

# *The Land Stewardship*



LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

*36 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together*

## *Letter*

Volume 36

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Number 3, 2018



*Photo by Molly DeVore*

A new book explores how “wildly successful farmers” are refusing to split ag from ecology (page 26).



- Binding a Community Together—*
- Keeping Factory Farms Accountable—*
- Talking About Minnesota’s Rural Future —*
- What’s Next for the Local Foods Market?—*
- Stocking Soil’s Refrigerator—*
- Transitioning to the Farmer Next Door—*
- It’s Back: ‘Let’s Stop Treating Our Soil Like Dirt’—*



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

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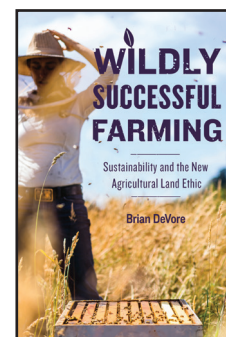
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# The Community Thresher

## *The Real Power Fueling the Viability of Family Farms*

*By Tony Schultz*

I was born on this farm. My grandfather started farming here in the 1940s. When I was growing up, we had a 50-cow conventional dairy, like so many other farms in the state at the time, including many of our neighbors. We had five neighbors on this road, including my grandparents. Two others — Linus Risch and Lenny Becker — were 50-cow dairy farmers like ourselves. Our farms were very similar in scale and acreage but all slightly distinct with our own little honed skills, priorities and innovations. We observed each other and helped one another.

Our biggest tractor was a Deutz 8006, an 80-horsepower machine that did the plowing, tillage, chopping and other heavy lifting. My dad liked the Deutz for its utility and fuel efficiency. With precise German engineering and the oil crisis-inspired innovation of the air-cooled engine, you could do all the work of a John Deere or a Ford with two-thirds the fuel. It was also more affordable. Some people call it a poor man's John Deere. I call it a smart man's John Deere. A mile down the road, Linus Risch had a big red International 966 that was the 80-four horsepower beast of his farm. It was a more common tractor on the American landscape. With its big rear tires and a powerful axle, it had a lot of torque and snort. Lenny had a 90-horsepower Ford.

When it came time to pump our manure pits, we would hire a local service to come around with their tankers and do the spreading in one clean day. The manure spreading service snorted into the yard with 1066 Internationals or maybe even a 1466, which seemed like the biggest tractors around those days. To make the job more efficient and be on the scene to make sure the manure was put where he wanted it, my dad joined the spreading. Another neighbor, Tony Eckert, had his own smaller manure tanker three miles away. Tony would let us use the tanker, which we would run with our Big Deutz. And Linus would let us use his big red International. His was not quite as big as

the 1066s, but big enough to run the pump with a six-inch pipe that filled the tankers with liquid manure, lickety-shit. Linus' son, Kenny, and Tony's son, Nathan, were some of my boyhood friends.

That was my job. It was so interesting and empowering to be on another big tractor and see its features and how it worked. When Linus, or Lenny, or Tony needed to pump their pits, our Big Deutz went down the road to run the pump and save them



**Tony Schultz, along with his father Ed, on Stoney Acres Farm. (Photo Courtesy of Tony Schultz)**

some of the cost of the service and get the job done that much faster. If a tractor went down or was having issues on one farm, the neighbor only had to come in the yard with a little small talk and a mild look of concern on their face and our tractor would be there to get their hay made. The Big Deutz always came back with a full tank of gas.

It was a community, one based on a common experience that cut across political and religious lines and reinforced itself with cooperation, empathy and mutual support. In the 1920s, 30s and 40s my grandparents operated their 20- or 30-cow dairy with an even greater degree of cooperation. The neighborhood had but one or two tractors, or one plow, or one thresher (combine). Come harvest time, the thresher would move around the neighborhood and a crew of able-bodied men and boys would bring the neighborhood harvest in together.

As technological regimes continued to scale up and capitalist consolidation sticks its tentacles into every crevice of every market on the planet, the farm crisis deepened.

Farms were lost and communities like ours have thinned and unraveled quite a bit. We sold our cows and rented the land. Linus and Lenny sold their farms to Amish farmers, one of which recently bailed-out and sold out to the biggest farmer around, who just cash crops the land.

Needless to say, I have a bitter populist taste in my mouth when it comes to the domination of consolidation and the motives of an ever-increasing scale of technology. I don't always think it is motivated by the lessening of human toil and suffering. I loved the farm, and the experience of the community thresher was one of the inspirations for that love.

My parents hung onto the farm, and I came back to it in 2006 and eventually started a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation. They are and continue to be the main source of support I have.

And when I need to take some beef to the butcher, Tony Eckert is there with his cattle trailer and my plain-clothed neighbor, Andrew Berry, lets me use his manure spreader every spring to haul out my bedding pack of manure. He is not interested in my rusty old Deutz, but I always give him a ham.

It would not be possible to have this farm without intergenerational and community support.

In 2013, we had just got "Pizza on the Farm" going and were a stop on a Slow Food Marathon County tour of local farms. A young couple came to the farm to check it out. I sat down to have a glass of wine with them and they told me that they were originally from Wausau, were moving back to the area and wanted to start a CSA operation. Over the next couple of months, we got to know Stacey and Tenzin Botsford and recruited them to buy land for their farm nearby. Tenzin asked me, "Don't you think it would be awkward to have two farms of a very similar nature so close together?" I responded, "Two farms; one set of equipment. Endless opportunities for cooperation and collaboration!"

My mom and dad, personally aware of the potential of local food and seeing the promise in this young couple, sold them 40 acres. Red Door Family Farm was born and the "community thresher" was reincarnated. They are more than neighbors, more than fellow farmers—they are some of our best friends. We borrow and lend equipment, commiserate and learn from each other's challenges, help out with projects, observe each other's innovations, and share in each other's joys.

My daughter Maple is six months

**Thresher, see page 4...**

younger than their daughter Leona, and 18 months older than their daughter Iris. "We're BFFs!" Maple exclaims. They are just a stroll through the woods from each other's company.

When Red Door's hoop houses blew down in heavy winds, we helped mobilize the cleanup and drove posts for the new ones. They were there for us through the pain and messiness of a divorce. When they needed to buy their farm's tractor, they

asked us for input. It just so happened I found an 8006 Deutz for sale on Craigslist. The Big Deutz was coming home, this time with four-wheel-drive and a cab.

Last night, after walking through the woods to watch our kids play and debrief about our CSA boxes over a bottle of wine, Stacy and Tenzin lamented that their Deutz had finally died this past spring after 14,000 hours. I might miss it more than they do, as I drove it half the time. When they expressed concern that they didn't have a production tractor, I simply said, "We have tractors." When I whined about the pace of my cu-

cumbers in the field, they sent me home with six bushels of theirs for our CSA box. I was again reminded of the value of cooperation, the meaning of friendship, and the power of the Community Thresher. The family farm thrives because of it. □

*Land Stewardship Project member Tony Schultz's Stoney Acres Farm (<http://stoneyacresfarm.net>), a CSA and "Pizza Farm" operation, is in north-central Wisconsin's Marathon County.*

## Myth Buster Box

### An Ongoing Series on Ag Myths & Ways of Deflating Them

#### → Myth: Food Nutrition Programs Mostly Benefit Lazy Welfare Cheats

##### → Fact

In September, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue marched out a popular trope: federal food assistance programs are being horrendously abused by people too lazy to work for a living. Speaking before the National Farmers Union, Perdue said, "People who want to stay on food stamps indefinitely I think are saying to me, 'I don't really want a job, I just want you to take care of me.' And the generosity and the compassion of the American people has a limit."

The timing of Perdue's comment wasn't coincidental: the nation's most significant food assistance program was at the center of a major fight over passage of a new Farm Bill. Called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, it currently makes up 70 percent of Farm Bill spending. Formerly known as Food Stamps, SNAP provides financial resources for low-income people so they can purchase food, and over the years has become a major way for families to keep themselves fed during tough times. This type of food assistance program has existed in various forms since the 1930s.

Critics of SNAP have been particularly willing to use misinformation to attack the program, characterizing it as an expensive handout to anyone who comes in the door, allowing them to buy alcohol, drugs and junk food.

The 2014 Farm Bill officially expired at the end of September as members of Congress grappled over trying to reconcile the

House and Senate versions of its replacement. As of this writing, the basic elements of the 2014 law remain in place, and it's not clear if we will have a new Farm Bill before 2019. A major sticking point preventing the Farm Bill conferees from coming to an agreement centers around changes the House version of the legislation would make to SNAP.

Under that version, nearly two million participating households would be stripped of their SNAP benefits as a result of a proposal to reformulate income and expense criteria, according to the nonpartisan Mathematica Policy Research. Among those households, 34 percent include seniors, 23 percent children and 11 percent a person with a disability.

The House Farm Bill would also impose new work requirements on individuals who want to participate in SNAP. That more stringent work requirement would push another 1.2 million people out of the program, according to an analysis conducted by the Congressional Budget Office.

This comes at a time when 15 million households in the U.S. are considered "food insecure"—in other words they had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all the members of the household due to a lack of resources.

The recent attack on SNAP fits into a general narrative that there are millions of people freeloading off public assistance programs. Since the 1970s, stories of "welfare queens" who make a comfortable living by scamming the system have made the rounds in America. Most of those stories, which are often steeped in racism, have been debunked, but that hasn't

killed the narrative that our national red ink is flowing like a river through such programs.

The recent Farm Bill fight over SNAP highlights the need to set the record straight when it comes to this program. For one, SNAP already has a work requirement. Recipients younger than 50 and without children or a disability must work at least 80 hours per month to get benefits. It turns out more than half of SNAP households with at least one working-age, non-disabled adult work while receiving SNAP benefits. Because people often participate in SNAP when they are between jobs, work rates are higher over a longer time frame: More than 80 percent of SNAP households work in the year before or the year after receiving SNAP. Work rates are even higher for families with children: more than 60 percent work while receiving SNAP, and almost 90 percent work in the prior or subsequent year, according to Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

And being a SNAP recipient is not exactly a get-rich-quick scheme. The amount one can get through the program is based on the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan, which is an estimate of how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals for a household. The estimate is changed every year to keep pace with food prices. SNAP benefits cannot be used to purchase nonfood items, alcohol, tobacco or any food that will be eaten in the store.

In fiscal year 2017, the average SNAP

**Myth Buster, see page 5...**



### ...Myth Buster, from page 4

household received about \$254 per month, while the average recipient received about \$126. That latter figure averages out to around \$1.40 per meal. Estimates by Moody's Analytics showed that in 2009, for every \$1 increase in SNAP benefits redeemed that year (when the economy was in a recession), it generated \$1.70 in economic activity. Some of that activity is generated in surprising places. Each year SNAP participants spend roughly \$70 billion in benefits, and in 2017, more than \$22 million of that was spent at farmers' markets. Of 8,600 farmers' markets in the U.S., 7,377 are authorized to accept SNAP transactions, according to the USDA. In fact, the number of SNAP redemptions involving farmers' markets and direct-marketing farmers have climbed steadily over the past several years, according to the Farmers Market Coalition.

Research has shown that SNAP reduces food insecurity among at-risk children by 20 percent and improves their overall health by 35 percent. Forty-four percent of SNAP participants are children under the age of 18, and it turns out children in SNAP households are not only healthier, but are more likely to graduate from high school, when compared to at-risk children who are not enrolled in SNAP.

And here's an inconvenient truth that Secretary Perdue might want to keep in mind: of the top 100 counties ranked by the share of the population that participates in SNAP, 85 are rural, according to an analysis of 2015 Census data conducted by the *Daily Yonder* news website. In 2015, 16 percent of rural counties used SNAP, as opposed to 13.5 percent in metropolitan ones. It should be noted that these are participation rates, not pure numbers. Overall, more than 37 million metropolitan residents used SNAP in 2015, as opposed to some 7 million rural residents; there are simply more people living in metropolitan areas. Overall, of the 44 million SNAP recipients in this country, 36 percent are white, 25 percent African-American, 27 percent are Latino, 3 percent Asian and 1 percent Native American, according to the USDA.

When Sonny Perdue vilifies SNAP recipients, he may want to keep in mind he is attacking the very people his position as Secretary of Agriculture is supposed to serve: farmers. As the current economic crisis raging across rural America deepens, SNAP is becoming even more critical to farmers and other rural residents.

Perhaps the biggest irony of the push to deny poor people food through the Farm Bill

is the fact that the same Congress pushing for SNAP's tighter restrictions is somehow unwilling to place even the most basic payment limits on farm subsidies, something the Land Stewardship Project and other groups have long called for. One loophole in the current Farm Bill allows people who don't work on farms to get substantial tax-funded subsidies. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, each person who qualifies

**Work participation in the year after starting to receive SNAP among households that worked in the prior year.** Source: *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, Feb. 14, 2018, [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)



through this loophole can get up to \$125,000 in subsidies each year; a spouse automatically qualifies for another \$125,000 in subsidies. A payment limit amendment authored by Iowa's Chuck Grassley passed with bipartisan support in the Senate. It remains to be seen what its fate will be when the conference committee finally produces the new agriculture law.

"How can anyone reconcile tightening eligibility for food stamps for the less fortunate

while turning a blind eye to the loopholes that millionaires exploit?" Grassley wrote in a blog for *The Hill* newspaper.

In a sense, the House's willingness to further undermine SNAP parallels its efforts to gut another Farm Bill program that provides public goods, in this case environmental benefits such as clean water, wildlife habitat and healthy soil. The House version of the Farm Bill basically eliminates the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the biggest conservation program in the Farm Bill and arguably the most effective. CSP is a working lands conservation program, and has been used by thousands of farmers to put in place practices that benefit the land. But, like SNAP, CSP does not benefit large-sale corporate agribusiness.

Attacking CSP and SNAP is short-sighted, and not just because of the benefits they provide in terms of greater food and land security. Both programs are ways to get bipartisan support from members of Congress who do not represent farming areas and so may not see the benefit of, for example, expanding crop insurance. But they may see the benefits of legislation that supports our society's most vulnerable, as well as the environment.

Continuing to shovel Farm Bill resources to big agribusinesses is a handout to entities that seem to have no problem with "welfare," as long as the word "corporate" is attached to it.

### More Information

- The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report, "Chart Book: SNAP Helps Struggling Families Put Food on the Table," is at [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org).

- *The Daily Yonder's* "The Geography of Food Stamps" report is at [www.dailyyonder.com](http://www.dailyyonder.com).

- The Congressional Budget Office ([www.cbo.gov](http://www.cbo.gov)) has developed a cost estimate of the House version of the 2018 Farm Bill called, "H.R. 2 Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018."

- The Land Stewardship Project's "Our Farm Bill" priority paper for the 2018 Farm Bill is on the Federal Farm Policy page at <https://landstewardshipproject.org>.

### More Myth Busters

More Land Stewardship Project *Myth Busters* on a variety of topics are available at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/about/libraryresources/mythbusters>. Paper copies are available by contacting Brian DeVore at 612-722-6377 or [bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org).



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## LSP News

# New Staff Join the LSP Team

**Annelie Livingston-Anderson** has joined the staff of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program. Livingston-Anderson has a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's degree in integrated biosciences from University of Minnesota-Duluth. She has worked as an adjunct professor at the university, as well as a project coordinator and manager at the Women's Environmental Institute's Amador Hill Farm, Mashkiikii Giti-gan. She also managed the SARE Farmer-Rancher grant for the Lake Pepin Local Food Program.



**Annelie Livingston-Anderson**

Livingston-Anderson is a graduate of LSP's Journeyperson Course, and since 2015 she and her husband Kevin have owned and operated Good Turn Farm, a certified organic vegetable operation near Stockholm, Wis.

At LSP, Livingston-Anderson is facilitating the Farm Beginnings course. She can be contacted at 507-523-3366 or [annelie@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:annelie@landstewardshipproject.org).

**Barbara Sogn-Frank** has joined LSP's Policy and Organizing team. Sogn-Frank has a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Minnesota and did graduate work in secondary education at the University of Sioux Falls. She has worked as an account executive for a communications arts firm, a sales and marketing manager for a fitness center,



**Barbara Sogn-Frank**

an instructor at St. Paul Public Schools and Saint Paul Academy and an "inclusion companion" for the Saint Paul Parks and

Recreation Department.

