen Stettler)

things going on out there, a lot of groups with a proven track record, and there's no need to reinvent the wheel with a brand-new, top-down program. It's clear these groups are doing great work, but it's hard for them to plan for the future without resources.

Another thing we're hearing is that face-to-face interactions are key for beginning farmers. The more often you are interacting with beginning farmers directly through classes, mentorship and field days, the more successful the program. Internet learning and paper publications are great tools, but they can't replace that face-to-face contact and farmer-to-farmer networking found to be vital in many beginning farmer efforts.

LSL: Were you surprised at how many beginning farmer programs there are out there?

Warthesen: I wouldn't say I'm surprised at how many groups there are doing this. I will say the demand is higher than it's ever been because of the opportunities in agriculture. When LSP was working for passage of BFRDP in the Farm Bill, that was what we emphasized: there is opportunity in agriculture right now, in everything from local and regional food systems to organic farming to biofuel production. We need more farmers than ever to help take us into the next era of a more sustainable agriculture. And we need strong community-based organizations to help build the movement, too. There are a lot of groups doing great things with beginning farmers, and just as we collaborated on the Farm Bill to get the legislation funded and passed, I think we will need to continue to work together to make sure the program gets implemented effectively. Oftentimes there is a gap between passage and how measures actually work on the ground. LSP has made it a priority to make sure the usage of the new BFRDP is successful.

LSL: What is the status of BFRDP?

Warthesen: CSREES [the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service of USDA] officials say they will issue a request for applications early in 2009, so I'm hopeful they will award grants sometime in the summer. I have to compliment them—that's a good, quick timeline. We want to get this program going.

LSL: With all the talk of budget cutting, how secure is BFRDP's funding?

Warthesen: The program has dedicated funding of \$18 million this year, which is a pretty good chunk of dollars. Never before have federal resources offered such solid support for beginning farmers. No single grant can be over \$250,000 per year. And a grant can run as long as three years, so at a maximum a group could receive \$750,000 over three years.

There are threats to cut funding in fiscal year 2009. That's why it's so important to show the USDA and Congress that there is a demand for this kind of an initiative. A strong constituency will make it harder to justify gutting the program in the future. □

More on BFRDP

To learn more, go to LSP's Federal Farm Policy web page at www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_federal_policy.html and check out our Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program fact sheet. Warthesen can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.

LSP's Farm Beginnings in action

A major focus of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings® course is the classwork that takes place from October to March each fall/winter. During the class sessions, established farmers and other agriculture professionals lead seminars on business planning, goal setting, marketing and networking, among other things. The 2008-2009 session of LSP's Farm Beginnings course is being held in two Minnesota communities: Goodhue and Paynesville. Pictured on these two pages are highlights from those classes. For more on Farm Beginnings, including information on how to sign-up for the 2009-2010 class, see pages 18-19. □



Participants in the Paynesville class represent a range of ages, as well as work and educational backgrounds. (LSP photo)



During her presentations, farmer Audrey Arner guides participants through the principles of Holistic Management using real-world examples, farm maps and graphics. (LSP photo)

Presenter Terry VanDerPol, who runs a grass-based beef operation and directs LSP's Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program, runs through the importance of a good decisionmaking process with students. (LSP photo)



Formal and informal small group discussions among Farm Beginnings participants are key components of the course. (LSP photo)



Vegetable producer Greg Reynolds describes how he and his wife Mary conduct long-term planning for their farm. (LSP photo)



ABOVE: Carol Ford (*left*) leads a small group discussion on decisionmaking during a recent Farm Beginnings session. Ford, a Farm Beginnings graduate, operates a winter Community Supported Agriculture operation using an innovative, custom-designed greenhouse system. (*LSP photo*)



During class sessions, Farm Beginnings participants consider questions and scenarios put forth by presenters, and brainstorm ideas for making their farming dreams a reality. (*LSP photo*)

RIGHT: Vegetable farmer Chris Blanchard's presentations on business and financial planning are a key part of Farm Beginnings courses each year. To listen to a podcast featuring one of Blanchard's recent presentations, go to www.landstewardshipproject.org and click on Listen to the Latest Podcast under Take Action. It's *Ear to the Ground* episode 59. You can also read a recent Minneapolis *Star Tribune* article on Farm Beginnings that features Blanchard by going to www.landstewardshipproject.org/itn/08/081222.htm. (*LSP photo*)



University of Minnesota dairy scientist Dennis Johnson describes opportunities in organic dairy farming. (*LSP photo*)



Participants in the Goodhue Farm Beginnings session posed for a class photo at the beginning of the 2008-2009 course. (*photo by Karen Stettler*)

Farm Beginnings

Karen Haverinen

Her turn on the land

Even when one is born into farming, returning to the land isn't always easy. Karen Haverinen was the eighth out of nine children. Her parents were in their 40s when Karen came along, so by the time she was old enough to take an interest in farming, older brothers were already in position to take over the dairy operation, which has been in the family since 1898 near Menahga, in northwest Minnesota. So one could excuse her for being a little dazed at the fact that just four years after graduating from high school, Haverinen is on her own farm, producing certified organic milk from a growing cow herd.

"I didn't think this would all fall into place so fast," the soft-spoken 22-year-old says. "I thought if by age 25 I was doing this I'd be doing good."

It's a bit misleading to say things "fell into place" for Haverinen. She's spent the past few years learning as much as possible about producing milk in a way that's profitable and sustainable. She's also crunched a lot of numbers and talked to other farmers who are taking an innovative approach to milk production. After completing a two-year farm management program at Ridgewater College in Willmar, Minn., Haverinen enrolled in the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings® course.

Twice-a-month during the winter of 2006-2007, Haverinen made the drive to the central Minnesota community of Hutchinson to hear established farmers and other ag professionals share 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.

Despite her deep background in all aspects of farming—from the routine chores and daily management to finances and livestock breeding—Haverinen felt she needed some grounding in how to make a living on the land with few financial resources.

"Ridgewater is a great school but I



Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming

thought Farm Beginnings would give me more of the sustainable, low-input, direct-marketing angle on farming," she recalls. "In college pretty much everybody wanted to have a larger dairy and manage a lot of cows and have high production. It can be pretty intimidating to feel like you have to invest a lot of money and manage a large

herd to make it. With Farm Beginnings, I realized I didn't need to invest so much and be so big to make it."

Indeed, she did learn how other farmers were making a go of it utilizing low-cost innovative production and marketing systems such as managed rotational grazing. But Haverinen says Farm Beginnings taught her something else: how to set goals that are more specific than, "I want to farm," and put in place decisions that makes those goals possible. Haverinen wasn't a total newbie to goal-setting—she took a class on it in college ("I slept through that class," she admits sheepishly.) But what Farm Beginnings taught her was how to set goals that coincided with her own priorities in life. Haverinen figured out early on that she wanted to make a living farming on a smaller scale, without stepping on the hyper-speed treadmill of ever-increasing investments in inputs.

"You kind of realize why you do what you do. In Farm Beginnings you had to sit down and think about your values behind the goals," she says. "I got more comfortable realizing I wanted to be a smaller farmer."

It wasn't just the Farm Beginnings instructors that helped Haverinen realize

her goals of modest-sized farming weren't all wet. She actually drew a lot of inspiration from her fellow class participants, who wanted to farm so badly that they were willing to do things on as small a scale imaginable.

"That was inspiring," she says.

The months following her participation in Farm Beginnings were a whirlwind. Within a year's time she bought 30 cows and an 80-acre farm near her family's original farm, launching a certified organic operation that sells to Organic Valley. As of this winter her herd has grown to 71 cows and Haverinen is already wondering whether she will need more land in a year's time to handle her ever-growing operation (she rents an additional 34 acres).

Even when describing her farm's impressive growth in a brief amount of time, Haverinen tends to use phrases like "dumb luck." In fact, she's been very methodical about expanding the enterprise. For example, Haverinen works closely with an instructor through the Farm Business Management Education Program, an initiative available through the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.



Karen Haverinen: "It can be pretty intimidating to feel like you have to invest a lot of money and manage a large herd to make it. With Farm Beginnings, I realized I didn't need to invest so much and be so big to make it." (LSP photo)

Fresh Faces, see page 19...

Through the program, the young farmer works one-on-one with an instructor, who helped her set up a business plan and evaluate its effectiveness, among other things. With the assistance of the instructor, she was able to develop a business plan that was appealing to a lender when she was starting up her operation. It turns out the Farm Business Management instructor is a believer in organics and its ability to cash flow on a moderate scale.

"I wouldn't be farming if it wasn't for my Farm Business Management instructor," she says without hesitation. "It's nice to have someone advocate for you to the lender."

