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Land Stewardship Project Board of Directors Policy Statement on Climate Change, Agriculture & Energy

To foster an ethic of stewardship for America's farmland, the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) advances regenerative farming and food systems that protect soil, water and wildlife resources; promote fairness and economic opportunities for family farms and rural communities; and provide safe and healthful food for all people. However, dangerously high levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which are continuing to rise, seriously threaten future progress.

We have reviewed published literature in LSP's "Climate Change, Farming, Food and Energy White Paper" (https://landstewardshipproject.org/repository/1/2534/climate_change_white_paper_4_20_18.pdf). The white paper is background for this statement. Additionally, in October 2017 LSP published *Soil Health, Water and Climate Change: A Pocket Guide to What You Need to Know* (<https://landstewardshipproject.org/smartsoil>), which connects real-life farming systems and practices that build soil health with mitigating climate change and improving water quality. From discussions with LSP members and our literature review, we conclude that farmers and society as a whole can and must act to limit the damaging impacts of climate change. There are real solutions that regenerative agriculture offers, and doing so will create positive opportunities for farmers and rural communities.

Whereas:

- Farmers readily acknowledge that weather is changing;
- Fossil fuel use, farming without living roots in the ground year-round, and excessive tillage all accelerate buildup of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, resulting in climate change;
- Risks from increased extreme weather events, temperature and changes in humidity that result from climate change are being seen in the Upper Midwest and across the globe, with impacts that include increased erosion from more intense storms, more frequent droughts, flooding of low lying communities, dangerously severe storms, outbreaks of diseases and pests, and loss of species diversity;
- In addition to directly impacting farm families in the Upper Midwest, climate change will disproportionately affect vulnerable people without the financial means to protect themselves, people of color, and indigenous peoples in rural and urban areas of the region, the nation and beyond;
- Our food system is fragile and can only be as stable as the earth's ecosystems, our climate and the human societies on which we are interdependent;
- Climate change and inequity both result from economic and political systems that reward excessive corporate profits enabled by government policies that make the public pay for the social and ecological costs,

while economic gains are privatized; and

- Innovative farmers are showing that not only can they both reduce carbon emissions and remove excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, but with those same soil health strategies they can build into their farm system resilience to the extreme weather and other disruptions from climate change. Continuous living cover is required from diverse plants above the ground and their well-developed, year-round living root structures below ground, along with decreased tillage.

We consequently understand that improved soil health is vital for dealing with climate change. Soil health regenerates the biological activity in the soil and increases organic matter, leading to deeper carbon storage in the soil. Systems that build soil health can also reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. Co-benefits are just as important and include healthful food for people to eat, more wildlife and pollinator habitat, cleaner water, and diversified income sources for farmers if markets are developed.

However, soil health is not a silver bullet. Businesses, cities and governments must do more to reduce reliance on fossil fuels by adapting low carbon energy use through conservation, improved efficiency and renewable energy. These efforts have begun, but much more is needed.

To create climate-friendly forms of agriculture and energy production, fundamental structural changes are needed in policy and markets, along with practical changes on the land. One of those changes is true cost accounting that includes the associated costs of production, such as greenhouse gas emissions, environmental degradation and social injustice, that are now born by the public.

Therefore, we urge LSP's programs to directly address the issue of climate change, its causes, and what can and must be done to stabilize our climate, adapt to impacts, store carbon through soil health and substantially reduce societal greenhouse gas emissions. We must also speak out about required structural changes in our economic systems which are needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These same systems must also be restructured to provide economic fairness and racial equity.

We urge LSP to speak out emphatically, in ways we have not previously done. We must use this opportunity to advance food and farming systems in society that provide solutions to the escalating costs of climate change and that address the unfairness of our current system, thereby helping to lead the way towards a society based on stewardship, sustainability, racial equity and a shared prosperity.

— Land Stewardship project board of directors, February 2018