For several years, Sogn-Frank volunteered as a member and executive board officer with Dakota Rural Action, an LSP ally. At LSP, she is involved in organizing centered around helping communities fight factory farms. Sogn-Frank can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or [bsognfrank@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bsognfrank@landstewardshipproject.org).

**Alex Romano** recently joined the staff of LSP's Bridge to Soil Health Program. Romano has a bachelor's degree in anthropology and interdisciplinary studies from Iowa State University and a master's degree in natural science and environmental education from Hamline University.

She has worked as a learning options instructor, an urban environmental educator at Bdote Learning Center and a naturalist at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. Romano also served as a volunteer worker for Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms.

At LSP, Romano is working with farmer-members of the Soil Health Network who are seeking to adopt innovative production methods. She can be contacted at 507-523-3366 or [aromano@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:aromano@landstewardshipproject.org).



**Alex Romano**

**Liana Nichols** is the Bridge to Soil Health's newest organizer. Nichols has a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University in zoology, and also studied at Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador.



**Liana Nichols**

She has served as a lab manager and researcher, and has worked on a grass-based livestock farm in California and a dairy operation in Austria, as well as a crop farm in Montana and a vegetable enterprise in Minnesota.

At LSP, Nichols is working with farmer-

members of the Soil Health Network to develop profitable, soil-friendly grazing systems. She can be reached at 507-523-3366 or [lnichols@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lnichols@landstewardshipproject.org).

**Laura Schreiber** has been serving an internship with the Land Stewardship Project's Policy and Organizing Program. Schreiber is a senior at the University of Minnesota double majoring in public relations and urban studies, with minors in leadership and sustainability.

She previously worked on a project in Bangalore, India, that focused on reducing food waste, and was a community affairs intern for TCF Bank. Schreiber also worked at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency researching the impacts of anaerobic digestion and biofuels versus composting.



**Laura Schreiber**

Schreiber's LSP internship is through the U of M's Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA), and she is working with LSP organizers to research the local foods landscape in Minnesota and help identify what policies or regulations can be pursued that will encourage and ease the selling, distribution, marketing and processing of local food (*see page 15*). □

## Peck, Henderson Join LSP Board

**Linda Peck** and **Rachel Henderson** have joined the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors.

**Peck** is a wildlife biologist and environmental educator. She lives near Saint Cloud, Minn., and has worked as a licensed master wildlife rehabilitator, treating as many as 250 injured animals a year. In 2006, she and her husband John, who is a retired St. Cloud State University biology professor, donated 200 acres for a park in Stearns County.

**Henderson** is a graduate of LSP's Farm Beginnings course. She and her husband Anton Ptak own and operate Mary Dirty Face Farm, a fruit operation in western Wisconsin's Dunn County. She recently participated in LSP's Racial Justice Cohort (*see the No. 1, 2018, Land Stewardship Letter*).

Peck and Henderson replace Vince Ready and Juliet Tomkins, who recently concluded their service on the board. □



# Journalists Get the Scoop on Soil Health

A group of 18 journalists from across the U.S. and Canada got a firsthand look at the power of healthy soil during a tour of the Duane and Susie Hager dairy farm in southeastern Minnesota this summer.

In a heavy downpour, Duane took the journalists out to his cornfields and pastures and showed how his use of managed rotational grazing, cover crops and diverse rotations is building the kind of soil that can manage water and make it available for later in the growing season. While precipitation pooled on the surface of other fields in the region, the Hagers' soil was soaking it up.

The journalists were at the farm as part of an Institute for Journalism & Natural Resources ([www.ijnr.org/upper-mississippi](http://www.ijnr.org/upper-mississippi)) tour of the Upper Mississippi Valley. During their stops in Minnesota, the journalists also heard from LSP staff and members on issues related to farm policy and frac sand mining. (LSP Photo) □



## 2018 Potluck Cookout

Over 200 Land Stewardship Project members, friends and allies turned out for the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Land Stewardship Project Potluck Cookout in July. The cookout, which was held in the yard at LSP's Twin Cities office, featured music by the Brass Messengers, a silent auction and a pie raffle, as well as local food, beer and cider.

For more information on volunteering to help with events like this, see page 31. (LSP Photo) □



## Farm Beginnings Field Day: Getting Started on Rented Land

Devon and Ross Ballinger of Basic Place Farm in southeastern Minnesota hosted a Farm Beginnings field day in June. They provided a tour of their vegetable operation and discussed how they developed their farm business on rented land while juggling the demands of off-farm work and a growing family.

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program is a 12-month course that provides training and hands-on learning opportunities in the form of classroom sessions and access to an extensive farmer network. Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the region. On-farm Farm Beginnings field days and workshops cover a variety of topics, including production practices, marketing, land transition and business management.

For more on the 2019-2020 Farm Beginnings course, as well as the one-day Farm Dreams class, see page 25. (LSP Photo) □





## LSP Members Call for Extensive Environmental Reviews of Factory Farms

**L**and Stewardship Project members have been involved in a pair of factory farm fights this fall. In both cases, the need for an extensive environmental study of these controversial proposals has become evident. As this *Land Stewardship Letter* went to press, this is where both issues stood:

### Mega-Dairy Poses Major Risks

On Oct. 16, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) held a public information forum regarding Daley Farms in southeastern Minnesota's Winona County and the Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) which is part of the operation's current permit application approval process. Daley Farms wants to more than double its dairy herd from 1,728 cows and calves to 4,628 total. This is an increase from 2,275 to 5,968 animal units, the measurement used by the MPCA and other state agencies to equalize manure output from different animals. This expansion would make it the largest livestock feedlot in southeastern Minnesota, and among the largest in the state.

LSP members made up over 60 percent of the comments after the presentation—and their comments were powerful. They made it clear we need an extensive environmental study, called an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

LSP members had pushed MPCA Commissioner John Linc Stine to extend the public comment period to Nov. 30; he ended up extending it to Nov. 15. A last-minute attempt by the Minnesota AgriGrowth Council and several commodity groups to stop the extension was struck down by a Ramsey County District Court judge.

Local rural residents have been expressing numerous concerns about this expansion. For example, this project would annually use 92 million gallons of water. In comparison, the nearby city of Lewiston (pop. 1,564) uses 33.5 million gallons of water per year. What impact will this major use of water have on the aquifer? In addition, the

proposal will annually produce 46 million gallons of manure and wastewater in an area where karst geology channels contaminants from surface water deep into the ground. Lewiston's municipal sewage lagoon disappeared into a sinkhole in 1991. What if one of the multi-million gallon lagoons at this project disappears into a sinkhole?

Well testing conducted by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in 2016 showed that 46.3 percent of the wells tested in the local township exceeded the safe drinking water standard for nitrates. Finally, citizens



**LSP member and hog farmer Dayna Burtress (holding microphone) spoke during a press conference at the MPCA's headquarters in Saint Paul, Minn., this summer. Burtress, along with other members of LSP and Responsible Ag in Karst Country, traveled to the MPCA to call for an EIS on a factory hog farm proposed for their community. (LSP Photo)**

are asking why the MPCA is doing an EAW on the Daleys' proposed expansion when it is technically not allowed under the current Winona County Ordinances. Winona County's ordinance is clear: no feedlots are allowed over 1,500 animal units. (The Daleys' operation was over the 1,500-animal unit cap at the time the ordinance was adopted and so was "grandfathered in." This means it could continue but could not expand.)

The 1,500-animal unit cap was passed in 1998. This cap acknowledges the reality that, in karst country, there is a limit to how many animals can be packed into one location and still protect water and air quality, as well as human health.

### EIS a Legal Mandate

The legal mandate for ordering an EIS for a controversial hog operation in southeastern Minnesota's Fillmore County has been met, according to a thorough analysis of the public record recently completed by LSP and Responsible Ag in Karst Country (RAKC). This analysis includes over 770 comments submitted as part of the Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) completed for the proposed Catalpa, LLC 4,980-head (1,992 animal units) factory hog farm. The proposed facility would annually generate 7.3 million gallons of liquid manure while using 8.8 million gallons of the area's groundwater. The proposed location is in southeastern Minnesota's vulnerable karst country. The decision on whether to order an EIS lies with the MPCA's Stine.

During the recently completed MPCA public comment period on Catalpa's EAW, of the 771 comments submitted, 760

expressed concern about the proposal. More than 580 commenters called for an EIS.

Minnesota law states that, "An EIS shall be ordered for projects that have the potential for significant environmental effects." Members of LSP and RAKC have sent this analysis to Governor Mark Dayton and MPCA Commissioner Stine. Over 50 local residents met with Dayton on July 3 regarding the proposed factory farm and the need for an EIS. The letter sent to the Governor and Commissioner Stine details the chief reasons the state standard for an EIS has been exceeded, including the fact that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has expressed deep concerns about the potential environmental effects. In addition, research by Minnesota's leading karst expert, Dr. Calvin Alexander, led him to call for an EIS.

On Sept. 5, the MPCA announced its third delay on the decision to order an EIS. The MPCA's repeated delays indicate that the agency acknowledges there is the "potential for significant environmental effects."

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### More Information

For more information on these proposals and LSP's factory farm organizing work in general, contact Barb Sogn-Frank at 612-722-6377 or [bsognfrank@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bsognfrank@landstewardshipproject.org). More information is also available on the **Stopping Factory Farms** page at <https://landstewardshipproject.org>. □



# Healthy Communities, Healthy Land, Healthy Healthcare

## *LSP Petition Delivers a Bold Message to the Governor: Put People First*

*Johanna Rupprecht & Paul Sobocinski*

The Land Stewardship Project wants more farmers stewarding the land; strong, vibrant, healthy communities; and a democracy where directly-affected people have a say over decisions that impact their lives. We believe we're each stronger when we all have the chance to prosper, and that the well-being of people and the land are connected.

But one way we see this vision being blocked, these values violated, is in the excessive power and control major corporations have over our economy and democracy. There is no clearer example of this than in our healthcare system.

For many, insurance companies provide no plans with meaningful, affordable coverage. Rural hospitals and clinics run by major hospital systems are being closed or seeing essential services taken away.

People can't fully contribute to our communities, because choices about the work we do must be based on the need to acquire healthcare coverage. Care of the land suffers because farmers must work off-farm jobs or pay exorbitant amounts of money for healthcare, leaving them without time, energy and resources to invest in stewardship.

Solving a crisis like this requires people coming together, uniting around clear demands for real change, and building power to achieve them. That's why this fall LSP launched a petition drive calling on Minnesota's new Governor to take concrete steps to address the rural healthcare crisis. Instead



**LSP members Al Kruse (left) and James Kanne participated in a march calling for healthcare reform this summer. (Photo by Paul Sobocinski)**

of the dominant story we too often hear about healthcare — that we're each on our own and not having affordable, accessible care is a personal failure — we will lift up the truth that this is a problem we can only solve together.

LSP believes that addressing the rural healthcare crisis must be a priority for Governor-elect Tim Walz. As Minnesotans, we value looking out for each other and communities where everyone can live

a good life. But in our rural communities, we are experiencing unaffordable health insurance premiums and deductibles, while hospitals and clinics are closed, and services cut. At the same time, we see major hospital systems and insurance companies posting large profits. Our current healthcare system is not making sure everyone can get the care they need.

This petition, which was signed by over 2,500 Minnesotans and delivered to the state Capitol in Saint Paul Nov. 13, calls for bold, real solutions that include:

→ **A moratorium on the closing of rural hospitals or clinics.** When hospitals and clinics close, rural communities suffer.

→ **Establishing a people-centered Rural Healthcare Access Taskforce.** The Governor must appoint a taskforce of rural Minnesotans to create a plan of action to ensure that rural communities have meaningful healthcare.

→ **Making MinnesotaCare available as an option for all Minnesotans so that everyone can have a healthcare plan available to them.**

For details on LSP's work to take bold action on creating an affordable, quality healthcare system, give us a call or check out our **Affordable Healthcare for All** web page at <https://landstewardshipproject.org>. □

*Johanna Rupprecht (jrupprecht@landstewardshipproject.org, 507-523-3366) and Paul Sobocinski (sobopaul@landstewardshipproject.org, 507-342-2323) are LSP healthcare organizers.*

## New Farm Bill On Hold

Roughly every five years, a new federal Farm Bill is created, and the current law expired at the end of September. Despite working on a new Farm Bill for more than a year, Congress was unable to pass legislation that would replace the current law before the expiration. A conference committee has been working the past few months to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the 2018 Farm Bill.

At this writing, it is unclear if that will happen before the end of the year. Most Farm Bill programs are continuing to function until the end of the year, yet many initiatives Land Stewardship Project members support, like conservation and beginning farmer programs, will be unable to enroll

new contracts or give out new grants.

While both versions of the proposed Farm Bill fall far short of what LSP believes is required to support both the people and the land, we have been advocating for lawmakers to pass the Senate version of the Farm Bill as a small step forward. Unlike the House version, the Senate version maintains the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), a major priority for LSP and our allies.

If CSP is eliminated, Minnesota would lose \$800 million in federal conservation funding over the next 10 years. This would be a huge step back in our efforts to support our farmers in building healthy soil, cleaning up our water, and protecting wildlife.

But we have time to protect this critical program. Minnesota U.S. Representative Collin Peterson still has great sway over the future of the program. Even if you have already called, he needs to hear from you again. Rep. Peterson, as a leader of the conference committee, will be a critical voice deciding the future of this program.

To make your voice heard, check out LSP's action alert at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/advocacy/#/59>, or call Rep. Peterson's office at 202-225-2165.

LSP federal policy organizer Ben Anderson can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or [banderson@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:banderson@landstewardshipproject.org). LSP federal policy organizer Tom Nuessmeier is at 507-995-3541 or [tomn@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:tomn@landstewardshipproject.org). □

# Let's Talk About Our Minnesota Future

## *LSP Members Share Their Visions for Rural Communities*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Land Stewardship Project recently completed a series of podcasts featuring members who are involved in "Our Minnesota Future," a statewide initiative LSP helped launch last year. The guiding principle of Our Minnesota Future is that regular people, and organizations representing the interests of these people, need a stronger voice in our government. Besides LSP, 21 people's organizations are part of this coalition, including faith and environmental groups, organizations that work in communities of color and immigrant communities, as well as labor unions and progressive organizations. Together, these groups seek to build people-centered governing power to address the critical issues communities face.

For this special podcast series, *Land Stewardship Letter* editor Brian DeVore traveled the state and talked to farmers and other rural residents about the challenges our communities face, and what they would like to see prioritized in public policy. On these two pages are brief excerpts of those podcast conversations. You can listen to the full interviews at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/organizingforchange/ourminnesotafuture>. There, you will also find a podcast (*episode 213*) where LSP executive director Mark Schultz discusses why an initiative like Our Minnesota Future is so key to LSP's work to reform our farm and food system. For more information on the Our Minnesota Future initiative and how you can get involved, contact Jonathan Maurer-Jones at 218-213-4008 or [jmaurer-jones@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:jmaurer-jones@landstewardshipproject.org). All 220 episodes of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast are at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast>. They are also available on iTunes and Stitcher.

### **Episode 214: Opening up New Markets for New Farmers**

Laura Frerichs, along with her husband Adam Cullip and sons Eli and William, raises organic vegetables on Loon Organics Farm near Hutchinson, roughly 70 miles west of the Twin Cities. Laura started farming in 2003 and she and Cullip launched Loon Organics in 2008. Over the years, they have helped numerous beginning farmers kick-start their own operations by giving them hands-on work experience.

*"There is an issue with markets. We need to develop more markets for local food outside of just the Twin Cities. Even in the Twin Cities, there's a feeling that local food markets are becoming saturated. So how do we open up new markets? Local market development can be affected by policy, by, for example, having schools and other institutions buying a portion of their food from local farms. That can be a goal or a mandate—there are a lot of different ways it could be done on a policy level.*

*"I hear from beginning farmers that healthcare is huge, and that's certainly been a challenge for our family. I feel if our situation were to change and we were to lose our MinnesotaCare, which we are on*

*right now, Adam or I would need to find an off-farm job with healthcare. I don't know if we could continue farming fulltime. Making it so farming can never be a fulltime enterprise is not what we want Minnesota's rural future to look like."*

### **Episode 215: Reversing the Brain Drain**

After graduating from college and taking LSP's Farm Beginnings course, Jenna Sandoe and her husband Alex moved to Litchfield, a community of around 6,600 people that lies west of Minnesota's Twin Cities. They chose this part of the state for numer-



**Laura Frerichs shows off her farm's innovative tomato production system near Hutchinson. (LSP Photo)**



**Jenna Sandoe and her daughter, Hattie, at their home in Litchfield. (LSP Photo)**

ous reasons, one of which is that it is home to established farming operations that are doing the kind of production and marketing the Sandoes would eventually like to undertake. They also like that the area has several viable small- and moderate-sized businesses that can provide off-farm income, as well as benefits such as healthcare coverage. Having such a potential source of employment is important to young people like the Sandoes as they save up money to eventually start their own farming enterprise. Alex works as a welder and Jenna works at the Litchfield Natural Food Co-op. Healthcare coverage is particularly important to the Sandoes these days, as Jenna recently gave birth to a daughter, Hattie.