It isn't just the price premiums organic milk can command that made Haverinen an attractive risk to lenders. One of the things that originally attracted Haverinen to Farm Beginnings was the interest-free livestock loan that is offered through Heifer International and which graduates of the program are eligible for. In the end, she didn't pursue the loan, which would have been for 15 heifers, but the young farmer says in an indirect way it still accomplished its task of getting her herd launched. She was meeting with a banker about obtaining credit for a dairy herd when she mentioned that she was quali-

fied to receive the Heifer International loan.

"He said, 'Well, if this program is willing to loan you 15 heifers, then you must be a good risk. Why don't you just skip that step and we'll loan you the money to buy all the heifers you need?'" Haverinen recalls. "In a weird way the Heifer International loan really helped me. It kind of did what it was supposed to accomplish."

What's also impressed lenders is her willingness to operate with a minimum of equipment: a small Oliver tractor that would qualify for antique status, a feed mill and a skid steer loader. "That's pretty much it," says Haverinen. "I'd rather put the money into the parlor and cows."

She's able to get by with so little equipment partially because she is not raising her own hay and supplemental feed. Haverinen buys it from a local farmer using forward contracts that lock in prices. She feels it pencils out better than investing in the land and equipment needed to raise all her own feed. She used managed rotational grazing to feed the cows this past summer, but Haverinen says the worn-out pastures on the farm need to be re-seeded and improved before they provide a significant source of forage.

Haverinen may not be on the 110-year-old family farm, but in a sense she's part of an extended family farm situation. Several family members are involved with agricul-

ture in various ways. She has a brother who lives about 25 miles away and produces milk for Organic Valley. And a nearby cousin will be selling organic milk soon as well. Haverinen says it's tough to get away from the farm, but she has young cousins who can help out with chores once in awhile.

She may be only a year or so out of the dairy-farming chute, but Haverinen can hold her own amongst her older peers, as she did recently at an LSP panel discussion on dairy alternatives (see page 9). The two men she shared the panel with were in their 50s and had years of experience under their belt. After getting over initial jitters, Karen talked easily to the audience about financing, feed rations, genetics and management strategies.

Afterwards, the young farmer was characteristically self-deprecating. "The only reason I agreed to do this is I figured if other people see that somebody as boneheaded as me can make it, then they'll figure anybody can make it."

A well-prepared bonehead, that is. □

To read other Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming profiles of Farm Beginnings graduates, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html.

Farm Beginnings classes: 2009-2010

Classes for the 2008-2009 edition of the Land Stewardship Project's Minnesota-area Farm Beginnings program are underway for the season (see pages 16-17). However, applications are being accepted for the 2009-2010 course, which will convene classes next fall in the western Wisconsin community of River Falls, and in Spicer, which is in west-central Minnesota. Classes will begin Oct. 24 in River Falls, and Nov. 7 in Spicer.

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, a South Dakota Farm Beginnings initiative will be launched this fall. Check the Farm Beginnings web page for details on these courses.

FB field days in 2009

Beginning this spring, LSP's Farm Beginnings program will be holding a series of public on-farm educational events. Watch future issues of the *Land Stewardship Letter* and the *LIVE-WIRE* electronic newsletter for details on these events. The latest information is also available on LSP's web calendar at www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-calendar.html.

Farm Beginnings in Hmong & Spanish

As part of Farm Beginnings' outreach to a diverse groups of people interested in getting started in farming, LSP has launched a web page that features resources in different languages. The page is in develop-

ment, and more resources will be added in the future. For now, you can see the first additions: Hmong and Spanish-language versions of a profile on Farm Beginnings graduates Carol Ford and Chuck Waibel. The page is at www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/hmong_spanish_resources.html.



Farm Beginnings on-farm educational events feature, among things, pasture walks such as this one held at the Art and Jean Thicke farm last spring. (LSP photo)

A (extended season) light at the end of the tunnel

By Tom Taylor

Tomatoes by the end of June and early July, with harvest continuing until September and October. On top of that, get three times the production. You may think these are simple boasts from a growing area far to the south of the Upper Midwest, or a prediction of the future when global warming has struck big time. In reality, those words are from vegetable growers right here in Minnesota. I heard such descriptions during the Minnesota Statewide High Tunnel Conference in Alexandria in early December. The University of Minnesota, USDA North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture sponsored this event. This was the first Minnesota-wide high tunnel conference, and judging from the interest and activity, it is about time.

While sometimes called a “poor person’s greenhouse,” high tunnels are not greenhouses. By definition a high tunnel is “a non-permanent structure that has no electrical service, no automated ventilation and no heating system.” Some artificial heat is used in emergencies when the temperature drops. Plants in high tunnels do not use planters or growing boxes; instead the crops are planted directly into the soil. While many high tunnels are assembled from special ordered or found materials, many presenters mentioned the availability of kits from places like Farm Tek. These are covered with a four-millimeter plastic sheeting that on average lasts three to four years.

High tunnels allow for not only an extended growing season and reduced plant cull rate, but also hold the promise of production of crops not normally grown in Minnesota, all with little to no pesticide used.

The U of M has been involved in high tunnel research since 2005. One of the high tunnels being used at the Northwest Re-



A high tunnel is not just a “poor person’s greenhouse.” By definition a high tunnel is “a non-permanent structure that has no electrical service, no automated ventilation and no heating system.”

search and Outreach Center in Crookston has been certified for organic production. Their 2007 and 2008 research shows that “organic production in high tunnels works well and can be very profitable if certain production practices are followed and high nutrient levels are maintained and supplied,” according to a summary of the research.

Today there is also research going on at U of M research centers in Morris, Lamberton, Grand Rapids, Staples, Waseca, the Twin Cities and Bagley/Bemidji. With high tunnel

research being so new in the Upper Midwest, everyone is learning together. The U of M is working with 21 farmers as “grower cooperators” to help collect data on high tunnel production. There are an estimated 300 high tunnels currently in use in the state.

While most research seems to be focused on tomatoes and cucumbers, raspberries are also grown in high tunnels. Promising garlic research conducted at Crookston shows that the soil does not freeze much below 2.5 inches in high tunnels, making for much less loss to freezing when over-wintering growing bulbs.

Commercially the biggest user of high tunnels in the U.S. is probably Driscoll’s Berries, with all of their berries grown in high tunnels. High tunnels are producing flowers in Kansas and melons in Missouri. There was even some interesting talk at the conference about growing dwarf tree species such as peaches in high tunnels.

While extending the season, garnering greater yields and growing crops not normally available here are all exciting prospects, high tunnels are not without their challenges. On several occasions during the conference, growing in high tunnels was compared to dairy farming because of the need to be so hands-on “all the time.” That passive solar energy captured by the plastic can rapidly climb to over 130 degrees Fahrenheit in a short amount of time, necessitating venting. Moisture levels and soil fertility must also be routinely monitored. And because of the elevated heat, pollination can be negatively affected in a high tunnel system.

A farmer in northwest Minnesota has pushed the definition and functionality of high tunnels by building one that uses a Minnesota-made solar collector to heat the soil. This innovative expansion of the high tunnel design was built just this past summer and is being tested by a real Minnesota winter as you read this.

High tunnel research in Waseca involves red cabbage and ginger to produce elevated

High Tunnel, see page 21...

High tunnel resources

- U of M high tunnel site: <http://hightunnels.cfans.umn.edu>
- U of M hoop house production manual: www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/M1218.html
- A USDA-sponsored website devoted to testing and promoting high tunnel use in the

Central Great Plains: www.hightunnels.org

- High tunnel melon and watermelon Production Research from the University of Missouri: <http://extension.missouri.edu/explore/manuals/m00173.htm>
- Penn State High Tunnel Production Manual: www.plasticulture.org/publications/tunnel.pdf
- High Tunnels: Using low-cost technology

- to increase yields, improve quality and extend the season: www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture/hightunnels.html
- High Tunnel Raspberries: www.fruit.cornell.edu/Berries/bramblepdf/hightunnelsrasp.pdf
- Market Farming Success: www.growingformarket.com

levels of anti-cancer properties. This fascinating research involves increasing these desired properties through light manipulation in high tunnels.

Use of high tunnels in the Upper Midwest is really just beginning. At the Minnesota Statewide High Tunnel Conference, it was

refreshing to see the farmers and U of M researchers working together with a “we’re learning from each other” attitude. It was an active example of a land grant institution and citizens teaming up. The results of these activities will not only be good for farms and rural communities, but eaters who appreciate an extension of their fresh produce season. □

Tom Taylor, an organizer with the Land Stewardship Project’s Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program, is based in Montevideo, Minn. He can be reached at 320-269-2105 or ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org.

Taking the high road to food transportation

By Caroline van Schaik

High touch or drop-and-go. Put another way, to drive or not to drive is fueling farmer-led transportation discussions that have picked up again now that the harvest is in.

“I’m over it!” said one producer wryly about what had been his preference for “high touch” personal deliveries of vegetables to Twin Cities stores. With an explosive growth in his farm business this year, he is tired but clear: he wants to leave the driving to someone else.