*"I was surprised when we bought a house in Litchfield how many young people, and young families, are here. I didn't expect as many young people as I have met.*

*"I think one of the big barriers for people to move out here can be finding jobs, but I think if you're willing to get creative, or if you're possibly willing to start your own business, there are opportunities. One thing I really like about smaller communities is you can feel empowered to step up through the different organizations, or the different roles—that is just something I've experienced out here.*

*"Oftentimes small-scale farms are possibly more labor intensive and need more people than larger scale farms that rely more on equipment and machinery; that in itself provides more opportunities for people working on the land.*

*"If you look at the small-scale farms in the community, all of them are employing people outside of their families and bringing*

**Our Minnesota Future, see page 11...**



people to this community, and I think as we have more people doing that, it's definitely a viable way to develop opportunities, especially if we can get creative with markets."

### Episode 216: Put People First

John Fisher-Merritt, along with his wife Jane, helped pioneer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farming in the region. In 1988, the Fisher-Merritts started raising vegetables on a farm they bought near Wrenshall in northeastern Minnesota. By the early 1990s they were marketing their production through the CSA model, as well as wholesaling to a food co-op in nearby Duluth. The Fisher-Merritts are working to

people it would attract, and what kind of ideas people would come up with. And the idea that the emphasis should be on the welfare of the people of Minnesota, rather than the income of corporations, that attracted me. That only makes sense to me."

### Episode 217: Homegrown Economic Development

Sylvia Luetmer grew up on a farm near Alexandria in west-central Minnesota, and a few years ago she and her husband Joe became involved with a community coalition of producers and consumers. As a result of community conversations around the role local, sustainable food production can play in a healthy community, four years ago the coalition launched Local Harvest Market, a kind of online farmers' market that aggregates and distributes food for some 30 farmers in the Alexandria region.

"If you look at it from the larger food system and rural development standpoint, being able to use the resources that we have available to us on farmland to grow our own food can help solve some of the rural economic problems that we're seeing—I think that's a big part of the solution to

rural economic woes.

"There's a lot of pressure to be efficient and use the economies of scale for efficiency, but I just don't think you can forget that rural economies run on people being able to make a living where they live, and if we want to empty out all the rural spaces and send them to urban areas for opportunities, I think that's really problematic."

### Episode 218: We Need Diverse Communities

Soon after he graduated from college, Darrel Mosel, along with his wife Diane, began farming in southern Minnesota's Sibley County during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Over the years, they built up a 50-cow dairy herd and raised a diverse mix of crops, pasture and hay. Darrel is now in his mid-60s and Diane recently retired as a social worker. They are thinking about easing out of



Sylvia and Joe Luetmer in the Local Harvest warehouse near Alexandria. (LSP Photo)

agriculture and making room for the next generation. Darrel is also contemplating what his community looked like when he first started farming, and what it might look like in the future.

"We have a serious problem in that I just don't think there's a willingness to accept people of a different ethnic background, or a different racial background, in the rural part of our state. And that really worries me, because it would be no different a hundred years ago if you were Irish or Scandinavian or German or Polish or whatever. It shouldn't make any difference.

"Because today if you're black, Muslim, Somali, Latino or whatever you are, what's the difference? They're doing a lot of our work already, but we're not mixing culturally or socially—it's just not happening.

"The vast majority of people are not out-and-out prejudice, they're just not familiar with other cultures, other ways of life, when it comes to these different ethnic and racial groups. That's one area I think we need to work on, and we need policymakers to be leaders and role models on this issue." □



John Fisher-Merritt (left) and some of Food Farm's crew in the operation's packing shed near Wrenshall. (LSP Photo)

play an important role in the community that goes beyond just being a source of organic vegetables. They employ around half-a-dozen people during the growing season, and strive to pay a good wage.

Several years ago, one of the Fisher-Merritt's sons, Janaki, went off to college with the idea that farming wasn't in his future. But Janaki, who is now 41, has recently purchased Food Farm; John and Jane, who are in their early 70s, still help out on the operation.

"If people are going to be able to support local, sustainably-raised foods, we need better paying jobs, and for people to be able to make more money so they can afford good food. We need healthcare, I mean that's a huge thing. If young, aspiring farmers had healthcare, somebody wouldn't have to be working off the farm to provide healthcare for the family...That's such valid economic policy.

"...I've always had a great respect for what LSP is doing, and I was curious about Our Minnesota Future and what kind of



Darrel and Diane Mosel on their farm near Gaylord. (LSP Photo)



## Transferring Values into Campaigns

*LSP's Leadership Assembly Brings Members Together to Discuss Taking Bold Actions*

By Amanda Babcock

On a rainy Sunday in early October, 125 Land Stewardship Project members from across the state and across different areas of our work came together in Saint Peter, Minn., for a Leadership Assembly. Participants discussed ways to move our vision for rural Minnesota forward together in a powerful way and why LSP is uniquely positioned to address the challenges we face.

One of the organizers of the event, LSP board member Aleta Borrud, said, "The larger movement for change in Minnesota that we are a part of needs us, needs LSP, needs our voices. We have a unique ability to create connections within the wider communities in which we live, because we lead with values, not just issues. Values that speak deeply to what is in people's hearts and what people are thirsting to see come forward into our public discourse."

To move our vision forward, member-leaders engaged in one of four breakout sessions to advance or launch issue campaigns:

→ **Local Foods**—The local foods breakout came together to advance a bold vision of making Minnesota a national leader in farmers growing food for their communities and state. Most of the breakout was a member-led listening session where we heard what narratives and policies members want changed. After the discussion, members designed and launched a "listening campaign" (see page 15) to determine what local foods policies LSP will fight for.

→ **Healthcare**—LSP members are working to attain "healthcare for all," a system where everyone can get the care they need, close to home and when they need it, at an afford cost. This fall, members gathered signatures on a petition to Minnesota's Governor-elect Tim Walz, calling for concrete steps to address the rural healthcare crisis (see page 9).

→ **Soil Health**—The soil health breakout session discussed ideas for policy we can advance in Minnesota to encourage and support soil health practices that

family farms and rural communities, and see that existing factory farms are regulated (see page 8). Together, we explored next steps that need to be taken and our narrative around developing a sustainable agriculture with farmers and animals on the land employing regenerative practices and building local economies.

The Leadership Assembly was a criti-



Participants in the Leadership Assembly discussed ways to move LSP's vision for rural Minnesota forward together. (Photo by Amanda Babcock)

make a difference for farmers as well as the land, water and climate (see page 16). We will have conversations around Minnesota to gather further ideas and decide policies we can push at the state level.

→ **Stopping Factory Farms**—The factory farms breakout session set the groundwork for a statewide campaign to stop the growth of factory farms in Minnesota, expose the harm they inflict on

cal moment to gather and plan our next steps together. We have a new Governor and administration in Minnesota, and we must take bold action together to address the challenges we face and create the communities we want to live in. □

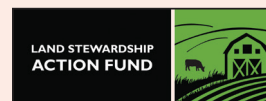
LSP state policy organizer Amanda Babcock can be contacted at 612-722-6377 or [ababcock@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:ababcock@landstewardshipproject.org).

### Land Stewardship Action Fund Launched

The Land Stewardship Project is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which, under tax law, limits our organizing work during election cycles, a time when we still need to be moving our vision and policies forward. A 501(c)(4) organization has more flexibility when it comes to engaging with candidates during election cycles. Because of this, the Land Stewardship Project board of directors determined that a 501(c)(4) organization would greatly increase the capacity of LSP to achieve its mission. In February, the board established a 501(c)(4) organization called the Land Stewardship Action Fund (LSAF).

LSAF's purpose is to powerfully move forward LSP's mission: stewardship of the land; a sustainable food and farming system; and resilient, prosperous and healthy rural communities. LSAF is able to engage with candidates for elected office directly, build relationships with them, and shape their understanding of and commitment to our issues. LSAF's funding is provided through a combination of grants and individual donations.

For more information on the Land Stewardship Action Fund, contact Mark Schultz at 612-722-6377 or Jonathan Maurer-Jones at 218-213-4008. More information is also available at <https://landstewardshipaction.org>.





# From Transactional to Transformational

## *Assessing the Lay of the Land When it Comes to Local Foods*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Has the shine worn off the local food movement? That's a question that's being asked as farmers who sell direct to consumers find themselves increasingly struggling to maintain consistent market options. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations are taking longer to fill out their membership rolls each year, some restaurants that had been committed to buying local food have reduced their purchases or gone out of business altogether, and schools and other institutions seem not as excited about serving local food in their cafeterias as they were in the past. Because the local food movement has the potential to play such a pivotal role in supporting the kind of farming that's good for the land and rural economies, the Land Stewardship Project is taking a serious look at some of its challenges and what, if anything, groups like LSP should be doing to address them.

Currently, LSP is in a fact-finding mode. As the story on page 15 describes, we will be holding a series of listening sessions this winter where we will seek input from members on how we can develop a vibrant, sustainable, local food system.

These listening sessions are just the latest in a series of initiatives LSP has undertaken to gather input on reforming our food production and distribution system. For example, Terry VanDerPol, who directs LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program, recently conducted a research project involving an online survey, one-to-one conversations and an analysis of the latest data related to local food markets. VanDerPol, who raises grass-fed beef in western Minnesota, recently sat down to talk to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about what this research turned up. To hear the whole conversation, check out **episode 219** of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1131>. By the way, you can check out other podcast conversations related to community based food systems on our **Talking Stewardship & Food** web page: <https://landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/talkingstewardshipfood>.

### What prompted this research?

"It started a little over two years ago with some questions brought to us by the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors, especially a couple of farmer-members who grow for local food systems, with the observation that the CSA model was really kind of hitting some walls. For a substantial number of CSA farmers, it had become a transactional model instead of a transformational model, where we're not thinking so much about how do we transform the food system, but just thinking this is a way to sell food.

"But they are also finding markets very much saturated, and wondering what role LSP might have, if any. And throughout this research process, we kept that part of the question in the foreground: do we have a role, first of all, in expanding the marketplace, making the marketplace for local foods more accessible, more profitable?

"I assembled a taskforce of five people who are all involved in either production, processing or distribution of local foods. We also did a member and supporter survey through social

media, e-mail and LSP's website.

"The questions were centered around whether LSP should be doing anything to address the lack of affordable markets, and if so, what strategies would you suggest? Of the 183 people who responded, it included people who were primarily consumers,

people who just grew food for their own family, people who direct-marketed, and also a number of commodity farmers, who are LSP supporters and have some thoughts on what could be done."

### What were some of the big messages that emerged from this research?

"The one that really rises to the top is that we need to grow the pie bigger. We're cutting the pie up into too small of pieces. We need more people demanding local food in more settings. That was stated over and over again, both in member meetings and personal visits, and that rose to the top on the survey as well.

"I was a little surprised that I heard from four or five people that said, 'No, LSP doesn't really have a role. Let the market take care of it.' One person said, 'Focus on holding back concentration in agriculture, pushing back on corporate control of agriculture, and the problems with the food system will take care of themselves.'

"I have a little sympathy for that point of view, but I'm not sure if it's going to happen magically. Thinking about who is in control of the food system we do have, that control is not going to be given up very readily.

"A lot of people talked about figuring out ways to help farmers become better marketers. There were a lot of suggestions around price reporting, for example—enough to lead me to believe it's a conversation that's going on out there. So maybe there could be a place online for farmers to go to where they could see this is what broccoli is selling for, this is what carrots are selling for, etc.

"Another thing that rose to the top pretty dramatically was it really takes a strong community to do this. We have to figure out a way to cooperate with each other, rather than compete with each other."

### Did any surprises come out of this research?

"I was a little surprised that multiple people mentioned price reporting. I do see where it would be a real useful tool in planning your marketing strategies. A number of people mentioned the need for more tools to do margin analysis, so you know what's working for you and what's not working for you, financially.

"One of the things that emerged from conversations with CSA farmers who have been in it for a long time was that they really, really want to be selling more of their food where they live. They're really tired of sending it all to the city, for reasons of transport-



**Workers pack vegetables on Threshing Table Farm, a CSA operation in Star Prairie, Wis. It's key that systems like CSA be "transformational" models, not just "transactional."**  
(Photo by Ilisa Ailts Photography, [www.ilisaailts.com](http://www.ilisaailts.com))

**Markets, see page 14...**

### ...Markets, from page 13

tation, but also for reasons of community.

"A lot of people talked about the idea of getting the local Economic Development Authorities to take local food seriously. Rather than re-opening a prison and bringing in immigrant detainees as so-called economic development, why not invest in making a local meat processing plant a USDA facility, or something like that?"

"But there are two conversations that I had that have been kind of haunting me for a long time. One was with a group of farmers in Wisconsin, who made the point that we're entering a time of pain in the countryside that we haven't seen since the 1980s. And when the economic crisis of the 80s hit, there was a great crying out about that pain in the countryside. And a couple of people I talked to made the point that we're going to be headed into a period that's just as bad, if not worse. But, they asked, there are so few of us to cry out anymore, is anybody even going to hear us?"

"Another farmer told me we're really doing a great job of preparing beginning farmers to go out and farm and most of them want to do some kind of direct-marketing farming. And then they're going out into what he described as broken, frayed, rural communities. That puts those beginning farmers in a situation where they have little chance of success.

"So it becomes more than just a matter of growing markets locally. It becomes a matter of rebuilding rural local communities. The suggestion was made in these conversations that maybe what LSP ought to be doing, and I don't take this lightly because it's an extremely difficult thing to even wrap your head around, is figuring out ways to help our members do community building.

"There's a whole host of issues that have to be addressed. For example, if we want to sell more food locally in rural areas, and if that family we are selling to is trying to hold onto three or four jobs, and you're asking them to come home and start supper with a CSA box and a whole chicken, that's just not going to happen. Farmers need to be aware of the limitations people are living with these days—economically, as well as how much time they have to prepare food."

### So eaters & farmers need to meet each other in the middle, so to speak?

"That was talked about quite a bit, both in our taskforce conversations and our interviews with farmers. How do we figure out how to help people go deeper beneath the surface of their environmental values, and make real changes in the way they lead their lives, with an understanding of why it matters? And certainly farmers have to be part of that conversation.

"One farmer told me how it's real easy if you don't want to see homelessness to walk right past a homeless person sitting on the sidewalk. And the same is true of a lot of environmental problems that are caused by a broken food and farming system. So that was talked about a lot — how can we figure



**Recently harvested onions at Prairie Drifter Farm in Litchfield, Minn. Farmers in the Upper Midwest have proven they can produce an abundance of food utilizing innovative methods. Now their operations need to be taken seriously as key engines of local economic development. (LSP Photo)**

out a way for both sides to do a little more compromising to come together?

"The other thing that was talked about was that there are farmers out there who are just really good at reading trends in direct-marketing. Is there any way we could be more helpful in getting a crystal ball and seeing what is the next trend? What's going to be happening in the food system?"

### What new local food/community food models are emerging?

"A piece that I ran across and is actually starting to develop in the Twin Cities area is the Good Food Purchasing Policy Program concept. Such programs have been developing through pretty strong grassroots alliance

es in a number of large cities, including Los Angeles, Oakland, New Orleans, New York and Chicago, to try to push institutional policy for buying local foods. So rather than just having a school chef who's passionate about it, to actually have school boards and other institutional boards adopt policies that support the purchase of local, sustainably raised foods. Such policies would say, 'We will do this, and we'll do it authentically. Based on five very specific measures, we'll increase the level of our performance from year-to-year.'

"These measures are centered around environmental sustainability; excellent nutrition; keeping it local; fair treatment of people in terms of working conditions and profits, including food chain workers and farmers; and ethical treatment of livestock."

### After doing this research, what is your sense of the local foods landscape?

"I'm actually pretty optimistic about it. I would have loved to have heard a number of people saying, 'Well, here's the log jam and if you just move one log everything's going to move smoothly and everything's going to be fine.' What we got was a wide variety of suggestions that lead me to believe that people are really thinking about this, and we can keep building.

"It's probably going to be more incremental than transformational; eventually transformational, but not right away. I am actually optimistic, because I think local foods is one of the areas where we can not only build community with it and around it, we can build community in a way that respects where that community is, that makes the community responsive to its own biosphere, if you will, and the culture of the people who live there. It can provide opportunity if we can just look at ourselves and let it. And it can provide opportunity for

a wide variety of people, including Native people. Exciting things are happening on reservations with food sovereignty. I find that just tremendously exciting.

"There is also a lot of potential related to new immigrants coming to our area. Food is always an important part of the culture people bring in when they come to a new land and a new community, and the existing community can really benefit from that culturally and economically.

"So I think there are a lot of reasons for optimism, but I also think there's a lot of work to be done." □



# LSP's Local Foods Listening Campaign Begins

By Laura Schreiber

“We need to change this idea that food is a product or commodity,” said Land Stewardship Project member and farmer Josh Reinitz. “Food is not a product—it is our energy, our medicine, and is made by and for real people, not consumers.”

On Oct. 7, LSP members like Reinitz came together from across Minnesota to launch LSP's Local Foods Listening Campaign. The campaign was started during the local foods breakout session at the LSP Leadership Assembly (see page 12). Building off the work that the Community Based Food Systems Program has done (page 13), LSP's Policy and Organizing Program is launching this campaign to determine what local food policies to advocate for.

During the breakout session, LSP members used their expertise and experiences from farming, food processing and buying food at their local co-op or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation to help shape what narrative and policies they want for local foods.

LSP members have a great history of fighting for community-based food systems and being leaders in sustainable agriculture. We are now ready to use our collective voice and power to fight for state policies and regulations that put small- and medium-sized local farmers — both rural and urban — first and increase everyone's access to healthy, local foods.

What can we do in the long term to support cultivation, selling, marketing, distribution and buying of local foods? For one

thing, we need to identify what barriers are in place that, for example, keep local foods out of our local schools.

“Many of the schools in my community are not equipped to cook food; they can only reheat,” said LSP member-farmer and Farm Beginnings graduate Anna Racer.

What can be done about this problem? Well, for one thing the Minnesota Depart-

ment of Agriculture's AGRI Farm-to-School Grant Program makes it possible for schools to apply for funding to buy equipment that can process local foods. This is a program that LSP can fight to have more funding directed toward.

“Schools should and need to serve local

• • •  
**“Food is not a product—it is our energy, our medicine, and is made by and for real people.”**

— farmer Josh Reinitz  
• • •

theme that emerged throughout the Oct. 7 breakout session was that we want a food system where local foods are seen as part of the larger system and where food is not consid-

ered merely a product. Instead, it should be understood as something that is real and made by hard-working people who care about what they grow. Minnesota can be a national leader in supporting farmers growing food for their communities and state. We want food to be redefined and re-understood as our energy source, our connection to the land, and one another.

How do you want local foods to be understood? What policies and regulations would you like to see put in place? This breakout session marked the start of our listening campaign.

We will host listening sessions across the state for the next few months and then gather a core group of member-leaders who will determine what policies LSP will fight for during the upcoming Minnesota state legislative session. See the box in the middle of this page for information on how you can share your voice and your vision for local food. ☐

University of Minnesota student Laura Schreiber is interning with LSP's Policy and Organizing Program.

## We Want to Hear From You

The next LSP Local Foods Listening Session will be Thursday, Dec. 6, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., at the Natural Foods Co-op in Litchfield, Minn. There will also be one Dec. 11, from 10 a.m.-11:30 a.m., at the South Central Service Cooperative in North Mankato, Minn. You can also share your input on how we can develop a vibrant, sustainable, local food system at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1127>.

For details and more information on this initiative in general, contact LSP's Ben Anderson at 612-722-6377 or [banderson@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:banderson@landstewardshipproject.org).

## CSA Farmers: Time to Sign-up for the Directory

If you are a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmer operating in Minnesota or western Wisconsin, the Land Stewardship Project invites you to be listed in the 2019 edition of LSP's *Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region CSA Farm Directory*.

An online version of the *CSA Farm Directory* will be available by Feb. 1 at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/stewardshipfood/csa>. On that web page, you will find an online form for submitting information about your farm.

The deadline for submitting listings is Monday, Jan. 7. The listing fee is \$15 for LSP members and \$20 for non-members. There is a 250-word limit for listings.

For more information on having your farm listed, contact LSP's Brian DeVore at [bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-722-6377.

## CSA Farm Directory 2019



2019 Edition of the Twin Cities, Minnesota & Western Wisconsin Region Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Directory



A Land Stewardship Project Publication

# Getting More With Less

## *The Productive Potential of Stocking the Refrigerator with Leftovers*

Sometimes, less really is more. That's particularly true when the "less" can help build the structure of something that is so much "more" in terms of its ability to have an outsized impact on the world around it. Take, for example, the way cattle producer Jim Wulf manages the pastures on the rolling glacial till that makes up his west-central Minnesota operation. Although he makes it clear that, without a doubt, "we're very much a grazing operation," the rancher says that doesn't mean grazing pastures down to bare ground. He rotates his cattle frequently enough that often half the forage is left behind. In addition, when planting corn in one of his fields this spring, Wulf left an extra-wide gap between every third row. Both practices stand out a bit in an agricultural landscape where utilizing every last bit of productive potential is more the norm.

As Wulf explained during a Land Stewardship Project field day on his operation in late August, all of this purposeful easing up on the agroeconomic accelerator is in service of one key resource: the soil. Specifically, he has learned that if he can feed the livestock in the soil, that will benefit the livestock he is taking to market.

Wulf, along with his wife Twyla and son Travis, raises around 350 Simmental and Simmental-Angus brood cows. Wulf feels the animals do better out on the land—and the land, in turn, does better as well.

"We recognize that what the cow does best is harvest her own feed, distributing the fertilizer as manure," he explained during

the field day, which was co-sponsored by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and The Nature Conservancy. "The longer we can keep that cow on the landscape grazing, the more it lowers our cost. It's best for us economically and also for the environment and the soils."

And it's those soils that are the pivot



**Jim Wulf: "The longer we can keep that cow on the landscape grazing, the more it lowers our cost. It's best for us economically and also for the environment and the soils." (LSP Photo)**

point for everything else, said Justin Morris, an NRCS soil health specialist. He explained that the growth in no-till farming during the 1980s produced significant benefits for the landscape by reducing or eliminating the soil disturbance that contributes to erosion. In fact, Wulf has been very pleased with how no-till has helped him cut erosion on the light glacial till soils he farms.

"But there were a lot of failures in no-till

systems because we were starving the soil biology," said Morris. "You need to protect your house's structure, but you need to make sure the refrigerator is stocked as well or the organisms in the house will starve. I really don't like the term, 'cover crop,' because it's one-dimensional—you're really feeding the soil biology all through the soil profile."

One key way to stock that refrigerator is to build soil organic matter by keeping living roots in the ground all year-round, and adding fertility in the form of animal manure and urine. The Wulfs rotate the cattle frequently through a combination of permanent pastures and annual cover crops. In the past, Wulf said his idea of late season grazing was to have the cows browse a few corn stalks

late in the fall. Now, by planting cocktail mixes of cover crops, he's able to, at times, extend the grazing season deep into winter.

And in a sense, the Wulfs are stocking that soil refrigerator with plenty of leftovers. They move the cattle frequently enough that the rotation leaves behind lots of uneaten, stomped-on forage to feed the soil, thus making his permanent pastures more resilient in the long term.

Such a strategy has paid off, and not just in terms of healthier grazing lands. Wulf has noticed that since he has a plant regime that is better capturing precipitation, the tops of his knobs are less prone to drought, and the low spots between the knobs are not as likely to pond water.

Kent Solberg, a livestock and grazing specialist with the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, said during the tour of the Wulf operation that integrating livestock into a cropping operation can be a key way to connect soil health and profits, since the manure and urine can help build the kind of long term biology that allows fields and pastures to generate their own fertility, while providing an economic reason

**Soil Health, see page 17...**

## Give the Cropping Systems Calculator a Try

What cropping or grazing system can help your farming operation reach its economic and soil health goals? The Land Stewardship Project has developed a "Cropping Systems Calculator" to help farmers plug in various cover crop and grazing scenarios. To download the Calculator as an Excel spreadsheet, see <https://landstewardshipproject.org/chippewa10croppingsystemscalculator>. You can use the recently updated Cropping Systems Calculator to compare the financial pluses and minuses of various crop rotations. It includes expanded crop options and recent figures for various regions, and it has organic and non-organic options. A companion version has also been released specifically for Illinois figures, including defaults for the northern, central and southern portions of that state. A soil erosion calculator component was recently added to the tool, and LSP has developed versions that can be used on Microsoft Windows or Macintosh operating systems.

By the way, a recent report from the Union of Concerned Scientists, "Reintegrating Land and Livestock," uses the Cropping Systems Calculator to look at the potential economic and environmental benefits of grazing, including, "increased soil carbon, reduced on-farm emissions from fertilizers, and reduced water footprints." Read the whole "Reintegrating Land and Livestock" report at [www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org).



for keeping cover on the surface and living roots in the ground all year round. Solberg showed the field day participants soil samples from Wulf land that had been managed with no-till, cover cropping and grazing.

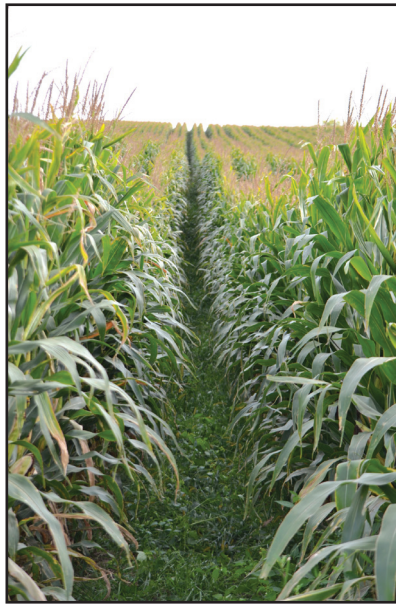
"This soil sample is amazing," said Solberg at one point. "I can't grab a soil sample without seeing at least one earthworm." Wulf said that, in fact, he recently took a foot-by-foot soil sample that was six inches deep from a field that was cover cropped and managed with no-till. There were 19 earthworms in that sample.

"In my neighbor's field that is conventionally farmed, I found about three earthworms in that same area," the rancher said.

### Filling the Soil Health Gaps

Wulf's Clear Springs Cattle Company is experimenting with the "less is more" strategy on corn ground as well. At one point during the tour, Wulf showed a cornfield where some rows were twice as wide as the rows adjacent to them. When planting the field, he shut off every third row on the planter, which resulted in the gaps. When the corn was roughly knee-high, Wulf seeded a cover crop mix of annual rye grass and cereal rye, as well as brassicas and clover, using a rotary hoe and air seeder. As the field day participants could see, by late summer the cover crops were thriving and the soil even on hilly parts of the cornfield was staying in place, despite the fact that land in this part of the state is extremely prone to erosion during rainstorms.

The wider, 60-inch rows (Wulf's other corn rows are set at 30 inches), provide more sunlight to reach the ground. Wulf increased the corn seeding rate on his regular rows so that the overall seed population in the field was the same. The idea, which he borrowed from Iowa farmer Loren Steinlage (*see the*



**Wulf has been experimenting with leaving a wide gap between every third row of corn to provide more room for cover crops. (LSP Photo)**

*No. 1, 2018, Land Stewardship Letter*), is that in the end the field's overall yield will be comparable to what it would be if no rows were skipped. But just as importantly, the cover crop will reduce erosion while feeding the soil, and Wulf will have good grazing in the fall.

"My son said, 'What would your dad say if he knew you were seeding grass into corn?'" Wulf said with a laugh. "We harvest two things in agriculture: sunlight and rain, and that's why we keep a living plant out there all the time. If you don't have something growing out there, you're wasting sunlight and rain." □

### Give it a Listen

On **episode 220** of the Land Stewardship Project's *Ear to the Ground* podcast, rancher Jim Wulf and grazing specialist Kent Solberg talk about how integrating livestock and crop production can build the kind of soil that's economically and environmentally resilient: <https://landstewardshipproject.org/posts/1132>.

Check out LSP's **Talking Smart Soil** web page for more podcasts featuring farmers, scientists and conservationists discussing soil health and agriculture: <https://landstewardshipproject.org/lspsoilbuilders/talkingsmartsoil>.



**Kent Solberg examines soil samples on the Wulf operation during the field day. "If we take care of the livestock in the soil, they will take care of the livestock we take to market," said Solberg. (LSP Photo)**

### 'Soil Health & Profits' Winter Workshops

The Land Stewardship Project will be holding a series of winter workshops across Minnesota on ways to integrate profit-producing enterprises and the building of soil health:

→ January 22 — **Grazing, Soil Health & Improving a Farm's Financial Picture, with Joshua Dukart**, Alexandria, Minn. Contact: LSP's Montevideo office at 320-269-2105.

→ January 23 — **Financial Decision Making for Building Profits & Soil Health, with Joshua Dukart**, Faribault, Minn. Contact: LSP's Lewiston office at 507-523-3366.

→ January 24 — **Financial Decision Making for Building Profits & Soil Health, with Joshua Dukart**, Lewiston, Minn. Contact: LSP's Lewiston office at 507-523-3366.

→ February 15 — **Building Soil Health, with farmers Dawn & Grant Breutkreutz & Tom Cotter**, Preston, Minn. Contact LSP's Lewiston office at 507-523-3366.

→ March 7 — **Roller crimper, weed control & soil health, with the University of Wisconsin's Dr. Erin Silva**, Rushford, Minn. Contact: Shona Snater, LSP, at 507-523-3366 or [ssnater@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:ssnater@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ March 13-15 — **Holistic Management Training, with Tara & Joshua Dukart**, Spring Valley, Minn. Contact LSP's Lewiston office at 507-523-3366.

### Climate Conversation

# Taking the Road Less Traveled

## Grappling with Broken Buckets, Damaged Soils & Extreme Weather

By Alex Baumhardt

Loretta Jaus saw the erosion happening during drives from her organic dairy farm in west-central Minnesota to Minneapolis for meetings at the Land Stewardship Project. The 90-mile journey along Highway 19 includes long stretches of farmland filled with nothing but row crops.

The erosion she saw was physical. Gullies and washouts indicated that the soil had lost structure and organic matter to the acres of corn planted right down to the road. The soil couldn't stand up to the extreme rains and droughts that had become longer and more volatile during the past several decades. If those farmers were feeling vulnerable to climate change, as Loretta was feeling on her farm, they weren't doing much to address the health of their soil.

The erosion was also psychological. It felt like something was being lost in how that land was valued.

"Every trip I made I noticed that there were more farmsteads being dozed," she recalls. "The groves were gone. If there were any wild areas along the roadside, they were disappearing. Fencelines were disappearing. And I thought, 'What in the world is happening?'"

What was happening was twofold: a direct response to the overwhelming demands industrial agriculture exacts on farmers and on land, and a response to the federal Farm Bill, which rewards the demands of that industry at great environmental cost.

Jaus sees her commitment to organic dairy farming as a commitment to mitigating those environmental impacts, and to fostering healthy soil on what land she can.

As someone who was trained as a wildlife biologist, Jaus might have seemed an unlikely farmer. She and her husband Martin met at a wildlife center in Illinois, and later took over Martin's family's dairy farm near Gibbon in 1980.

"I remember coming up the driveway the day we moved and kind of thinking, well

that was a waste of a college education," she says with a laugh. "But we hadn't been at the farm for more than a week when we got a real lesson in putting some thought into the management of the farm. We had one of these perennial dust storms kick up, and I had a quarter-inch of topsoil on the inside of my window sills."