Still, when farming success today is marked most by those who are selling their good food themselves, this is not an easy pronouncement. Last spring, the Land Stewardship Project worked with Bluff Country Co-op in Winona, Minn., to send surveys to 215 Land Stewardship Project farmer-members and co-op farmer suppliers as well as miscellaneous other farmers in southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin and northeast Iowa. The response rate was 23 percent.

In this survey, a telling observation illuminated the conundrum: “It would be nice to have a driver for deliveries but it is in direct conflict with what the consumer wants.”

People who eat want to know the people who grow their food.

It’s going to take some work to safeguard this interest and further the economic and mental health of stewardship farmers. So the question has turned again to the balance between a know-thy-farmer approach to delivery versus the more efficient, and impersonal, method that success seems to mandate. This winter is bound to uncover a hybrid, or two.

Sustainable farmers working with LSP’s Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program grow good food and they want it delivered with the same care. They have learned how to move in and out of the back doors of stores and restaurants, to eat lunch at the wheel, to move fast and talk slow with half an eye

for abandoned flats and an ear cocked for the growl of a compressor in a refrigerated truck. Since last winter’s LSP-led transportation meetings, some farmers can (and do) articulate how much they dislike being away from the farm for a whole day. There isn’t even time to visit potential markets. Almost half (46 percent) of survey respondents named time as a major transportation issue – more than those who marked labor and shipping costs combined.

These are challenging issues, though not without signs of solution, or at least movement, if you’ll pardon the pun. Just since last winter, the southeast Minnesota/southwest Wisconsin region has more warehouse space and farmer-owned delivery trucks, each with space to share. If there is more frustration over delivery schedules and handling, count on considerable enthusiasm for doing something different in 2009.

Of course, not all farmers are drawing the same conclusions. They may be united in the need for better delivery infrastructure, but farmers are clearly divided by the details along both pragmatic and philosophical lines. Does transportation mean a box of herbs on the front seat or six pallets at 34 degrees? Could a driver know his/her wares enough to speak for the farmers back home? How best to build in some efficiency (and economy) of scale, but safeguard the “Face of the Farmer” in the process? Do you guarantee overnight delivery with a series of small feeder warehouses or a large centralized one? Should a big truck drive around a big city? What does talk of infrastructure do to a fair price for farmer and eater alike?

Readers may be relishing their last sustainably raised/really local onions of the year this month. Meanwhile, farmers are scratching their weary heads over how to deliver more of them to more people during the upcoming growing season. Savor the bites, because no matter the method, there’s more to come. □

Caroline van Schaik is an organizer with LSP’s Community Based Food Systems and

Economic Development Program. She is based in LSP’s southeast Minnesota office in Lewiston and can be reached at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

Other survey results

- Respondents listed annual transportation costs as ranging from \$180 to \$40,000. About a quarter of respondents did not know their costs, and some respondents included just fuel in their calculation.

- Almost half of all respondents (48 percent) said they have a transportation system in place and therefore did not consider it to be a problem in their farm business.

- Refrigeration, labor, shipping costs and fuel led the list of serious transportation issues—after the dominant issue of time.

- Sixty-four percent of respondents said that in a perfect world, their goal would be to direct-market their good food within 50 miles of their farms. Almost half would like to have a delivery truck come to their farm.

- Eighty-three percent of respondents said that in a perfect world, they would have a warehouse or distribution center within 50 miles of their farm.

Haulers’ List

The Land Stewardship Project has developed a “Haulers’ List” featuring food transportation companies serving the Twin Cities/southeast Minnesota/western Wisconsin corridor. The listing is now available in pdf format at www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/se_haulers_list.pdf, or by contacting Caroline van Schaik in LSP’s Lewiston office at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. □

Catching the local foods boat

By Terry VanDerPol

Is rural Minnesota missing the economic boat by not doing more to promote local foods? That question was on the minds of community leaders, economic development professionals and local food enthusiasts during a November tour of western Minnesota by Ken Meter and Melvyn Hauser. Meter is president of the Crossroads Resource Center and one of the region's leading experts on the role local foods play in economic development. Hauser is a supervisor in southwest Iowa's Pottawattamie County. Meter and Hauser spoke during the "Economic Benefits of Local Foods" tour in Appleton in Swift County and Hector in Renville County.

In a 10-county area of western Minnesota farmers lose \$120 million a year producing commodities and spend \$460 million buying inputs from external suppliers, according to Meter. This means the region is losing \$580 million per year. Add that to consumer expenditures of over \$300 million per year on food grown outside the region and you have over \$880 million of potential wealth lost annually. That's a huge leak in the food and farming bucket.

After hearing Meter speak in western Iowa, Hauser, a retired farmer and recently-elected county supervisor, worked to get his county active in developing a community based food system. Last August the county unanimously voted to commit \$30,000 a year for the next five years to do just that. A group of county leaders and citizens has since drafted an ambitious strategic plan to identify and assist farmers in growing local foods, developing infrastructure and markets, and educating consumers. The plan was adopted by the county. "We'll use the county's money to leverage other funds and to hire someone to put this plan to work," Hauser told the participants in the forums.

Clearly, the work Pottawattamie County is doing and what many of us are working on in rural Minnesota goes beyond just production and sales of food grown locally. It means food grown by family farmers in a sustainable manner, a healthier agro-ecological system and a healthier diet. The goal is food processed and distributed through a value supply chain that retains the identity of

the farm that produced the food and respects the need of everyone in the supply chain for a fair profit. It upholds the ethic of stewardship from field to fork. It retains wealth instead of exporting it. It builds community.

A lot is happening already. Interest in serving local foods is growing in hospitals and schools as well as grocery stores and restaurants throughout Minnesota. A small private school in Marshall has a group of parents working toward a goal of "100



Ken Meter and Melvyn Hauser believe promoting local food systems is sound rural economic policy.
(photo by Tom Taylor)

percent local" in their cafeteria. Many small towns now boast a restaurant or café that features locally grown cuisine. The University of Minnesota-Morris, a charter member of the Pride of the Prairie (www.prideoftheprairie.org) collaboration in western Minnesota, is on track to purchase over \$85,000 in local food this year. From a starting point of \$0 just a few years ago, that's remarkable progress.

Even former President Bill Clinton acknowledged in a speech on World Hunger Day, "We blew it, I blew it when it comes to food." Clinton referenced decades of failed International Monetary Fund and World Bank policy that pushed nations to produce commodities for world trade rather than food for themselves. "Food is not a commodity like others," Clinton said. "We should go back to a policy of maximum food self-sufficiency. It is crazy for us to think we can develop countries around the world without increasing their ability to feed themselves."

That the same is true for rural Minnesota is not news to LSP members. Community based food systems can build healthier economies, profit family farms, and provide good, nutritious food while upholding an ethic of stewardship for the land. We need more farmers producing for local markets. We also need the infrastructure necessary to process and distribute the food in ways that treat the farmer as a valued link in the system—not as a faceless, interchangeable, lowest-cost input supplier.

Wal-Mart is "doing local foods." And it will do all it can to drive down the price of the food it sells, externalizing the costs all the way down the food chain, extracting wealth from rural communities and degrading the ecosystem we all depend on. We need to be very clear about what we're talking about, here. An organization like Wal-Mart can "do local foods." But it can't create a community based food system. That requires a community.

In his presentation, Hauser told the story of another county supervisor expressing skepticism about this approach. "This is an agricultural area. Why are we talking about food?" the supervisor asked Hauser. Hauser acknowledged the huge disconnect in our food and farming system that community based food systems can knit back together. A community based food system can result in a healthier rural economy and provide opportunity.

"But, one of the most important aspects of this to me is giving our kids a chance to reconnect with the natural world through their food," Hauser says. "Have you ever read Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*?"

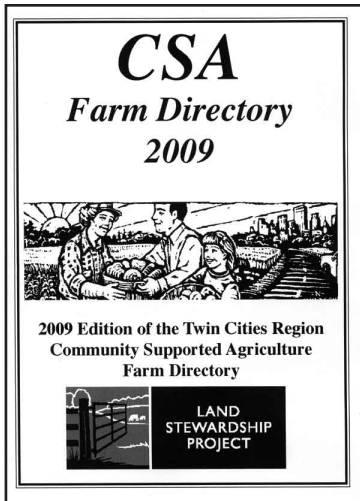
Kids getting out in nature and digging in the soil, understanding where their food comes from—it's such an important part of what we're trying to do." □

Terry VanDerPol is the Director of LSP's Community Based Food Systems and Economic Development Program. The Economic Benefits of Local Foods tour was sponsored by LSP, Ag/Renewable Energy Committee of the Renville County Housing and Economic Development Authority, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Swift County Rural Development Authority and West Central Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnership. More information on the Crossroads Resource Center is available at www.crcworks.org. LSP recently developed a series of podcasts featuring Ken Meter's research (episodes 51-53). See page 8 for details on how to listen.