Jaus was just learning about farming, but her background in wildlife biology made her keenly aware of how everything in an



**Loretta and Martin Jaus on their dairy farm. "For sure, there's always bad weather—farmers have always lived by that," says Loretta. "But, we've not seen anything like this before...and there's a role on this farm for us to try and help mitigate those changes." (LSP Photo)**

ecosystem impacts and depends on everything else, down to the birds and the bugs. She and Martin were committed to farming ethically and with nature by producing milk as an organic operation. It also meant that decades later, when conversations began about climate change and the impacts of it, she had a scientist's pragmatism about meeting those challenges.

### Early Inputs

The Jauses manage 410 acres, most of it in pasture for their cows, the rest in corn, sorghum, alfalfa and soybeans.

Early on, they set about planting trees along the perimeter of the farm to slow the

wind that seems to rake across this part of Sibley County incessantly, as well as to try to get their soil to stay in place. They began wetland and prairie restorations to build diversity and to attract wildlife that could help with pest control and strengthen the biology of the soil.

"One of the reasons this farming system is so beneficial is it has built-in resistance. When we have all these wild areas mixed in with the fields, those are places where beneficial insects can survive and flourish," Jaus says. "So when aphids show up on the soybean plants, the cavalry arrives in the form of lady bug larvae and then you'll start seeing the lacewings. And yes there is some damage on some of the plants, and I don't doubt that it might affect some yields, but we've got the natural predators there to take care of that."

They are committed to strengthening the biology of their soil as a matter of long-term health on the farm and to stand up to climate change. For their pasture, this involves making sure their livestock is out on the land, treading the soil and dispersing their manure via a managed rotational grazing system. For their fields, they try and get as much diverse cover on the land as possible, "to keep that soil in place so that biology has a place to live," says Loretta.

Healthy soil can actually capture climate-warming carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere. Exposed soils break down and leak carbon that mixes with the air to become CO<sub>2</sub>. But healthy soil can actually work as a carbon sink — a sort of reservoir storing carbon beneath the ground.

The Jauses revamped their cropping system in response to impacts from climate change. After experiencing two, four-year periods of drought, mixed with damaging and unpredictable rains, they needed to get creative. These radical weather changes are a hallmark of climate change. According to the U.S. Global Change Research Program, over the past 50 years climate change in the U.S. has manifested itself in both longer periods of drought as well as heavy downpours, which lead to severe floods.

Over the past decade on their farm, the Jauses were no longer getting hay in high enough quantity or quality anymore due to periods of extreme heat. So, they introduced drought-resistant forage sorghum into their crop rotation, which supplements the hay.

Their neighbors, largely corn and soybean farmers, also struggle to retain soil that's both blowing and washing away as

**Climate Conversation, see page 19...**



a result of weather extremes, coupled with monoculture crop growing and the use of pesticides that deplete the soil biome. Jaus says that as she and Martin experiment with cover cropping to keep the carbon underground, she's encouraged to see her neighbors trying such methods, too.

## Talking Climate in Rural America

Conversations in rural America around climate change can be polarizing and political, rather than practical. It's even more difficult when the role of modern, industrial agriculture is discussed as part of the problem. Agriculture is responsible for more than 10 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions that are created by humans, according to the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change. But smart farm management can reduce these emissions, as well as actually counteract them.

Despite the difficulty some farmers have talking about climate change, Loretta is outspoken about what she sees as a responsibility to acknowledge that humans have played a central role in the warming of this planet, and that she can effect change through her farming. She says that many farmers won't make connections between extreme weather and climate change, and will argue that the weather has always been unpredictable.

"For sure, there's always bad weather—farmers have always lived by that," she says. "But, we've not seen anything like this before. I think there's enough research about it to know why that's happening, or have a good idea about why it's happening, and... there's a role on this farm for us to try and help mitigate those changes."

Jaus says public policy such as the federal Farm Bill should be encouraging practices that help farmers adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. But Farm Bill initiatives like the federal crop insurance program are actually counterproductive to what agriculture needs to address and respond to such challenges.

"When a farmer is guaranteed a profit, regardless of what yields he gets off of that land, he has nothing to lose," she says of the federal crop insurance program. "He can afford to put a seed on that land even if he knows he can't get a crop, and he'll be okay."

Hence the rows and rows of corn being planted all the way up to the road, the

bulldozed barns, the lack of groves and wild places, all the diversity on the land turned over to row crops.

"That really cemented my image of what I call the broken bucket bill," Jaus says. "I know how hard we have to fight to get money into the CSP program" — the federal Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which provides support for cover cropping, wildlife management and other methods that are environmentally friendly — "and then once you get an amount established, there are always fingers dipping into the top of the bucket trying to pull money out to cover other places where they'd rather see that money. So it's a constant fight to try and get that money."

She adds, "Then, there's legislation that drills holes in the bottom of the bucket. So that at the same time we're paying tax dollars into the CSP program to get continuous cover on the land,

to help new farmers and small-scale farmers get livestock on the land, we're also doing things like crop insurance where money is pouring out to pay for practices that are doing the opposite of what the Conservation Stewardship Program is doing. So it's frustrating to me because of what I care about, and it's frustrating to me as a taxpayer."

## The Courage to Change

As Loretta and Martin Jaus consider the future of their farm, they are interested in planting and experimenting with more resilient crops that can survive drought and heavy rain. Loretta mentions the "super wheat" Kernza being developed at the University of Minnesota as something she'd love to plant. Kernza is a perennial wheat-

## Video: Talking Climate Change

In *Farmers Talk About Climate Change*, a Land Stewardship Project video, farmers discuss the challenges posed by extreme climate conditions and how building soil health can help make their operations more resilient. View it at [www.youtube.com/user/lspnow](http://www.youtube.com/user/lspnow).

grass that has the potential to build soil health while providing forage and grain and sucking CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere.

She'd also like to be able to incorporate cover crops into all of their row crops, but the equipment to do so is still prohibitively expensive. They've explored using a roller-crimper, which both lays down the cover crop and crimps, or bends and breaks, its stems, killing it and turning it into a rich mulch without the use of herbicides. They've also looked into aerial seeding and cover crop interseeders.

Whatever technique is being used, Jaus says in order to combat climate change, and to make sure there is a future for farmers and farming on the land, the courage to speak out, and to change, is imperative.

"There's a culture in farming that's comfortable doing things the way they've always been done and not stepping out," she says, "and if you don't have support from agricultural leadership to move in those directions, it's really tough for a conventional farmer to have the courage to do that, and to take a different direction." □

*Former Land Stewardship Project journalism intern Alex Baumhardt is a radio producer and reporter. She has written for the Washington Post, Los Angeles Review of Books, Vice and Minnesota Monthly.*

## A Pocket Guide to the Power of Soil

The Land Stewardship Project's *Soil Health, Water & Climate Change: A Pocket Guide to What You Need to Know* provides an introduction to the latest innovations in science and farming related to building soil health, and how implementing such practices on a wide-scale basis can make agriculture a powerful force for creating a landscape that is good for our water and our climate.

Utilizing easy-to-understand graphics and summaries, this pocket guide shows how building soil organic matter can sequester massive amounts of greenhouse gases. Combined with energy conservation and alternative energy sources, making agricultural soils a net carbon sink could play a major role in helping prevent disastrous changes to the climate. In addition, healthy, biologically active soil has been shown to dramatically cut erosion levels, as well as the amount of farmland fertilizer and other chemicals flowing into our rivers, streams and lakes.

An online app or pdf version of the guide can be accessed at <https://landstewardship-project.org/smartsoil>. Paper copies of the 50-page guide can be purchased for \$5 from LSP's online store at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/store> or by calling 612-722-6377.

# Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland in the Midwest? Or are you an established farmer/landowner in the Midwest who is seeking a beginning farmer to purchase or rent your land, or to work with in a partnership/employee situation? Then consider having your information circulated via the Land Stewardship Project's *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse*. To fill out a form and for more information, see <https://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse>. You can also obtain forms by e-mailing LSP's Karen Stettler at [stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org), or by calling her at 507-523-3366. Here are excerpts of recent listings. For the full listings, see <https://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/seekingfarmersseekinglandclearinghouse>.

## Seeking Farmland

◆ Jill Chi is seeking to purchase 20-80 acres of farmland in *Minnesota (would prefer to be within 25 miles of Annandale in east-central Minnesota)*. Land with 5-10 acres of forest and that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred. Fencing would be ideal, but Chi can build fence as well. A water source is required; outbuildings and a house are not necessary. Contact: Jill Chi, 320-266-5675, [jill@bevarafarms.com](mailto:jill@bevarafarms.com).

◆ Josh Heinze is seeking to purchase 40+ acres of farmland in *Wisconsin*. Land with 20+ acres pasture, 20+ acres forest and 2 acres tillable is preferred. Land with fencing, a water source, outbuildings and a house is also preferred. Contact: Josh Heinze, 715-797-6844, [5speedtrailrig@gmail.com](mailto:5speedtrailrig@gmail.com).

◆ Chandler Morton is seeking to rent 100+ acres of pasture in *Minnesota* to expand his yak operation. He needs well water for livestock and good fencing, but can install fencing on a long-term lease. Chandler can work with existing landowners who would like to supply him with their production or can lease land for production. No house is required. Contact: Chandler Morton, 720-256-3364, [info@theyakboys.com](mailto:info@theyakboys.com).

◆ Paul Huber is seeking to purchase 5-20 acres of farmland in *Wisconsin (near the southeastern Wisconsin town of Fredonia is preferred)*. Land that is certified organic, has water for irrigation and has 5-10 acres tillable is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Paul Huber, 920-251-5908, [info@sharedseasonsfarm.com](mailto:info@sharedseasonsfarm.com).

◆ Maggie Albright is seeking to purchase 100 acres of farmland in *Wisconsin*. Land with 20-50 acres pasture, 10-20 forest and 20-30 tillable is preferred; no house is required. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a water or stream of some sort is preferred. Contact: Maggie Albright, 608-369-4579, [maggierandall@yahoo.com](mailto:maggierandall@yahoo.com).

◆ Michael Anderson is seeking to purchase 10-30 acres of farmland in *Minnesota (near Wabasha in southeastern Minnesota is preferred)*. Land with 10-20 tillable acres is preferred; he is open to bare land or land with buildings. Contact: Michael Anderson, 952-261-7081, [michaeland3@gmail.com](mailto:michaeland3@gmail.com).

◆ Jeremy Bennett is seeking to rent 30+ acres of farmland in *Minnesota (Itasca County is preferred)*. Land with 15 acres pasture, 5 tillable acres and 7 forest acres is preferred. Land with pasture fencing, outbuildings (or an ability to add a barn) and a house is preferred. Contact: Jeremy Bennett, 218-398-1953, [jeremy.evergreenofgr@gmail.com](mailto:jeremy.evergreenofgr@gmail.com).

◆ Nancy St. Germaine is seeking to purchase 10+ acres of farmland in *Minnesota or western Wisconsin*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred. It would be ideal to have utilities and a house or other livable structure. St. Germaine is flexible about other details, such as outbuildings and tillable acres available. Contact: Nancy St. Germaine, 612-209-2045, [Nancystg@yahoo.com](mailto:Nancystg@yahoo.com).

◆ Nathan Baseman is seeking to rent tillable farmland in *Minnesota or Iowa*; no house is required. Contact: Nathan Baseman, 507-402-5302, [nbaseman@gmail.com](mailto:nbaseman@gmail.com).

◆ Tom Sullivan is seeking to rent 1,500 acres of farmland in *Iowa*. Land with 300 acres pasture and 1,200 tillable acres is preferred; no house is required. Land with water for the pasture acres is preferred. Contact: Tom Sullivan, 712-747-3909 or 712-579-6959.

◆ Kyle Wermerskirchen is seeking to rent 20-160 acres of farmland in the southern or southwestern region of the *Twin Cities (Minnesota) Metropolitan Area*. Land with 20-100 pasture acres, 0-40 acres tillable and 5-20 forest acres is preferred. Land that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred. Land with a dairy barn, multipurpose sheds and a house is also preferred. Contact: Kyle Wermerskirchen, 952-239-7736, [kylew02@hotmail.com](mailto:kylew02@hotmail.com).

◆ Jeana Corrado is seeking to rent 1 acre of farmland in *Wisconsin*. Land with an electrical hook-up, water and sewer system is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Jeana Corrado, 608-800-4795, [jeanacorrado13@gmail.com](mailto:jeanacorrado13@gmail.com).

◆ Ryan Saxton is seeking to purchase 5+ acres of farmland in *southwestern Wisconsin (near Viroqua)*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has forest is preferred. A house and barn would be ideal, but is not necessary. Land with a water source of any kind and that is on a minimal-traffic road is preferred. Contact: Ryan Saxton, 913-669-8642, [Runningrootsfarmstead@gmail.com](mailto:Runningrootsfarmstead@gmail.com).

◆ Jesse Sigurdson is seeking to purchase

1 acre of farmland in the *Twin Cities, Minn., region (near Lino Lakes)*. At least half-an-acre tillable is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Jesse Sigurdson, 651-249-5132, [momasboy11@hotmail.com](mailto:momasboy11@hotmail.com).

◆ Eric Heins is seeking to purchase 20-50 acres of farmland in *southeastern Minnesota (preferably near Plainview)*. No house is required. Contact: Eric Heins, 507-259-0611, [circlehcustomfarming@gmail.com](mailto:circlehcustomfarming@gmail.com).

◆ James Bauman is seeking to purchase 5-15 acres of tillable farmland in *east-central Minnesota's Wright County (within a one-and-a-quarter-hour drive of the Twin Cities)*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years is preferred, but not necessary. Sandy soil for vegetable farming required; flat tillable land preferred. Outbuildings preferred, but not required; a house is required. Contact: James Bauman, 763-913-5465, [first7letters@gmail.com](mailto:first7letters@gmail.com).

◆ Craig Buss is seeking to purchase 100-500 acres of farmland in *Minnesota*. Land with at least 20 pasture acres, 10 forest acres and 100 tillable acres is preferred. Land with a machine shed, barn and mechanics shop is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Craig Buss, 320-582-2323, [dairyseed2@yahoo.com](mailto:dairyseed2@yahoo.com).

◆ Stephanie Mullis is seeking to rent up to 5 acres of farmland in *southern Wisconsin (between Beloit and Madison)*. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has 1-3 pasture acres and 2-3 tillable acres is preferred. No house is required; water and electricity is preferred. Contact: Stephanie Mullis, 262-325-7134.

◆ Katie Ross is seeking to purchase approximately 20 acres of farmland in *Minnesota or Illinois*. Land with 10 pastured acres, 10 tillable and 10 forested is preferred. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has sturdy outbuildings, a house and a river or creek is preferred. Contact: Katie Ross, 952-210-5192.

◆ Ryan Ericson is seeking to purchase 5-15 acres of farmland in *Minnesota or Wisconsin*. Land with 1-5 pasture acres, 5-10 tillable and 1-5 forest is preferred. Outbuildings such as a storage barn and

Clearinghouse, see page 21...



wash/pack facility are also preferred, as well as fencing and water. Land that is within 45 minutes of a city/market is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Ryan Ericson, 651-353-2474.

◆ Xiang Zou is seeking to purchase 20 acres of farmland in **Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, North Dakota or Illinois**. Land with pasture is preferred. Contact: Xiang Zou, 816-282-4291.

◆ John Stoltz is seeking to purchase 5+ acres of farmland in **northeastern Minnesota or northwestern Wisconsin (within 40 minutes of Duluth)**. At least 4+ tillable acres are sought; outbuildings would be helpful, but are not necessary. Land with a house is preferred. Contact: John Stoltz, 608-738-9210, stoltzjm@gmail.com.

◆ Astrid Yankosky is seeking to purchase up to 5 acres of tillable farmland in **northeastern Minnesota**. Land that has not been sprayed for several years, and that has water and electricity, as well as outbuildings, is preferred. Land that is within close proximity to Duluth, Minn., is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Astrid Yankosky, 206-579-0508, farmerastridy@gmail.com.

◆ Andrew Karki is seeking to purchase 50-100 tillable acres of farmland in **Minnesota**. Land with a well and three-phase power is preferred; no house is required. Contact: Andrew Karki, 920-645-8526, Akarki327@gmail.com.