2009 Twin Cities CSA Farm Directory

Spring is almost here and Twin Cities-area consumers who want to receive fresh, sustainably-produced vegetables on a weekly basis during the 2009 growing season should reserve a share in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm now.

The 2009 edition of the Land Stewardship Project's *Twin Cities Region Community Supported Agriculture Farm Directory* features more farms than ever—over three-dozen. For a free copy, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html. For a paper copy, call LSP at 612-722-6377 or stop by our office in Minneapolis at 821 East 35th Street, Suite 200. □



LSP members attend Slow Food meeting

Several Land Stewardship Project member-farmers served as delegates to the 2008 Terra Madre "Slow Food" conference in October. Terra Madre is held every two years in Turin, Italy. The 2008 Terra Madre featured over 7,000 farmers, fishers, shepherds, chefs, educators and students participating in four days of meetings, workshops and lectures that focused on increasing small-scale, traditional and sustainable food production.

Among those representing Minnesota were LSP members Audrey Arner, Richard Handeen, Jim VanDerPol and LeeAnn VanDerPol, who all farm in western Minnesota. Arner and Handeen operate Moonstone Farm, which raises grass-based beef and grapes, among other things. The VanDerPols' Pastures A Plenty operation raises pork and poultry.

On Jan. 19, LSP co-sponsored a meet-

ing in the western Minnesota community of Montevideo where the local Terra Madre delegates led a discussion about how Slow Food can help sustainability around the world while alleviating hunger and creating economic development opportunities in western Minnesota.

During the most recent Terra Madre, Slow Food founder Carl Petrini emphasized the importance of using the movement to make good, clean and fair food accessible to all people, including those living in poverty. Slow Food supports and is working towards the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which are focused on ending poverty. □

Details on Slow Food USA are available at www.slowfoodusa.org. On March 8, Slow Food Minnesota will be holding an event called, "One Food Lover's Journey to the Land, or The American Paradox," featuring Minnesota Public Radio's Lynne Rossetto Kasper, at the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis. Details are available by visiting www.slowfoodmn.org/events.html or calling 612-362-9210.

Stewardship Food Directory

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

Some of the production methods used by the *Directory* farmers include certified organic, antibiotic- and hormone-free, humanely raised and slaughtered, free of genetically modified organisms, pasture-based, integrated pest management to reduce pesticide use, deep-bedded straw livestock housing and conservation tillage.

The *Directory* is categorized by region as well as food items. Over 130 farms and 20 retail establishments are listed. Contact information and the various ways food can be obtained (on-farm pick-up, farmers' markets, direct delivery, etc.) are included in the *Stewardship Food Directory*.

The 21-page listing is available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/food-farm-main.html#sfd, or by contacting

one of LSP's offices. The listing provides information about the farmers so consumers can communicate with them directly to learn more about production methods, availability of products and prices.

LSP periodically updates and makes corrections to its *Stewardship Food Directory* list. If you are an LSP member who would like to be listed, call 612-722-6377 or e-mail mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

Here are the latest additions:

SW Wisconsin

□ Indecision Ridge Farm

Sara Martinez & Matt Urch
E5866 Weber Rd.

Viroqua, WI 54665-7749

Phone: 608-675-3766

E-mail: urchm@yahoo.com

→ Products: **Pasture-raised
beef & pork, Black
Galloway breeding stock**

Twin Cities Metro

□ The Good Earth Food Co-op

2010 Veterans Drive
Saint Cloud, MN 56303

Phone: 320-253-9290

E-mail: info@goodearthcoop.com

Website: <http://goodearthcoop.com>

→ Products: **Natural food co-op**

□ Finca Mirasol

Reginaldo & Amy

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Pepper & salt stewardship

Why 'farm the best & preserve the rest' isn't always the answer

"Doesn't conservation imply a certain interspersion of land-uses, a certain pepper-and-salt pattern in the warp and woof of the land-use fabric?" — Aldo Leopold, 1939

By Brian DeVore

In 2003, after several years working for state and federal agencies as a wildlife manager, Kent Solberg bought a farm in central Minnesota's Wadena County and began raising livestock. Since he was a youngster growing up in the Twin Cities, Solberg has been passionate about the outdoors and has always wanted to work to protect and improve natural resources. Some might say that his latest career shift contradicts that dream. But Solberg sees it as just a continuum of the work he did on wildlife refuges with an agronomic twist—a chance to put in play a "working lands conservation ethic" on his own piece of property.

"One of our main goals is making our farm a place of food production while protecting those resources that are so important," says Solberg. "That's a big challenge that I see in the Midwest where most of the land is in agricultural production."

Solberg's belief that it's not that big a leap from the wildlife preserve to the cow pasture is not a new idea. Aldo Leopold, the father of the "land ethic," wrote about it 70 years ago—the idea that the health of the land in rural areas is best served when food production and "wild areas" exist side-by-side on the same farm, rather than as separate entities performing seemingly unrelated tasks.

In his essay, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," Leopold eloquently describes how woodlands, meadows, sloughs and wetlands, those odd corners where ecological services quietly go about their business, can coexist with corn, pasture and other farming enterprises. Wilderness areas, national forests and wildlife refuges are important. But as Dana and Laura Jackson point out in the book, *The Farm as Natural Habitat*, too often people see their presence as an excuse to sacrifice ecological health on good farmland—"farm the best and preserve the rest." The result of this mental separation on a landscape scale is pristine preserves such as the Boundary

Waters Canoe Area Wilderness on one end of the spectrum, and industrial agriculture sacrifice regions such as the Corn Belt on the other end. On an individual farm scale, it often means gradual elimination of residual habitat fragments on the assumption that displaced wildlife can simply take up residence on public land somewhere else.

An integration of the tamed and the wild not only makes economic sense by saving soil and protecting water quality, for

Wildly Successful Farming



example, but it provides a certain "wholeness" that is so critical to the overall success of a farm. Wrote Leopold: "No one censures a man who loses his leg in an accident, or who was born with only four fingers, but we should look askance at a man who amputated a natural part on the grounds that some other part is more profitable."

In the decades since, it has become clear that Leopold was right in more ways than one. The sustainable agriculture movement is based on the idea that all aspects of a successful farm—from its soil, croplands and pastures to its woodlands and sloughs—are part of a healthy whole. Farmers and scientists are realizing that an agricultural operation too far removed from its biological roots is more vulnerable to disease, pests and uncooperative weather.

Leopold was writing in a different era, when industrial agriculture and agroecological thinking were both in their infancy. But recent research and real-farm experience has

proven him right in more ways than one. Environmentalists are now aware that creating islands of natural areas is not sustainable in the long term. Waterfowl benefit from state and federal wildlife refuges to be sure, but when migrating they rely on the food and shelter present in the potholes and sloughs found on farms across the Midwest. A protected waterway may be safe from having factory waste dumped straight into it, but what about the non-point runoff from all the farms present in the surrounding watershed?

In places like the Midwest, working lands conservation is more than a nice concept—it's a necessity in a region where vast tracts of publicly owned land are few and far between. In Iowa, almost 89 percent of the land area is farmed. Even in a state like Minnesota, with its vast timberlands and lake country in the north and east, 29.5 million acres is classified as agricultural (predominately in the south and west), which is 58 percent of the state's total. Nationally, privately-owned croplands, pastures and rangeland make up about half of the terrestrial surface area, and are managed by just 2 percent of the population.

'Sparing' vs. 'wild'

Some scientists have characterized the two ends of this spectrum as "land sparing" and "wildlife-friendly farming." Writing in the September 2008 issue of *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, scientists from the Australian National University and Stanford University provide an extensive description of these two ways of managing the landscape.

In "land sparing," land is farmed intensively—large-scale monocultural operations are used to produce high yields. In theory, sacrificing these farmlands for food, and increasingly fuel, production, makes it possible to set up nature reserves separate from the farmland on land that normally could not produce high yields of crops or livestock. Usually these reserves are owned or somehow managed by the government, since they do not produce the kind of income private landowners need. Or, in the case of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the government pays the landowner not to farm the land.

"Wildlife friendly farming" is characterized by interconnecting patches of native vegetation scattered throughout the landscape and a high level of spatial heterogeneity—in other words, a diversity of crops in a range of small fields, retaining habitat features within the fields like buffer strips or scattered trees and habitat features along

Wild, see page 25...

streams, travel lanes or field borders. The scientists writing in *Frontiers* point out that “wildlife-friendly farming” may or may not be undertaken to help wildlife. In the end it not only benefits various critters, but also provides numerous side ecological services like “bug banks” for pollination and cleaner water. Native prairie plants may provide nesting cover for pheasants, but they also provide year-round protection for the soil and trap greenhouse gases.

The downside to the wildlife friendly operation is it normally takes more land to produce the same amount of food, although scientists writing in *Frontiers* point out that many long-standing assumptions about sustainable farming methods being inherently low-yielding are being challenged (see the *Myth Buster* on page 5). And research conducted by the Land Stewardship Project as part of the Multiple Benefits of Agriculture initiative, for example, is showing that diverse farming systems can produce numerous public goods besides food—flood protection, carbon sequestration, renewable energy and more vibrant rural communities, among other things.

A major downside to land sparing is that it tends to produce environmental problems and costs—excessive runoff, destruction of infrastructure, loss of pollinators, etc.—on the land that’s being intensively farmed. Sometimes those off-site impacts extend to downstream areas and overwhelm the habitat and recreational benefits provided by protected public land.

A Minnesota Department of Natural Resources study in southern Minnesota found that although CRP land provided key nesting and wintering habitat for pheasants, those benefits were offset by the loss of small grains, pasture and hay ground—important sources of habitat in farm country. This loss came from increased plantings of row crops like corn and soybeans, which are poor sources of wildlife habitat, according to the study, which was published in

the June 2007 issue of the *Journal of Field Ornithology*. In fact, for every hectare of CRP added to the pheasant range during the study period (1974 to 1997), 3.1 hectares of alternative reproductive habitat like small grains, pasture and hay ground was lost. The result was that in fact some parts of the study area actually had fewer pheasants after CRP was established in the region (CRP was first implemented in 1986). The researchers who did this study acknowledge that a lot has changed since 1997; for one thing, CRP plantings now include more seedings of native grasses and legumes, making better habitat for pheasants and other wildlife. But the intensification of the non-CRP landscape has only increased in the past dozen years, and there’s even less hay, pasture and small grains than before in southern Minnesota.

“We suggest that a more balanced evaluation of the Farm Bill effects on wildlife is needed, including consideration of commodity provisions that apparently are driving declines in small grains, pasture, and hay land...,” conclude the authors.

It’s not only federal policy that can have a negative impact on wild farming. As the Green Acres article on page 11 shows, calling such natural corners of a farm “non-productive” in the state of Minnesota could have devastating consequences for the environment, as well as farmers whose tax status could be affected.

The *Frontiers in Ecology* paper points out that, not surprisingly, wildlife friendly farming is likely to occur in “complex topography.” Translation: land that’s too hilly or otherwise rough to farm intensively with large machinery. That describes southeast Minnesota’s bluff country (see article below). And land sparing agriculture is intensifying in places like central Iowa and southwest Minnesota, where flat fields and deep soils make industrial ag possible. But this isn’t an all or none proposition. Intensive row-cropping still takes place in the driftless region, and diversified “wild” farming can be found in corners of Corn Country.

As wildlife biologist Tex Hawkins says, “Every farm, even flatland farms, can have a

nice back forty where the farmer has done a little bit of habitat improvement.”

During many decades of working in rural areas both here and abroad, Hawkins has been impressed by what he calls “wildly successful” farms—those operations that are able to integrate ecological services into a working landscape.

Hawkins isn’t the only natural resource expert who sees the potential of farms as natural habitat. While working in wildlife management all those years, Kent Solberg was impressed by farmers who were using managed rotational grazing and diverse crop rotations to produce income from the land in an ecologically health manner. Today he’s one of them: his Wadena County farm is producing milk, pork and eggs on carefully managed pastures. He has a small pine tree plantation and is thrilled to see native prairie plants “volunteer” on land that had been cropped pretty intensively in the past. A tributary of the Mississippi River runs through the Solberg property, and the farmer feels that by converting former row crop fields to grass, he’s making his own contribution to better water quality in the larger watershed.

The wildlifer in Solberg emerges when he begins ticking off the critters that make the farm home: woodcock, bobolink, turkey, ruffed grouse, sandhill crane, eagle, wood duck, bluebird and otter.

The presence of these animals is an important indicator that this experiment in working lands conservation is working, says Solberg. But they also show why it would be a shame to relegate all our wild wonders to far-off refuges and wilderness areas.

“To hear the honking of the geese or the rattle of the cranes in the distance when we’re going out to get the cows in the morning really just makes it much more enjoyable,” says the farmer. “It’s part of the thrill of getting up in the morning.”

With the article that begins below, the *Land Stewardship Letter* is launching “Wildly Successful Farming,” an occasional series on agriculture that balances food production and conservation, while making life on the land a little more thrilling. □

Patchwork portrait painting

A wildlife biologist points out what makes a wildly successful farm

It’s a sunny afternoon in late July, and wildlife biologist Tex Hawkins is ecstatic over the “pepper-and-salt” pattern he’s seeing on a diverse farming operation in southeast Minnesota’s bluff country. He’s getting a tour of the John and Marge Warthesen farm, which sits astride

a ridge overlooking West Indian Creek, a tributary of the Zumbro River. Its presence marked by a blue haze above the trees a few miles away, the Zumbro flows another dozen miles before draining into the Mississippi.

“It’s just bird heaven,” he says as the van he and the Warthesens (along with their

friend John Grobner and his daughter Laura) are riding in stops next to a brushy fenceline. A 35-head brood cow herd is grazing on the other side of the fence. Behind Hawkins and the Warthesens is corn and hay. The brushy fenceline extends both ways and follows the contour of the ridge. Down the hill below the grazing cattle is a pond and beyond that,

Portrait, see page 26...

a thick stand of hardwoods that block the view of West Indian Creek.

"The thing about the field borders and pastures is that they're all connected together with these wonderful fences that are woven together with vines of grapes and woodbine and all these different species of crawling vine as well as low shrubs," Hawkins explains. "You've got these long strips—they're very narrow, but they're excellent habitat for catbirds, and a lot of other fruit and seed-eating birds like to perch along the fenceline. I like the connectivity of the whole situation."

"Most of these fencelines in other places would be sprayed, just to clean them up," says John.

Conscious conservation

But the presence of the brushy fenceline, as well as the timber, sloughs and other "wild" corners on the Warthesen farm are not there as a result of neglect, an unwillingness to take the time and effort to "clean up" the farm. Quite the opposite. Since they started farming this land more than three decades ago, the Warthesens have made a conscious effort to combine food production with stewardship. It's been a lot of hard work. John grew up across the road from this farm, and remembers as a kid when there were ravines so deep a D6 Caterpillar could work at the bottom without being seen from ground level.

"In places it was just a huge bunch of ditches," says John. "You couldn't get across them. You could barely walk across them."

They've replaced large over-grazed pastures with smaller ones that are managed with rotational grazing, which helps maintain the health of deep-rooted, soil-friendly grasses while recycling manure. The Warthesens have also replaced contiguous crop fields with contour-hugging strips consisting of diverse plantings of hay, small grains, soybeans and corn. And in places where producing a crop in a given year is an iffy proposition at best, they've established native prairie, woodlands and wetlands.

The farm uses a variety of government programs. For example, cost-share money from the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (see page 14), helped the Warthesens get their managed rotational grazing system set up about five years ago. They've also used the federal Conservation Reserve Program and the Grassland Reserve to keep the land covered in perennial vegeta-

tion. In addition, many of the trees were planted and managed through a program run by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), called the Forest Stewardship Program.

This farm is 160 acres, but one friend describes it as the "biggest little 160 acres he's ever seen." A drive around the perimeter of the land shows why: the undulating landscape, combined with the diversity of plants, gives a visitor the sense that they are entering a different parcel of land every hundred yards or so. Drive past the cornfield and over a hump in the land, and all of a sudden there's seven acres of native prairie established on CRP ground. Take a walk past a stand of timber and it quickly gives



John Warthesen describes the mix of land uses adjacent to West Indian Creek as Tex Hawkins and Marge Warthesen look on. (LSP photo)

way to a hay field or a small slough. While returning from the fields and forests, one gets a grand view of the Warthesens' 3.8 acres of vegetable gardens, which produces for the Rochester Farmers' Market as well as for a couple dozen local families who belong to the Many Hands Farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation. They also raise lamb, eggs and poultry for direct sale to consumers.

Of the 160 acres, about 40 is timber, 30 is pasture and 10 is wetland/wildlife habitat. The rest is crop fields and vegetable gardens.

This agroecological tour on a summer day is significant not only for what is being observed on the Warthesen farm, but who is doing the observing. At first blush, it may seem odd that someone like Tex Hawkins appreciates the benefits a privately held farm

can provide landscape health. His employer is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which is known for, among other things, managing federally-owned wildlife refuges across the country. But like a growing group of natural resource professionals, Hawkins knows that such refuges do not have impenetrable walls around them. For example, runoff from farms in southeast Minnesota and southwest Wisconsin is having negative impacts on water quality in the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, a 261-mile stretch of marsh, floodplain forests and grasslands that begins a few miles from the Warthesen farm.

In the 1990s, he was one of the members of the Monitoring Team, an initiative led by the Land Stewardship Project that brought together farmers, scientists and environmental professionals to determine how to measure the impacts of various sustainable farming practices. While with the Monitoring Team, Hawkins and other environmental experts saw how systems such as managed rotational grazing could improve ecological health while producing a viable income for farmers.