◆ Anthony Welti is seeking to purchase 50-100 acres of farmland in **Minnesota or Wisconsin**. Land with 30-50 acres pasture and 30-50 acres tillable is preferred. Land that has not been sprayed for several years and that has a house is also preferred. Contact: Anthony Welti, 507-951-2669, tmwelti@gmail.com.

### Farmland Available

◆ Andrew Hanson-Pierre has for rent 7 acres of farmland in **Minnesota's Chisago County, near the Twin Cities**. The land includes 6 acres pasture and 1.5 acres forest. The land has not been sprayed for two years and is currently in an alfalfa and grass mix. There is a pole barn that could be rented for livestock housing. Water is available; no fencing is available. No house is available. Contact: Andrew Hanson-Pierre, 952-261-3312, cloverbeefarm@gmail.com.

◆ Casey Kirt has for rent 15+ tillable acres of farmland near **Watertown in the Twin Cities, Minn., region**. The land has not been farmed for over 10 years and has not been sprayed for several years. There is a 40 x 100 pole barn; a house could be

available. The landlord has access to owners of numerous Minneapolis high-end restaurants as possible produce buyers. A small amount of capital may be available for site improvements. Contact: Casey Kirt, 952-956-6872, caseykirt@gmail.com.

◆ Mary Schneider has for sale 68 acres of farmland in **Dakota County near Minnesota's Twin Cities**. There are 60 tillable acres and 8 pasture acres (some pastureland can be tilled). There is no house and no outbuildings. The asking price is \$7,500 per acre. Contact: Mary Schneider, 952-607-1587, Mary.schneider@integra.net.

◆ Ed Lysne has for rent approximately 9 acres of farmland in **Minnesota's Rice County, south of the Twin Cities (near Northfield)**. The land includes up to 4.5 pasture acres, up to 4.5 tillable acres and roughly 1 forest acre. It has not been sprayed for three growing seasons. It has supported a few pigs, chickens and produce during the past two years—all grown organically. There is a large lawn with gardens, trees and shrubs. There is a house and small garage. The lease terms are negotiable. Contact: Ed Lysne, 612-790-7873, edriclysne@gmail.com.

◆ Brad Zettler has for sale a 234-acre certified organic dairy farm in **north-central Wisconsin's Marathon County**. There are 200 tillable acres, 7 pasture acres and 25 forest acres. There is a house and a barn with 30 stalls under pipeline and a swing six parlor. There is a 40 x 80 loafing barn and a 44 x 80 pole shed with an attached heated shop. All land is adjoining. There is a grid-tied solar system. The farm has an Organic Valley milk contract. Contact: Brad Zettler, 715-965-3440, bradleybzacres@aol.com.

◆ Andy Cotter has for sale a 92-acre certified organic farm near **Hutchinson, Minn., west of the Twin Cities**. There are 12 tillable acres and 3 forest acres. There is a shop, updated granary, two machinery storage sheds, three wood drying sheds, a chicken coop, a well house converted to living space, a large renovated barn, a wood-fired brick oven, a summer kitchen, a hoop house and an updated 2,280 square-foot house. There is also 18-acres of deer fence and a wind generator. The asking price is \$500,000. Contact: www.yorkfarmmn.com.

◆ Cheryl Landgren has for sale 15 acres of farmland in western **Minnesota's Chippewa County (near Milan)**. The land consists of 2 pasture acres and it has not been sprayed for several years; it sits on the banks of the Chippewa River. There is a house, along with a storage shed and screened-in gazebo. Property must be sold as one parcel, and buyer must be pre-qualified. The asking price is \$149,000. Contact: Janell Welling, 320-226-5586, janellwelling@gmail.com.

◆ Knelly Dettinger has for sale 20-40 acres of farmland in **western Wisconsin's Dunn County (near Menomonie)**. The land has not been sprayed for several years. It consists of 25 pasture acres, 7 tillable acres, 5 forest acres, a pole shed, a lean-to, a moveable chicken coop and a house. There are two wells, fencing for rotational grazing and a head-gate. The asking price is \$425,000 to \$525,000. Contact: Knelly Dettinger, 507-272-0526, kdettinger@tkw.com.

### Seeking Farmer

◆ Humble Hands Harvest is seeking a farmer to join its 22-acre certified organic operation in **northeastern Iowa's Winneshiek County (near Decorah)**. Currently, 2 acres of organic vegetables provide most of the farm's income; they also pasture a 25-ewe flock of sheep and raise feeder pigs on pasture. Three hundred nut and fruit trees have been planted, and there are plans to add more. Humble Hands is looking to add another member to its worker-owned cooperative farm. The operation is hoping to build its capacity to branch out and work on establishing perennial crops and regenerating the soil with pastured livestock. The pay is \$1,000 per month; no housing is available. More information is at <https://humblehandsharvest.com/join-our-co-operative>. Contact: Hannah Breckbill, 507-513-1502, humblehandsharvest@gmail.com.

◆ Benjamin Wojahn is seeking a farmer to join his 69-acre operation in **southwestern Wisconsin's Vernon County (near Viroqua)**. There is basic infrastructure for an orchard, 70 x 30 hoop house, permaculture, woodlands, hay, cropland and nursery. There is an opportunity to rent a shared house with possibilities to develop individual sustainable farm enterprises. Contact: Benjamin Wojahn, benjamin.foodrevolution@gmail.com.

◆ Sarah Frater is seeking an individual or family interested in running her 10-acre farm in **south-central Wisconsin's Dane County (20 minutes from Madison)**. There are 3 tillable acres, a turkey pasture and several outbuildings. There is a fully functional website, a customer base for eggs, and an opportunity for an event venue in an outbuilding that has held gatherings and a wedding. The tillable land has drain tile installed. The chicken barn is half-workshop and there are coops and outdoor runs for chickens. There is a five-bedroom house. The land has not been sprayed for several years. Contact: Sarah Frater, 414-841-4016, jsfr8r@gmail.com.

## The Goal Standard of Farming

*Passing the Land on to the Farmer Next Door Still Takes Planning Based on Values*

By Brian DeVore

One day in 2014, a man stopped by Bill and Bonnie McMillin's farm tucked away in the hills of southeastern Minnesota's Wabasha County and offered to pay cash for all 160 acres, lock, stock and barrel. Such an offer can be tempting. After all, Bill and Bonnie had worked hard over the previous few decades to build a 45-cow dairy operation, which they later transitioned to a grass-fed beef enterprise. Working with livestock takes a toll on the body, and at the time Bill was 60 and Bonnie 58. In fact, the previous year they had both had serious cancer scares, and their adult son is not interested in farming. It was time to think about the future of a farm that had been in Bill's family since 1946.

Fortunately, the McMillin's had recently completed a Land Stewardship Project Farm Transition Planning Workshop (*see sidebar on page 23*), where, among other things, they learned the importance of setting goals and figuring out ways to attain them, while developing a retirement plan that would guarantee a sustainable income. The McMillins came out of that workshop series more committed than ever to seeing their farm remain a "stand-alone" operation, a home to crops and livestock, as well as a place where a farm family would reside, rather than just another 160 acres appended to a larger corn and soybean operation. Bill was especially adamant that the farm offer an opportunity for the next generation of agricultural entrepreneur, given his involvement during the late 1980s in a group called the "Wabasha County Give A Damns," an informal collection of neighbors that encouraged LSP to eventually launch Farm Beginnings, which

has trained hundreds of new farmers during the past two decades (*see page 25*).

"Providing an opportunity for somebody to farm is big for us," says Bill while sitting at a table with Bonnie in their farmhouse on a bright fall day. "I didn't take that offer in



**Bryton Miller with Bill and Bonnie McMillin. "Providing an opportunity for somebody to farm is big for us," says Bill. (LSP Photo)**

2014 to buy the farm seriously. He was serious, but we had no intention of taking him up on that offer at all."

They knew once they took the cash, they would have no influence on the farm's future, and the chances of the buildings being knocked down and the land becoming just one more corn and soybean field would be increased significantly.

"The best part of the Farm Transition class for me was it made us ask, 'What are our goals for the farm?'" Bonnie recalls. "And whenever something came up around decision making, it was clear we could go back to our goals, and that really helped us make that decision. When something came up, that's what we went back to—our goals."

As the McMillins relate this story, sitting across the table from them is someone who has made sticking to their goals of using the farm to launch a new agricultural

career much easier: Bryton Miller. On this fall day, the 22-year-old has just wrapped up the morning chores in the nearby barn and is taking a break before heading over to a neighbor's farm to help with chopping silage. Miller grew up on a 184-cow dairy just up the road from the McMillins, and has made it clear his entire life that his ultimate goal is to own and operate his own milking enterprise. After all, last year Bryton received a dairy heifer due to calve as a Christmas present from his parents; as a high school graduation present, they gave him an Allis-Chalmers D17 tractor.

"Farming oozes out of my pores," says Bryton with a laugh. "Every career day at school, I was a farmer. Every time."

Bryton is the oldest of six children, and his parents, Tom and Kay, encouraged him from a young age to seek farming opportunities off the home place. In fact, he has held jobs off the farm since he was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, gaining experience not just on other agricultural operations but in everything from construction to being part of an ambulance crew, all the while building a nest egg for buying a farm someday.

Bill and Bonnie say Miller and his family have a reputation for being hard

workers and having a commitment to the community. By the time they received that offer to sell everything in 2014, the McMillins were already in discussion with Miller about how he could take over the operation.

Farm transitions in farming are full of missed opportunities, connections that aren't quite solidified and, in general, timing that doesn't work out for the parties involved. A retiring farm couple, for example, may be leaving the land at a time when a beginning farmer is not ready to step in and take over. Given that, the McMillins and Miller seem to be a perfect match: a rare bit of lucky providence where a retiring farm family's goals and a beginning farmer's aspirations intersect logistically and timing wise.

But a closer look shows that a lot of preparation went into making certain the two

**Farm Transition, *see page 23...***



parties could take advantage of that luck and ensure long-term success for all involved.

## Getting it on Paper

The McMillins concede that they have a huge advantage over a lot of retiring farmers: they know Miller and they know his family. In fact, they began discussing with Tom the possibility of his son taking over the farm while Bryton was still in high school. But such familiarity comes with its own challenges. When tensions over payment arrangements or management decisions come up, “handshake” agreements between neighbors can go sour as the two parties involved realize expectations haven’t been put on paper. That didn’t happen in this particular situation, but the McMillins and Miller realized the potential was there.

In order to make sure the transition went in a way that ensured a good retirement income for the McMillins while Miller didn’t get in over his head financially, Bonnie and Bill knew they had to develop a formal agreement that covered everything from how to handle down payments and conflict resolution to where the retiring couple would live during the next few years. The latter issue can be particularly fraught for retiring farmers, since their place of employment is also their home.

Both parties hired attorneys to help draw up a contract and hammer out an agreement, something that was emphasized in the LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop.

“I hate paperwork,” says Bryton.

“But now you know where you stand, and we know where we stand,” responds Bonnie.

They ended up developing a “contract for deed” arrangement. This consists of an initial down payment, and then a regular payment schedule stretching over a 10-year period. At the end of the 10 years, roughly half of the price of the farm will be paid for at that point, and a “balloon payment” for the balance will come due. Then, Miller will either have to refinance to pay off the McMillins, or the two parties could decide to have him continue making regular payments to Bill and Bonnie for the balance.

The McMillins felt an important piece to include in the arrangement was that they be allowed to continue living on the farm for up to four years. The contract is set up so that they can live in the house for two years rent-free, and after that they will pay rent. Bryton’s attorney counseled against such an arrangement, but the McMillins and Miller say it has advantages for both parties.

For Bill and Bonnie, it gives them until

2021 to find a new place to live (Bryton is currently living on another farm). Bryton works fulltime on an overnight ambulance crew, so since Bill is living on the farm he can often help with the morning milking when a shift runs long. Overall, it allows the McMillins to stay connected to dairying without having to be tied to it on a daily basis. Bonnie has retired after being at Mayo Clinic for 41 years, and the couple is looking forward to traveling more.

The contract for deed has another twist—it allows Miller to spread his down payment out over four years. This helps Bill and Bonnie tax-wise, and gives Bryton more breathing room financially as he gets his operation

off the ground.

“We’ve farmed our whole lives and we know that sometimes you get a little bit behind,” says Bill.

## The Cows Come Home

In March 2017, after a dozen-year absence, milk cows returned to the McMillin parlor. Because it had been several years since the operation was a dairy farm, Miller had to replace the stanchions and repair the pipeline milking system. He was able to build up a herd by purchasing cows with

**Farm Transition, see page 24...**

## Start Your Farm Transition this Winter

By Karen Stettler

A farm’s transition, eventually, is inevitable, but how that transition takes place is often an open question. The Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings Program is committed to help beginning farmers gain access to secure and affordable land. Part of that work involves conversations with current farmers about future options for their operations.

Through these conversations and by working with a Land Access Committee of LSP members, a Farm Transition Planning Workshop has been developed. Over the past several winters, roughly 30 families have engaged in long-term thinking and planning to ensure the legacy of their farms. These farmers are choosing to proactively start the process—sometimes the hardest part of planning is getting started.

LSP’s next Farm Transition Planning Workshop is scheduled for this winter during a series of Saturdays—Jan. 19, Feb. 16 and March 16—at Peace United Church of Christ in Rochester, Minn. This series highlights important work that families need to think about as they are planning for a farm transition. There are some “soft” issues like values, legacy, communication and family

dynamics, as well as “hard” issues like tax implications, legal issues and long-term care realities.

This series aims to provide a foundation of important issues that need consideration in the planning process. Based on the guidance of LSP’s Land Access Committee, the series is designed to give attendees practical information and allow families to get started on the work during the trainings. There is also time in-between the sessions to engage in thinking and planning.

Farmers Bill and Bonnie McMillin (see page 22), who have participated in a past Farm Transition Planning Workshop, say it helped them to define their values and set goals for their farm.

“Whenever a difficult decision or unforeseen issue arose, we went back to our values and goals to help us make our decision,” they wrote. “It was also great to hear how other farmers were dealing with the process.”

If you are thinking about the next steps

for your farm, I encourage you to contact me about this workshop series.

*Land Stewardship Project organizer Karen Stettler focuses on farm transition issues.*

### LSP Farm Transition Workshop this Winter

The Land Stewardship Project’s 2019 Farm Transition Planning Workshop is scheduled to be held during a series of Saturdays—Jan. 19, Feb. 16 and March 16—at Peace United Church of Christ in Rochester, Minn.

There will be a chance to network with other farmers who are at all stages of going through the transition planning process. Topics to be covered include goal setting and financial planning, as well as legal, tax and healthcare implications related to transition plans.

The workshop fee is \$200 per family, which includes course materials and meals. To sign-up or for more information, contact LSP’s Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or [stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org). More information on farm transition resources is on LSP’s website: <https://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmtransitiontools>.

### ...Farm Transition, from page 23

savings he'd squirreled away since he was a freshman in high school. And since he's still working fulltime on an ambulance crew, Bryton has that income for living expenses. Having outside income and being able to ease into a dairy operation while keeping exposure to financial risk low is important at a time when milk prices appear to be in a free fall. Dairy farms are liquidating herds as oversupply floods the market and university economists are espousing the belief that "mega-farms" are the future.

But Bryton is confident he can make a go of it. He is keeping his expenses low and relying a lot on sweat equity. Today, he's milking 50 cows, and has a 10-year plan of building a new parlor and a free stall barn, as well as eventually expanding to around 80 cows. Besides milking assistance from Bill, Bryton benefits by being able to borrow equipment from his family.

*"The best part of the Farm Transition class for me was it made us ask, 'What are our goals for the farm?'"*

— Bonnie McMillin

The McMillins are thrilled that dairying has returned to the farm. For one, the land is considered highly erodible and vulnerable to runoff, and keeping it a dairy operation means there is a better chance that the farm will be covered in a diversity of plant systems, including hay and pasture. Bill, who long utilized managed rotational grazing to raise livestock, has encouraged Bryton to experiment with this system. The young farmer has also been planting cover crops, which has reduced erosion significantly.

### Goal Tending

As they enter a critical stage in the transition—Bryton's last down payment is due in January 2020, and Bill and Bonnie's future

living situation must be decided the next year—questions hang in the air. What will milk prices do? Where will the McMillins move

to? Is 160 acres enough to support a growing dairy herd?