The Warthesens' method of managing the land is a combination of proactivity and going with the flow. For example, one crop field in a triangle-shaped area was difficult to turn equipment around in. So they used EQIP money to turn it into a grazing paddock. At one point, Hawkins comments on a shrubby area that makes nice wildlife habitat and is full of game trails. It turns out a boulder is nestled in there somewhere, and John grew tired of moving cropping equipment around it.

Marge drives the van close to the tree line above Indian Creek. John points out a wildlife planting they put in seven years ago—maple, black cherry and pines are thriving. When planting, he followed the guidelines in *Landscaping for Wildlife*, a DNR booklet. Before that it was just a bunch of ditches. Marge parks on a small rise that turns out to be a check dam. In amongst a thick stand of trees and cattails is standing water. Indian grass above the catchment provides deep-rooted soil protection. Below the dam, a ravine covered with trees plunges sharply toward West Indian Creek, just a quarter-mile down hill. A premier trout stream, the DNR has spent a lot of tax money on the stream to improve fish habitat.

"This would have delivered a lot of sedi-

Portrait, see page 27...

ment down into the stream,” says Hawkins. “Now look how it’s buffered.”

Up the hill is seven acres of CRP ground with a twist: the Warthesens have planted oak, ash and walnut, among other species, in the native prairie. The planting is four years old, and some of the trees are poking up through the grass. This was done with the help of DNR money.

Toward the end of the tour, Marge parks the van next to a cornfield, gets out, and leads the way through a thick stand of hardwoods as a hidden warbling vireo sings its heart out. “They don’t even take a breath all summer—sing, sing, sing,” says Hawkins with a laugh.

Next to some old barbed wire, Marge points out a small sinkhole, an indicator of the presence of fractured limestone “karst” geology just below the soil’s surface. This type of geology is a major conduit for contaminants such as agrichemicals, manure and human sewage to make their way down to groundwater.

A few yards beyond the sinkhole, she stops on the lip of a cliff. Some 200 feet below is Highway 4, and on the other wide of that is an oxbow-ridden Indian Creek. A neighbor has planted corn in the bend of the river right up to the bank. It’s a beautiful view, but also a reminder that no farm is an ecological island. All of the efforts they are making to improve soil and water quality, as well as wildlife habitat, are dwarfed by landscape-level impacts elsewhere in the watershed.

“There’s not much of a buffer strip around that creek where the corn is and in the spring the erosion and the falling off of that field is just atrocious, just atrocious,” says Marge as she gazes at the bottomland.

“And at the mouth of the Zumbro you’ll see the results—a huge mud plume coming out at the mouth of the river,” says Hawkins. “People are losing a lot of ag ground on the bottoms too, because the river’s going crazy and ripping out the banks.”

“It doesn’t take much rain to create havoc down on the Zumbro anymore,” says Marge.

Land isn’t eroding because farmers want it to. The reality is that in order for the Warthesens and their neighbors to stay on the land, they have to make a viable living from it. Rotational grazing can be a low-cost, profitable way to raise livestock. And the recent demand for locally-produced foods has kept the Many Hands CSA busy. But the fact remains that every acre of land planted to trees or prairie is an acre not

producing corn or some other cash commodity. Programs like EQIP can help relieve the burden of putting in the fencing, pathways and water lines needed for a good managed rotational grazing system. In addition, the Warthesens have taken advantage of tree planting and forest management funds that are available. But on this particular summer day, the shadow of farm economics is looming over this “non-productive” land. For example, the Warthesens receive \$78 an acre annually for “renting” their CRP ground to the government. A neighbor with land equally as steep as theirs is receiving \$200 cash rent from a crop farmer.

Hawkins notes that one way to make up



A view of the Warthesen farm’s diverse landscape: a CSA garden in the foreground—hay, corn, pasture and timber in the background. (LSP photo)

for the discrepancy would be through “ecosystem service payments” that would reward farmers for providing such public goods as cleaner water in the watershed. He says such a system is being used in Costa Rica, where he has assisted on conservation projects off and on over the past 40 years. “They have a number of different categories of ecosystem service payments that the landowners get,” he says. “Costa Rican farmers can receive annual payments to help maintain forest cover, financed in part through European carbon offsets, and this helps sustain clean local drinking water sources, as well as the songbirds that spend their winters in the tropics and raise their young each summer right there on the farm.”

“Well, keeping the creek clean would be a public service,” quips Marge.

The economics of modern agriculture make being a good steward difficult, but farmers like the Warthesens are highly motivated to work around such barriers. It’s obvious Marge and John are proud of what they’ve done with the farm. John is an avid

outdoorsman, the type that finds benefits even in having hollow trees on the place because they provide homes for coons, and thus plenty of hunts for his Walker hound.

Throughout the entire tour, the Warthesens proudly describe how they see bluebirds, tree swallows, red-headed woodpeckers, meadowlarks, dickcissels and bobolinks along their fencelines as well as in the pastures. At one point, as if on cue, three turkeys emerge from a cornfield a couple hundred yards away on a sidehill and stroll over a hay field. One of the turkeys is unusually light-colored, almost blond or golden in the July sun.

But there’s more than recreation and wildlife watching on the farmers’ minds when they plant yet one more row of trees. Hawkins says that he recognizes in the Warthesens a deep, abiding love for what the land can produce—agronomically as well as ecologically. But it even goes beyond that—to an unwavering respect for the land, down to the soil itself.

Marge made that clear back in the 1980s when she and a small group of LSP members traveled to the Boston headquarters of John Hancock to talk about the environmental abuse of a neighborhood farm the insurance giant owned at the time. How did these farmers get across their message that this was more than about economics and efficiency? There in John Hancock’s corporate offices, among the pinstripes and power ties, Warthesen and the other farmers showed off Exhibit A: a small pile of prime southeast Minnesota soil.

As Aldo Leopold put it: “The landscape of any farm is the owner’s portrait of himself. Conservation implies self-expression in that landscape, rather than blind compliance with economic dogma.” □

More information

- To listen to wildlife biologist Tex Hawkins talk about his experience as a member of the Monitoring Team, check out episode 32 of LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast (see page 8). Episode 57 features Kent Solberg talking about mixing farming and natural resource conservation.

- Details on the federal Conservation Stewardship Program, which rewards environmentally-friendly agriculture, are available at www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_csp.html.

- For more on research related to the Multiple Benefits of Agriculture project, see www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_mba.html.



Kitchen Literacy

How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes from and Why We Need to Get it Back

By Ann Vileisis

2007; 352 pages

(hardcover & compact disk)

Island Press/Shearwater Books

www.islandpress.org

Reviewed by Dana Jackson

Ann Vileisis, author and prize-winning historian, wanted to know how consumers changed their thinking about food as the experience of eating became wholly separate from that of raising and producing sustenance. Her resulting book, *Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes from and Why We Need to Get it Back*, explores how “kitchen literacy,” defined as the mental framework people use to understand food, was changed as society became urbanized, and food became more industrialized.

Vileisis chronicles what Americans knew about their food in the late 18th century and how that changed in the 19th and 20th centuries—and is still changing. I’ve been involved in the sustainable food and agriculture movement since 1976 and am familiar with changes in thinking during those years. However, what fascinated me about this book was what I didn’t experience and didn’t know, which was how the food system looked and was understood by people in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The first chapter, “A Meal with Martha,” quotes Martha Ballard, a 55-year-old woman living near Augusta, Maine, who wrote in her diary on August 15, 1790: “had bakt [sic] lamb with string beans [sic] and cucumbers.” Other entries over a period of 27 years show that Martha’s gardens, the source of her beans and cucumbers, were important to the household food supply, as was the grain grown and ground into flour by her husband Ephraim. Also key were the chickens, cow and pigs the family tended. Since they produced almost all their own food, or bought it from neighbors, they knew the origin of every bite they ate.

The first cookbook in America was written by Amelia Simmons in 1796 as a guide

to young women in cities learning to cook foods they didn’t raise. In *American Cookery*, Simmons assumed readers were familiar with the sources of foods and was insulted when her publisher tacked on 17 pages of advice about choosing meats, fish, fowl and vegetables at the market. But city women were dependent on buying all of their food in open air markets, and they needed to know where the freshest, best-flavored fish came from, or which particular varieties of vegetables to ask farmers for, or how to examine a live goose to know if it would be good eating.

Women like Martha who moved to the city in the 19th century could still count upon their country knowledge in buying food; their daughters faced a different world. As populations grew in East Coast cities, a much larger foodshed was required to provide the great quantities needed, and before long, instead of arriving by wagons that traveled 150 miles to market, food came by train from farms 1,000 miles away.

Vileisis tells us that Thomas DeVoe, a butcher working in Greenwich Village from

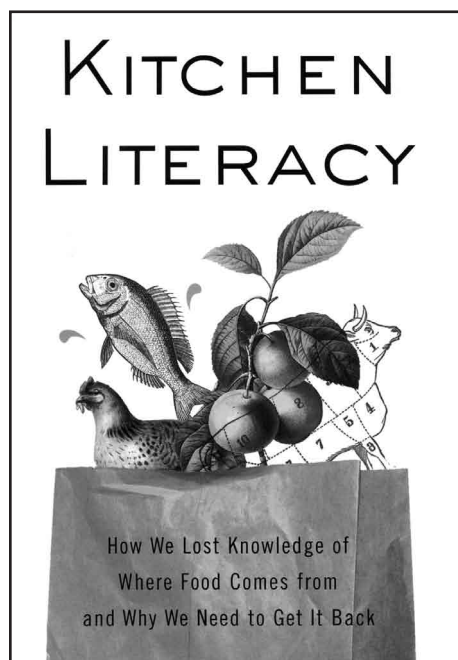
for someone, in the marketplace. Food was simply the part of nature that people ate.” So of course wild species became scarce in the East, then began to decline in numbers all across the country, and in 1911, New York City markets stopped selling wild game. When people began to see nature as a “source of solace,” not a source of food, they became dependent upon mass produced and processed foods of unknown origin, and food was completely disconnected from nature in their minds.

Kitchen Literacy explains how our mass produced foods and industrial system in the U.S. naturally evolved to meet the market demands of people no longer producing any of their own food, and gradually people had little understanding of where food came from. Vileisis describes the introduction of dressed beef and canned foods as well as the advertising industry that arose to convince consumers to accept such foods. She explains how the transcontinental railroad began to ship live animals from Chicago stockyards to Eastern markets. They lost a lot of weight during their long, bumpy ride crammed in rail cars, and the meat was bruised and discolored. Much better quality-dressed beef from Chicago packing plants reached Easterners after Gustavus Swift introduced the refrigerated rail car.

Vileisis tells how people with no knowledge of the real character of food were easily deceived into buying products adulterated with dyes and preservatives because of their appearance, which led to passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

A recent news note in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* newspaper reminded me how we take such public safety laws for granted in the U. S. The article stated that China had just released a list of 17 substances now banned as food additives, including boric acid commonly used as an insecticide, which was being “mixed with noodles and meatballs to increase elasticity, and certain industrial dyes used to improve product appearance.” Of course, the negative impact of such laws in the U.S. has been the elimination of small, regional food producers and processors that cannot meet sanitary production standards based on large-scale specifications.

Towards the end of the book, a chapter called “The Covenant of Ignorance” duplicates information in nutritionist Marion Nestle’s books—*Food Politics*, *What to Eat*, *Safe Food*—but from the perspective of an historian. The chapter “Kitchen Counter-trends” traces changes in thinking influenced by the 1960-70’s “natural” food movement



the 1820s to the 1860s, documented the “flora and fauna of the market” in his book *The Market Assistant*. He not only described all the domestic livestock and fowl for sale, he also listed the dozens of species of wild birds (35 types of wildfowl and 84 other kinds of wild birds), animals (even bears) and fishes commonly available. Although I knew that hunters killed passenger pigeons and buffalo for Eastern markets, I wasn’t aware of all the other wild creatures sold as food. Vileisis startled me when she stated: “Any animal, plant—farmed, gathered, trapped, or shot—might be found as food,

Kitchen, see page 29...

led by back-to-the-landers, by authors Frances Moore Lappé (*Diet for a Small Planet*) and Ralph Nader (*Chemical Feast*), the rise of the Organic Valley Cooperative and the sustainable agriculture movement.

The Transition Handbook From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience

By Rob Hopkins

Foreword by Richard Heinberg

2008; 240 pages

Chelsea Green Publishing

www.chelseagreen.com

Reviewed by Susan Maas

As a longtime locavore and Land Stewardship Project supporter, I didn't have much trouble swallowing many of the principles in Rob Hopkins's recent book, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience*. Like you, I already knew that our fossil-fuel-sucking lifestyle and our corporatized, globalized food system are unhealthy and unsustainable. What I didn't have, before reading this inspiring book, was a clear picture of how we might see our way out of this mess.

If you're feeling paralyzed by climate change, peak oil and financial collapse, I cannot recommend *The Transition Handbook* strongly enough. Hopkins, a British-based teacher of permaculture and natural building and the co-founder of the Transition Network, has given me hope that my fears of a post-petroleum Dark Age may be misplaced — that what's before us is, maybe, an opportunity to create a 21st-century Renaissance. "Inherent within the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change is an extraordinary opportunity to reinvent, rethink and rebuild the world around us," Hopkins explains.

Like it or not, the coming decades will bring radical changes. But there's much we can do, at the neighborhood and community level, to prepare for them. One crucial aspect of resilient communities, Hopkins believes, is diversity: of skills, of industries, of food sources, of land use. "Diversity of land use — farms, market gardens, aquaculture, forest gardens, nut tree plantings, and so on — are the key to resilience...and their erosion in recent years has paralleled the rise of mono-

The "Countertrends" chapter is a good reminder that we may have misplaced some of food's "books" during the past few centuries, but we haven't forgotten how to "read." And where there's reading, there's learning. □

Dana Jackson coordinates the St. Croix River

cultures, which are by definition an absence of diversity."

Hopkins points to a 2006 report by the New Economics Foundation to underscore the absurdly dysfunctional side of globalization, especially where food is concerned: "In 2004 the UK imported 17.2 million kilos of chocolate-covered wafers and exported 17.6 million kilos; we imported 10.2 million kilos of milk and cream from France and exported 9.9 million. ... Germany sent us 1.5 million kilos of potatoes and we sent them, yes, 1.5 million kilos of potatoes."

• • •
*I can't remember the last
time a book — especially one
that's largely about peak
oil and climate change — left
me so heartened.*
• • •

Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign out of the Land Stewardship Project's Twin Cities office. For more on Ann Vileisis, Jackson recommends an interview with her posted at www.cookingupastory.com/food-news/kitchen-literacy.

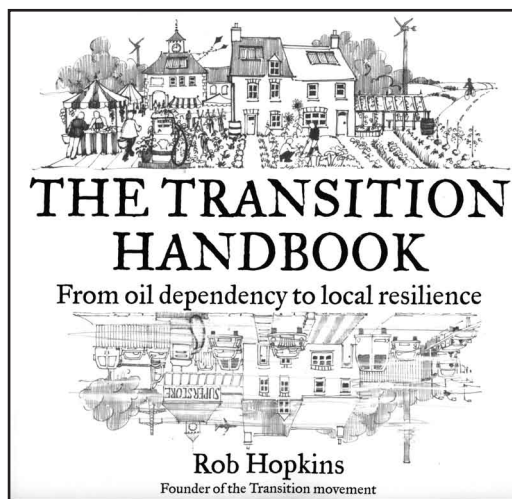
Hopkins cites the "cake analogy": A century ago, most towns were largely self-reliant; the "cake" was produced locally, while the icing and cherries on top were imported. Today, the reverse is true. What we need now, Hopkins says, is a massive "reskilling" — we must challenge ourselves to see how much we're really capable of at the local level. "Only a culture awash with cheap oil could become deskilled on the monumental scale

that we have, to the extent that some young people I have met are lucky to emerge from cutting a slice of bread with all of their fingers intact. It is no exaggeration to say that we in the West are the single most useless generation (in terms of practical skills) to which this planet has ever played host."

Harsh words, but he's hopeful that we can rise to the challenge. I agree, and we can look to the more than 20 million World War II Victory Gardens that were planted in the U.S. alone for inspiration. Given the growing list of "Transition Towns" — mostly across the UK, where Hopkins lives — that are making palpable progress towards reviving and regearing their local economies, his optimism seems well-founded.

I can't remember the last time a book — especially one that's largely about peak oil and climate change — left me so heartened. Even with the guilt of reading it in a fossil-fuel-burning, carbon-emitting station wagon on a very long family road trip. Though I have a hopelessly black thumb, which is why we are members of a Community Supported Agriculture farm, I told my husband it's inspired me to plant a nut tree come spring. He says a nut tree would be really appropriate for me, which I think is meant to be snarky, but I'm choosing not to be insulted. □

LSP member Susan Maas writes frequently on health, environmental and community issues for a variety of publications. She also writes a blog at <http://maas-media.com/wordpress>.



Such institutionalized pointlessness puts one in mind of a Monty Python sketch. But there's nothing funny about the enormous toll it's exacting on our planet.

We can all think of positive, even miraculous, aspects of globalization, and Hopkins isn't calling for throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Though it's likely to get increasingly tougher, the thoughtful long-distance exchange of people, ideas, art and understanding remains a wise and important use of our limited resources. Industrialized monocultures of nonnative grains, not so much.