But Bonnie and Bill say they get a lot of comfort knowing that they have set goals for themselves and the farm, and been able to develop a plan that helps them attain those goals. That's been important, particularly

when challenges arise from unexpected places. For example, the farmer who stopped by in 2014 to offer cash for the land was not the only prospective buyer. Others in the neighborhood, including extended family members, were also interested in purchasing the farm. Turning down such offers can result in strained relations, but Bill says in general the community has been supportive of their efforts to keep the farm as a stand-alone dairy operation.

"You think it's your farm and your decision, but it's easy to hurt somebody's feelings," he says. "We have our values, our goals, and it might not go that way if we let somebody else take control of the situation."

And sometimes those goals go beyond one's retirement plans or even the state of the land. Also key are connections to the next generation that aren't based on a transaction involving money or infrastructure.

"I kind of enjoy having you guys here," says Bryton as he heads out to do field work. "When you're in the barn and you see somebody up at the house you know if something did happen, there's somebody up there."

Bonnie watches him walk out the door.

"Bryton doesn't sit still," she says. "He comes down the driveway in a skid steer loader or on a tractor and he's always on the phone, but he has a smile on his face. You can tell he's just happy." □

## Want a Rental Agreement that Reflects Your Values? Check Out these LSP Workshops

The Land Stewardship Project will be holding several "Managing for Stewardship" workshops this winter for farmland owners and renters who are looking for help developing rental agreements that reflect their stewardship values:

### Intro to Land Management & Stewardship Communication

Ready to start talking about stewardship on your rented-out farmland? This workshop will help landowners orient to the basics of good land stewardship while pursuing soil building in partnership with renters. We will talk about soil health, review resources for landowners, have a panel of farmers and landowners to answer your questions, and learn how to start some of the difficult conversations around increasing conservation practices on your land. Here are the workshops we have scheduled so far:

- **Jan. 10:** Vinje Church, Willmar, Minn.
- **Jan 16:** northern Twin Cities metropolitan area location
- **Jan 17:** Wedgewood Cove, Albert Lea, Minn.

### Digging Deeper into Conservation

These are two-part workshops for digging deeper into details. In the morning, we will have a session for *women landowners only*, recognizing that many farmland owners are women who have often inherited land without having been deeply involved in farmland management. We will go over some basics, offer each other support, and talk about what this group needs most to be able to make changes on the land that they manage.

We will break for lunch at which point *anybody* can join us for the afternoon where we will bring in legal, financial and agency experts, as well as farmers, to answer your more in-depth questions about what you can ask/do on your land, what to include in your lease, and how to approach those conversations and changes. These are the workshops we have scheduled:

- **Feb. 7:** Vinje Church, Willmar, Minn.
- **Feb 13:** northern Twin Cities metropolitan area location
- **Feb 14:** Albert Lea, Minn.

For more information on these workshops, contact LSP's Robin Moore at 320-269-2105 or [rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org).



## Farm Beginnings

# Applications Open for 2019-2020 FB Course

## Minnesota-Wisconsin Region Class to Begin in Fall 2019

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings Program is accepting applications for its 2019-2020 class session. The class will be held at a location in either Minnesota or Wisconsin; details will be announced this winter.

LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its second decade of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farm management. The course is for people just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers looking to make changes in their operations. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial and enterprise planning, and innovative marketing techniques.

This 12-month course provides training and hands-on learning opportunities in the form of classroom sessions, farm tours, field

of 2019, run until March 2020, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, approximately 800 people have graduated from the Minnesota-Wisconsin region Farm Beginnings course. Graduates are involved in a wide-range of agricultural enterprises, including grass-based livestock, organic vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture and specialty products.

The Farm Beginnings class fee is \$1,500, which covers one "farm unit"—either one farmer or two farming partners who are on the same farm. A \$200 deposit is required with an application and will be put towards the final fee. Payment plans are available, as well as a limited number of scholarships. For application materials or more information, see

[www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org). You can also get details from the Land Stewardship Project's Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or [karenb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:karenb@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Farm Beginnings in Other Regions

Besides Minnesota and Wisconsin, Farm Beginnings classes have been held in Illinois, Nebraska and North Dakota. Local community-based organizations have also launched Farm Beginnings courses in South Dakota, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, New York and Maine.

For information on Farm Beginnings courses in other parts of the country, see the Farm Beginnings Collaborative website at [www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org](http://www.farmbeginningscollaborative.org). More information is also available by contacting LSP's Amy Bacigalupo at 320-269-2105 or [amyb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:amyb@landstewardshipproject.org).

days, workshops and access to an extensive farmer network. Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the region. The classes, which meet approximately twice-a-month beginning in the fall

# LSP's Farm Dreams Can Help You Figure out if Farming is in Your Future

Farm Dreams is an entry level, four-hour, exploratory Land Stewardship Project workshop designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether farming is the next step for them. This is a great workshop to attend if you are considering farming as a career and are not sure where to start. Farm Dreams is a good prerequisite for LSP's Farm Beginnings course (see above).

LSP holds Farm Dreams workshops at locations throughout the Minnesota-Wisconsin region over the course of a year. The cost is \$20 for LSP members and \$40 for non-members. The next round of classes will begin during the spring of 2019.

For more information, see the **Farm Dreams** page at [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org). Details are also available by contacting LSP's Annelie Livingston-Anderson at 507-523-3366 or by e-mailing her at [annelie@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:annelie@landstewardshipproject.org). □



Participants in a September Land Stewardship Project Farm Dreams class did some "cognitive mapping of their ideal farm" to help them identify quality-of-life goals. Farm Dreams also introduces participants to the various resources available for pursuing agriculture as a career. (Photo by Annelie Livingston-Anderson)



Illustration by Malena Arner Handeen

# A Day on the Farm, a Night on the River

*New Book Profiles Farmers Who Refuse to Separate Ag from Ecology*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** On Oct. 9, the University of Wisconsin Press released *Wildly Successful Farming: Sustainability and the New Agricultural Land Ethic*, a book written by *Land Stewardship Letter* editor Brian DeVore. This book tells the stories of farmers across the Midwest who are balancing viable food production with environmental sustainability and a "passion for all things wild." They are using innovative techniques and strategies to develop their "wildly successful" farms as working ecosystems. Several Land Stewardship Project farmer-members are featured in *Wildly Successful Farming*. The following pages include an excerpt of the opening chapter.

By Brian DeVore

Dan Specht finished up hog and cattle chores, hopped into his pickup truck, and wound his way down to the Mississippi River, just a few minutes' drive away from his hilltop farm in northeastern Iowa. He had fishing gear in the back, soil under his fingernails, and nutrient runoff on the mind. That wasn't unusual for Specht. It was difficult for the farmer to separate his various passions—even if they seemed to come into conflict at times.

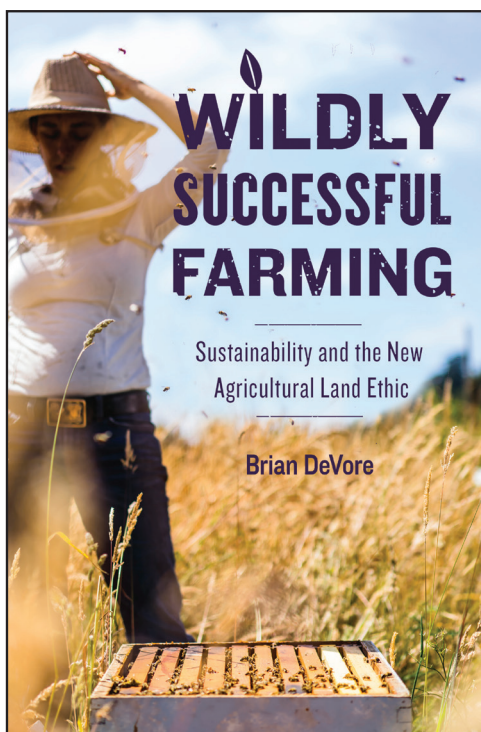
"I'm trying to be more efficient in my nutrient cycling," the softspoken bear of a man told me that summer evening as he guided the pickup past corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and pastures before hitting the heavily timbered river bottom, which was home to, among other things, the ancient, humped structures of the effigy mound builders culture. "The thing is that corn and beans don't create a very complex rotation. It's a very leaky system. It's annual, warm season row crops, and it's the middle of June before the roots start picking much up. Before you know it, your drain tile lines are running full of nutrients the whole months of April, May, and June."

There, in one succinct description given during a 500-foot drop in elevation that carried us from the cultivated farmlands to the wild bottoms of the Upper Mississippi, Specht had laid out to me perfectly a problem that touched on plant physiology, soil biology, and hydrogeology.

And because his beloved Mississippi flows down to the Gulf of Mexico, where all that nitrogen that's escaping leaky farm fields has helped create an oxygen-poor "dead zone" that, as of 2017, was the size of New Jersey (approximately 9,000 square-

miles), Specht's description demonstrated he also understood Barry Commoner's first law of ecology: "Everything is connected to everything else."

This conversation took place in 1999. I had called Dan and asked if I could visit him for a day to talk about the Gulf of Mexico dead zone and the role agriculture plays in



it. The dead zone, which has decimated fisheries in the Gulf, has its roots in a Midwestern farming system that has increasingly become dependent on monocrops of corn and soybeans.

Raising corn, for example, requires heavy dosages of nitrogen fertilizer, and much of it—20 percent or more in some cases—escapes down into the soil profile, making its

way into field drainage systems and eventually down the Mississippi to the Gulf, where it supercharges algal growths that gobble up oxygen. I've looked at historical charts that illustrate a clearcut mathematical equation: more corn + more fertilizer = less life in the Gulf of Mexico.

I had read all the government studies on the topic, and perused the statements issued by the environmental community ("Farmers are killing the Gulf!") as well as the agribusiness industry ("We can't feed the world without nitrogen fertilizer!"). But to write an article that went beyond the science and the rhetoric, I needed someone to give me a ground-level view of the situation. Dan represented a way to put a human face on an incredibly complex and controversial topic.

I had met Dan a few years earlier at a sustainable agriculture workshop and was impressed with his knowledge of not just farming but the landscape it was set in. He was an avid hunter and angler, had studied wildlife biology at Iowa State University before leaving to go into farming fulltime, and later in life got a biology degree from the University of Northern Iowa. He was a bit of an expert (in a good way) on everything from local springs and karst geology to the birds that called his corner of Iowa home. It was all part of a blend, and Dan was the kind of guy who surprised you: after pulling a few words of small talk out of him, suddenly you realized you'd just gotten the entire history of the Big Spring Project, a pioneering research initiative in his community that set the standard for learning about and mitigating agricultural fertilizer pollution.

And he walked the talk: Dan wouldn't dream of doing anything to upset the delicate balance between farming and the land that he felt should exist. I'll admit, at times Dan took blurring the lines between humanity and nature a little too far. Once, while I was eating a bowl of ice cream in his somewhat rustic kitchen, he opened his back door and grabbed a handful of mulberries that were sprouting from a limb scratching at the side of the house. He threw them into my bowl, stems, ants, and all. The resulting concoction was delicious, if somewhat more fibrous than I had bargained for.

Not long before I had visited Dan's farm for the first time in 1999, he traveled to the Gulf of Mexico as the guest of an environmental group, getting a firsthand look at the impact of agricultural pollution on the people and their livelihoods. The experience had reinforced his commitment to reducing the amount of nutrients leaving the 500 acres he farmed at the time. Many farmers would approach such a problem

*Wildly Successful Farming*, see page 27...



in a reductionist manner: too much fertilizer escapes my land, so I will put in place a specific practice or structure to control it. Such thinking has resulted in innumerable terraces, controlled drainage systems, and even “bioreactors” (utilizing material such as wood chips to soak up excess nutrient runoff) on farms across the Midwest, often at taxpayer expense.

They’ve had mixed results. Such practices have helped reduce pollutants on a local basis, but on a watershed-wide level, we still have major problems, and not just in the Gulf of Mexico. In 2015, the Des Moines Waterworks sued three northwestern Iowa counties, claiming drainage districts there act as conduits for nitrate to move from farm fields into the Raccoon River, a major source of water for 500,000 residents. Such contamination has forced the city to invest massive amounts of money in equipment just to make the water safe for drinking.

Agricultural runoff led to massive algal blooms in Lake Erie during 2014. As a result, for three days Toledo, Ohio, had to shut down the drinking-water system that services 400,000 people.

Such problems are caused by nonpoint source pollution runoff, which is particularly difficult to control since it comes from numerous places on the landscape, rather than one specific “point” source such as a storm sewer pipe emptying straight into a river. The latest U.S. Environmental Protection Agency National Water Quality Assessment shows that agricultural nonpoint source pollution is the leading source of water quality problems on surveyed rivers and streams, the third largest source for lakes, the second largest source of impairments to wetlands, and a major contributor to contamination of estuaries and groundwater. Climate change, which is bringing torrential rains to parts of the Corn Belt, is exacerbating the problem. In 2017, the journal *Science* published a paper showing that increased rainfall could increase nitrogen runoff as much as 20 percent by the end of this century, which would slash oxygen levels even more in not just the Gulf but places like Chesapeake Bay.

As farmers like Dan Specht see it, the struggle to contain nonpoint source pollution is an indicator that stopgap conservation structures don’t encompass the big picture “system” approach to farming in concert with the land. Many of these mitigation measures are steeped in a basic mindset: How can we continue to raise corn in a manner that will keep regulators off our backs? That’s the kind of thinking that predominates when people see themselves as “corn

producers” only, rather than farmers who are willing, depending on the circumstances, to consider raising a variety of products.

Dan had the ability to raise a high-yielding crop of corn. But to him, such a crop was a means to an end, not an end itself. Therefore, he approached the leaky nutrient problem much more holistically. He asked such questions as, “Should I be raising corn on this particular piece of ground in the first place? Rather than raising corn and selling it to the local elevator so that it could eventually be fed to livestock, why not raise livestock on that land myself?” This kind of thinking led Dan to do such things as produce beef cattle on his hilliest acres, utilizing a system called managed rotational grazing. Developed in France and New Zealand and modified to fit local situations, this system consists of moving livestock through



**The late Dan Specht during a field day on his farm. Specht followed Aldo Leopold’s philosophy that working lands conservation should be “a positive exercise of skill and insight, not merely a negative exercise of abstinence or caution.” (LSP Photo)**

a series of grazing paddocks on a regular basis—sometimes as much as once or twice a day—so that they don’t overgraze the pastures. It distributes manure and urine across the landscape evenly, providing grasses and forbs an opportunity to take up the nutrients at a sustainable rate that fits their needs. Because it eliminates overgrazing, such a system can extend the pasture season by a month or more in the Upper Midwest, which is a financial bonus for farmers, particularly beef and dairy producers.

As managed rotational grazing has caught on in this country, farmers and scientists have noted numerous other benefits: it sequesters greenhouse gases, while providing

habitat for grassland songbirds and pollinators.

One other important benefit is that such a system can be set up at a lower cost than, say, a full confinement livestock facility reliant on high inputs of machinery, energy, and drugs. As a result, managed rotational grazing has provided an entrée into livestock production for many cash-strapped beginning farmers in recent years. Since managed rotational grazing provides an economically viable reason for keeping the land covered in perennial plants such as grass, it can be a way to counter the trend of more and more acres going under the plow to grow annual row crops like corn and soybeans.

I spent the day on Specht’s crop and livestock farm and saw firsthand how he utilized rotational grazing on his steepest fields while bobolinks and bluebirds flitted about in pastures surrounded by oaks. Most of Iowa is former tallgrass prairie and in many parts of the state any field that dares to rise even a few feet above the surrounding landscape is considered mountainous. But Dan’s neighborhood is part of the “Driftless Area”—a region dominated by rugged bluffs that were not shaved down by the last ice age. Some of his fields are so steep that people joke that squirrel hunting on this land involves aiming a .22 rifle down at the tree canopy. Dan reserved his flatter acres for raising corn and soybeans, and even in his row-cropped fields he utilized diverse rotations and soil-building cover cropping to keep nutrients on his land and out of the water. Such methods also kept topsoil in place. That’s not an easy task; during my first visit I noticed how a recent rain had washed soil and plant debris off a neighbor’s field, forming a dirty, stucco-like wall that plastered a fence line separating it from Dan’s property.