Poetry

Patriotism

My country is this dirt
that gathers under my fingernails
when I am in the garden.
The quiet bacteria and fungi,
all the little insects and bugs
are my compatriots. They are
idealistic, always working together
for the common good,
for their own good,
always for the good.
I kneel on the earth
and pledge my allegiance
to all the dirt of the world,
to all of that soil which grows
flowers and food
for the just and unjust alike.
The soil does not care



what we think about or what we love,
it knows our true substance,
what we are really made of.
I stand my ground on this ground,
this ground which will ultimately
recruit us all to its side.

— Ellie Schoenfeld

Ellie Schoenfeld is a poet from Duluth, Minn. Her latest book, Ready Or Not: New and Used Poems, will be published this spring. It will be available through Clover Valley Press (www.clovervalleypress.com; 218-525-4552).

Opportunities



Resources

Small-acreage classes

University of Minnesota Extension is offering a series of workshops for people who want to figure out ways to be good stewards of rural parcels that are 40 acres or less.

The eight-week “Living on the Land” course will feature sessions on water quality, plants, weeds, lawn and pasture maintenance, and soils, among other things. The series will be taught by Extension educators and natural resource professionals at two Minnesota locations: Rogers and Jordan. The Rogers course will be on Wednesday evenings from March 4 to April 29; the Jordan workshops are on Thursdays from March 5 to April 30.

For details, see www.extension.umn.edu/extensionnews/2009/small-acreage-owner-workshop.html, or call 612-596-1175. □

Writing contest

The “Youth Sustainability Writing Competition” is a contest sponsored by the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota for two age groups: 14 to 18 and 19 to 25. The intention of the contest is to encourage young

people to think about sustainable farming and its implications in Minnesota. The categories are poetry, journalism, limerick, haiku, essay/creative non-fiction, flash fiction/short story and dramatic monologue or duet.

The entry deadline is March 16. For more information on entering, contact Jerry Ford at 320-543-3394. An application form can be downloaded at www.sfa-mn.org/documents/ysw_competition.pdf. □

Marketing toolkit

“Making the Connection: A Toolkit for

Starting a Radio and Web-based Local Food Campaign” is a new resource developed by Curt Arens and Sandy Patton.

The 44-page booklet and accompanying compact disc tells the story of “Farm to Family Connection,” a weekly radio program touting family farmers in northeast Nebraska and southeast South Dakota who direct-market food and farm products. Since first airing in 2004, the show has run over 250 programs, highlighting the products and farm stories of hundreds of families and rural communities. A companion website (www.farmtofamily.net) lists a local food directory, as well as recipes, program transcripts and audio clips, and tips for farmers and consumers.

To order the toolkit, visit www.farmtofamily.net, or call 402-582-4866. □

Get your local democracy bumper sticker

The Land Stewardship Project has been a leader in standing up for the rights of local governments—particularly townships—to control harmful developments like factory farms. One way to keep township democracy strong is to go public with your support via the “Grassroots Democracy” red, white and blue bumper sticker.

For details on getting your free bumper sticker, visit www.landstewardship-project.org/resources-misc.html, or call Bobby King at 612-722-6377. □

Grassroots Democracy & Local Control

STAND UP FOR MN TOWNSHIPS

www.LandStewardshipProject.org



LAND
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PROJECT

Membership Update

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. □

Support LSP with gifts of property

The Land Stewardship Project has launched a new initiative that allows property owners to continue their family's legacy



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.thedatabank.com/dpg/231/donate.asp?formid=donate to donate online. If you have questions about gift memberships, please contact Mike McMahon at mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org or 612-722-6377. □

Get the buzz with

LIVE  **WIRE**

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* for regular 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*." □

Membership ???

If you have any questions about your Land Stewardship Project membership, please contact Membership Coordinator Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org.

You can renew your membership with the envelope included with this newsletter, or visit www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-joinus.html. □

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

Support LSP in your workplace

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

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



MINNESOTA
Environmental Fund

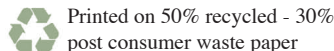
You can support LSP in your workplace by giving through the Minnesota Environmental Fund. Options include giving a designated amount through payroll deduction, or a single gift. You may also choose to give to the entire coalition or specify the organization of your choice within the coalition, such as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



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STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **FEB. 21—Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota's 18th Annual Conference, featuring keynote speaker Joel Salatin**, Saint Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org; 320-226-6318

→ **FEB. 21—"Writing the Story: Authors on Farming & Sustainability," featuring LSP's Dana Jackson**, SFA Annual Conference, 1:30 p.m.-2:30 p.m., Northfield, Minn. (see above)

→ **FEB. 25-26—National Organic Action Plan Summit**, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.nationalorganiccoalition.org/invoke.html; 715-772-3153

→ **FEB. 26—"Getting Started with an Organic Farm" presentation by LSP's Amy Bacigalupo**, Organic University, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org/conference; 715-772-3153

→ **FEB. 26-28—20th Annual MOSES Organic Farming Conference & Organic University**, featuring Vandana Shiva, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: www.mosesorganic.org/conference; 715-772-3153

→ **LATE FEB.-EARLY MARCH—LSP Federal Farm Policy Meeting**, Rochester, Minn.; Contact: Doug Nopar, LSP, 507-523-3366; dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **MARCH-APRIL—U of M Small Acreage Workshops**, Rogers & Jordan, Minn. (see page 30)

→ **MARCH 6—LSP Twin Cities Open House**, Minneapolis, Minn. (see page 6)

→ **MARCH 7—Winona Local Foods Forum & Expo**, Winona, Minn.; Contact: Caroline van Schaik, LSP, 507-523-3366; caroline@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **MARCH 7—Beekeeping basics workshop**, Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn.;

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

→ **MARCH 7—Basics of fruit production workshop**, Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn.; Contact: 763-694-2001; www.threeriversparkdistrict.org/parks/galewoods.cfm

→ **MARCH 7-8—Beekeeping in Northern Climates Short Course**, St. Paul, Minn.; Contact: www.extension.umn.edu/honeybees/; 612-624-4798

→ **MARCH 8—Slow Food MN event featuring MPR's Lynne Rossetto Kasper**, Minneapolis, Minn. (see page 23)

→ **MARCH 14—Farm Business Time Management Workshop with Chris Blanchard**, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Rochester, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, LSP, 507-523-3366; parker@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **MARCH 14—South Central SFA of Minn. Annual Meeting**, Clarks Grove, Minn.; Contact: Katy Wortel, enviros@hickorytech.net

→ **MARCH 16—Entry Deadline for SFA Youth Sustainability Writing Competition**; (see page 30)

→ **MARCH 28—2009 Community Garden Spring Resource Fair**, Saint Paul, Minn.; Contact: www.gardenworksmn.org; 612-492-8964

→ **MARCH 28—Get started vegetable gardening workshop**, Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn.; Contact: 763-694-2001; www.threeriversparkdistrict.org/parks/galewoods.cfm

→ **SPRING—LSP's Farm Beginnings 2009 public on-farm educational events begin** (see page 19)

→ **APRIL 4—SFA Youth Sustainability Confab**, Gustavus Adolphus College, Saint Peter, Minn.; Contact: SFA, www.sfa-mn.org; 866-760-8732

→ **APRIL 6-11—National Public Health**

Week Film Festival, featuring *King Corn & Flow*, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: Michelle Lian-Anderson, 612-626-5536; www.sph.umn.edu/filmfest09/home.html

→ **APRIL 11—Beekeeping basics workshop**, Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn.; Contact: 763-694-2001; www.threeriversparkdistrict.org/parks/galewoods.cfm

→ **APRIL 16-17—3rd Annual Home Grown Economy Conference: Equipping You to Build Community-based Food Systems**, Southwest State University, Marshall, Minn.; Contact: Terry VanDerPol, LSP, 320-269-2105, tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org

→ **APRIL 25—Seward Co-op CSA Fair, Minneapolis, Minn.**; Contact: www.seward.coop; 612-338-2465

→ **APRIL 25—Backyard chicken raising workshop**, Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, Minn.; Contact: 763-694-2001; www.threeriversparkdistrict.org/parks/galewoods.cfm

→ **MAY 2-3—Community Food & Farm Fest**, Minn. State Fairgrounds (see page 6)

→ **AUG. 22—4th Annual Minnesota Garlic Festival**, Wright County Fairgrounds, Howard Lake, Minn.; Contact: www.sfa-mn.org/garlicfest; 320-543-3394

→ **AUG. 26—Registration deadline for 2009-2010 session of LSP's Farm Beginnings program** (see page 19)

→ **SEPT. 1—Minnesota Cooks Event**, Minn. State Fair, Contact: Food Alliance Midwest, 651-209-3382; www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_mwfa.html

→ **OCT. 24—LSP's Farm Beginnings classes begin in River Falls, Wis.** (see page 19)

→ **NOV. 7—LSP's Farm Beginnings classes begin in Spicer, Minn.** (see page 19)

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