The fishing trip we took at the end of that informative day was not just a way to blow off steam over a few beers—to Specht it was part and parcel of the personal seminar he was giving on farming, fishing, and fertilizing. It became clear as he, neighboring farmer Jeff Klinge, and I cast lines and talked about everything from agricultural policy to water chemistry to geology, that there was no divide between what took place up on the nearby hilltops and the results down on the bottomlands, all the way downstream to the Gulf, almost 2,000 miles away. It was all interconnected.

“It’s really fragile,” Dan said at one point while a freight train rumbled along the Wisconsin side of the river. “It’s vast, but it’s fragile.” He was referring to the point where the Mississippi meets the Gulf, but it was clear he had his own neck of the woods

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in mind as well.

## Making Connections

I thought about that jam-packed day more than a dozen years later while standing on a sidewalk in Saint Paul, Minnesota. I'd just gotten the news that Dan had been killed at the age of 63 in a haymaking accident on one of those steep fields that made up his farm. I had spent the intervening years writing about other farmers that refused to separate food production from ecological processes, and Dan had been the spark that ignited my interest in this kind of agriculture.

Frankly, farmers like Dan Specht are not the norm. I've seen innumerable examples of farms that place a wildlife pond here or a windbreak there in the name of "conservation." Every year farmers throughout the Corn Belt are given awards by commodity groups or Soil and Water Conservation Districts for owning and operating some version of an "Outstanding Conservation Farm." Invariably, when the press release is issued it provides a shopping list of practices and structures the winners have put in place: a wildlife planting or grassed waterway, planting cover crops to protect soil between the regular cash crop growing seasons, switching to no-till to reduce erosion.

These practices are all well and good, and when taken together make an impressive scorecard. There is no doubt, for example, that no-till farming, which does away with using the moldboard plow to disturb the land, has saved billions of tons of soil in recent decades. But these disparate practices don't always add up to an integrated system, and thus are vulnerable to being dropped as soon as market, regulatory, or other incentives disappear.

But occasionally over the years, I'd run into someone like Dan Specht, who wasn't just cherry-picking a practice here and there in order to provide a short-term solution to a problem. They have a comprehensive view of a world where agriculture and ecology are deeply interconnected, and realize any real, long-term sustainability must be rooted in taking advantage of these connections in a positive way. Such a worldview is not easy to come by. I know, because it didn't come naturally to me.

Growing up on a 240-acre farm in southwestern Iowa during the 1970s, I considered farming and the natural world to be two very different animals. You raised corn,

soybeans, hogs, and cattle up on the DeVore hill, and wildlife thrived in those hidden, and somewhat mysterious, hollows down in the bottomland where a scrappy little stream called the 7-Mile cut a gash through our neighborhood. That belief was reinforced by the fact that the 1970s was witness to a "fencerow-to-fencerow" grain production explosion, when farmers were encouraged to farm every last acre in the name of "feeding the world." Wildlife habitat was a luxury on "real" working farms. My home place succumbed to this thinking, but not nearly to the extent of other farms. My dad removed plenty of trees and a few brushy fencerows—more out of a need to see things neat and tidy than any desire to "feed the world." He had hunted, fished, and trapped back in the day, but now he was a farmer, and his

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*It turns out the fate of the family farmer isn't just tied to the price of corn—there is a real connection to the health of the land as well.*

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interaction with the land began and ended with how to wrest a living from it.

I had always preferred spending more time in the untamed bottoms of the 7-Mile than the domesticated tops of our farm, so when I went to college I studied fish and wildlife biology and journalism, thinking I was going to be the next Mark Trail, the outdoor writer of newspaper comic strip fame.

And during my college years in the early 1980s, farming and nature seemed more alienated from each other than ever. I wrote articles about studies showing that agricultural contamination of Iowa's drinking water wells was ubiquitous, while wildlife habitat was shrinking to all-time lows.

It turns out there was a very important human element to all this bad news that I missed at the time: as farms became less numerous and larger, environmental degradation increased. There were simply fewer people on the land to care if a pasture was plowed or a brushy fence line bulldozed.

It turns out the fate of the family farmer isn't just tied to the price of corn—there is a real connection to the health of the land as well. Somewhere along the line, my view of agriculture's relationship with nature changed. I'm sure it was a combination of things, but one experience stands out. One of the farmers who farmed on the bottomlands of the 7-Mile had hunted, fished, and trapped with my dad back when they were young. But this guy, perhaps because of his nearness to the creek, had never quite lost his interest in woods and streams. One day

he told me about a book he had just read.

"You might be interested in it," he said nonchalantly. "It's about this guy who kind of takes you through the seasons and describes our relationship with the land, things like that."

That book was *A Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold. Even though it had been written almost half a century before I picked it up, it set my brain on fire. I loved the descriptions of nature, and Leopold's ability to observe one small aspect of the land and extrapolate it into a larger way of thinking. But what really drew me in was his idea of the "land ethic"—the idea that we have a moral responsibility to the land and its wild flora and fauna, that not every "cog and wheel" in nature must justify itself economically in order for us to give it permission to exist.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community," wrote Leopold. "It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

When I first read those words, I didn't know enough about "biotas" or "ecosystems" to judge what land practices were preserving "integrity and stability." All I knew was I didn't like the cold feeling I got in my gut when I saw a stand of hardwoods bulldozed and burned, a creek straightened or a pasture plowed up and planted to corn. Leopold helped me begin observing the workings of the land less as a consumer of outdoor diversions and more as a member of a community, one that was much more interesting than I could have imagined.

When we stop viewing land as mere property, the possibilities, for us as well as that land, are opened wide. Ironically, some of those possibilities are actually based in economics. For example, farmers in recent years are discovering that by ignoring all that "useless" soil biota and focusing exclusively on adding to their fields' financial value with high-priced, artificial inputs like petroleum-based fertilizer, they are sacrificing the long-term viability of their land. That would not have surprised Leopold, who called it a false assumption that "the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts."

And I liked what Leopold said about how an all-encompassing ethic should apply not only to pristine wilderness areas but to where we live and work every day. When one considers such an ethic in terms of agriculture, the health of the land in rural areas is best served when food production and wild areas exist side-by-side, rather than as separate entities performing seemingly

**Wildly Successful Farming, see page 29...**



unrelated tasks. Such a way of looking at the world was highly appealing to a wildlife-loving farm kid who was living nowhere near a national park, wildlife refuge, or nature preserve.

If I was to have any interaction with nature, it had to be in the pastures, crop fields and ditches that made up my agrarian world. Seeing my family's 240 acres through Leopold's eyes suddenly made that farm seem much larger and layered.

In his essay "The Farmer as a Conservationist," Leopold eloquently described how woodlands, meadows, sloughs, and wetlands, those odd corners where ecological services quietly go about their business, can coexist with corn production, pasturing, and other farming enterprises.

Wilderness areas, national forests, and wildlife refuges are important. But as Dana and Laura Jackson point out in a book I contributed to in 2002, *The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems*, too often people see their presence as an excuse to sacrifice a functioning ecosystem on good farmland: "Farm the best and preserve the rest."

The result of this segregation on a landscape scale is pristine preserves such as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness on one end of the spectrum and ecological sacrifice zones 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 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 seven decades since Leopold wrote those words, it has become clear he 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—in other words, it's less resilient.

Environmentalists are now aware that creating islands of natural areas is not sustainable in the long term. To be sure, waterfowl benefit from state and federal wildlife refuges, 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 nonpoint runoff from all the farms present in the surrounding watershed?

Soon after I went to work for the Land Stewardship Project in the mid-1990s, I had the opportunity to encounter numerous

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***"Wildness," in this case, extends beneath the surface as well: healthy soil is perhaps the most diverse ecosystem on earth and maintaining its diversity to the point where natural systems can function has repercussions all the way up the food chain, to us.***

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farmers, such as Dan Specht, who blended the natural world and their farming systems. Some of these farmers were prompted to make major changes in their operations by health concerns (a well contaminated with agrichemicals), while others were triggered by economics (seeking a premium price in the organic market, for example).

The stories I find particularly intriguing are those of farmers who I call "ecological agrarians"—people who never really separated the natural world from food production. Sometimes they seemed to be born with this inability to disconnect the two. Other times, early life experiences forged this connection.

### Wildly Successful Farming

No matter what the avenue or the timing, the result is, as Art "Tex" Hawkins refers to it, "wildly successful farms." Hawkins is a former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service watershed biologist who went on to start a sustainability initiative at Winona State University in Minnesota, and his late father, Art Sr., was one of Leopold's first graduate students. The younger Hawkins has worked closely with many of these farms that are blending nature and agriculture, helping them, for example, monitor the health of the ecosystem via bird identification. He sees them as the living embodiment of what good can come from refusing to separate the ecological from the agronomic.

I like the term "wildly successful," partly because it's a play on the title of a well-known farm magazine, *Successful Farming*. Just as a pop musician pines to be on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, it's long been acknowledged in the agricultural world that to have your farm featured in a magazine like *Successful Farming* is a sign that you've arrived. Farm magazines like this offer up lots of practical advice, but like their glossy counterparts in the suburbs and cities, they also have an aspirational component to them. "You too can be a successful farmer!" is the message their profiles and photographs convey.

Such success is measured by how many bushels are being produced on how many acres utilizing what kind of technology and inputs. However, there have always been groups of farmers who measure success based on how well their production systems interact with the land's natural functions. When done right, these farms are able to succeed not only ecologically but financially and from a quality-of-life point of view.

And we're not just talking about farms that are homes to ducks and deer. "Wildness," in this case, extends beneath the surface as well: healthy soil is perhaps the most diverse ecosystem on earth and maintaining its diversity to the point where natural systems can function has repercussions all the way up the food chain, to us. So, this book isn't just about marshes and prairies—it's about farms that give a variety of natural forces the opportunity to interact with human-driven forces in a positive way, literally from the ground up. Some of those interactions happen through a hands-off approach; others are more directed. Either way, thought and conscious decision-making must go into the process for it to be successful. This is, after all, for all intents and purposes the Anthropocene, a geological epoch dominated by the actions of human beings.

These farmers are utilizing a wide range of techniques and strategies, but they are united by a single philosophy, which is to approach working lands conservation as, to quote Leopold, "a positive exercise of skill and insight, not merely a negative exercise of abstinence or caution." □

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### Want a Copy of Wildly Successful Farming?

To order a copy of *Wildly Successful Farming*, see <https://uwpress.wisc.edu>. Copies can also be ordered through local independent book stores.



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## Membership Update

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## In Memory & in Honor...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gifts made to honor and remember loved ones and friends:

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◆ Pat Lytwyn

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*In Memory of Joe Morse*

◆ Ed Krall

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◆ Kyle Reicks  
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*In Memory of Tom Taylor*

◆ Catherine Settanni

For details on donating to the Land Stewardship Project in the name of someone, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or [mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org). Donations can be made online at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/home/donate>.

## Support LSP in Your Workplace

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

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

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

If your employer does not provide this opportunity to give through the Minnesota Environmental Fund, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For details, contact LSP's Amelia Shoptaugh at [amelias@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:amelias@landstewardshipproject.org) or 612-722-6377.





# Land Stewardship Project Board Statement on Gender Equity

**NOTE:** Periodically, the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors develops policy statements that address key issues LSP and society in general are dealing with. Here is our recent board of directors' policy statement on gender equity.

One aspect of the Land Stewardship Project's mission is to advance the development of healthy communities based upon our principles of democracy, justice and equity. To achieve the vibrant, resilient communities we envision, there must be gender equity, meaning all persons, regardless of gender or gender identity, must have the same opportunities, rights, benefits and obligations. In acknowledging our shared history of gender oppression, we also recognize that if we are to enjoy the full potential our community holds, this often means ensuring that people who were denied opportunities in the past

now receive them.

We seek to build communities built on mutual respect where all are free from sexual harassment, sexual abuse and prejudice or discrimination based on gender. As an organization, as staff, board and members committed to justice, we will not allow or excuse behavior, conditions or attitudes among us (staff, board and members) that reinforce stereotypes of social roles based on gender.

To realize our ideal of gender equity, the Land Stewardship Project will engage in an ongoing reexamination of its policies and culture, as well as the makeup and relationships of power within the organization. LSP commits to educating staff and members about gender inequity, how to identify it, and how best to support those who are experiencing it. LSP aims for an environment where everyone is able and supported to come forward to discuss and address issues of gender inequity. Furthermore, LSP will establish policies to examine

and resolve such issues where they exist. Finally, LSP recognizes that it cannot be silent where issues of gender injustice exist in our communities. Consequently, we encourage all to speak clearly and publicly with a depth we have not exercised before in pointing out examples of gender inequity in a way that teaches about the unfairness of our current social norms and structures. As an organization, we have an opportunity to demonstrate in practice what gender equity looks like and can mean for all of us. Ensuring everyone's full contribution without regard to gender or gender identity is an essential step in paving the way for a society based on stewardship, sustainability, economic justice and racial equity.

You can read other LSP board statements at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/lspboardstatements>.

## Get Current With

**LIVE  WIRE**

Sign up for the **LIVE-WIRE** e-letter to get monthly updates from the Land Stewardship Project sent straight to your inbox. Details are at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/signup>. □

## Volunteer for LSP

A big "thank you" goes out to the volunteers who help the Land Stewardship Project in all aspects of our work. LSP literally could not fulfill its mission without the hard work of our volunteers. Volunteers help us do everything from stuff envelopes and make telephone calls to enter data and set up logistics for meetings. If you'd like to volunteer in one of our offices, for an event or at a meeting, contact:

- **Montevideo, Minnesota**

Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105,  
[tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:tlvdp@landstewardshipproject.org)

- **Lewiston, Minnesota**

Karen Benson, 507-523-3366,  
[karenb@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:karenb@landstewardshipproject.org)

- **Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Clara Sanders Marcus, 612-722-6377,  
[cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org) □

## Land Stewardship Talk

The Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast features over 220 episodes focused on everything from beginning farmer issues and soil health, to policy and local food systems. Check them out at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast>. *Ear to the Ground* is also available on Stitcher and iTunes. □

## Membership Questions?

If you have questions about the status of your Land Stewardship Project membership, give our Individual Giving and Membership Program a call at 612-722-6377, or e-mail Clara Sanders Marcus at [cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:cmarcus@landstewardshipproject.org). □



The success of Land Stewardship Project events like the annual Potluck-Cookout relies on the support of volunteers. (LSP Photo)



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## STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **DEC. 1—Farm Beginnings class** (*Beginning Farmer Panel and Intro to Personal Finances*), Rochester, Minn. (see page 25)  
 → **DEC. 6—LSP Local Foods Listening Session**, Natural Foods Co-op, Litchfield, Minn. (see page 15)  
 → **DEC. 11—LSP Local Foods Listening Session**, South Central Service Cooperative, North Mankato, Minn. (see page 15)  
 → **DEC. 15—LSP Farm Beginnings class** (*Introduction to Holistic Financial Planning*), Rochester, Minn. (see page 25)  
 → **JAN. 7—LSP CSA Farm Directory Listing Deadline** (see page 15)  
 → **JAN. 8—2019 Minnesota Legislature Convenes**. Contact: Bobby King, LSP, 507-523-3366, [bking@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:bking@landstewardshipproject.org)  
 → **JAN. 10—Managing for Stewardship: Introduction to Land Management & Stewardship Communication**, Willmar, Minn. (see page 24)  
 → **JAN. 12—LSP Farm Beginnings class** (*Enterprise Investigation: Defining Your Market & Pricing*), Rochester, Minn. (see page 25)  
 → **JAN. 16—Managing for Stewardship: Introduction to Land Management & Stewardship Communication**, northern Twin Cities metro area (see page 24)  
 → **JAN. 17—Managing for Stewardship: Introduction to Land Management & Stewardship Communication**, Albert Lea, Minn. (see page 24)  
 → **JAN. 19—Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Rochester, Minn. (see page 23)  
 → **JAN. 22—Workshop on Grazing, Soil Health & Improving a Farm's Financial Picture**, with Joshua Dukart, Alexandria, Minn. (see page 17)  
 → **JAN. 23—Workshop on Financial Decision Making for Building Profits & Soil Health**, with Joshua Dukart, Faribault, Minn. (see page 17)

→ **JAN. 24—Workshop on Financial Decision Making for Building Profits & Soil Health**, with Joshua Dukart, Lewiston, Minn. (see page 17)  
 → **JAN. 31—Farm Beginnings class** (*Marketing & Branding with Buyers Panel*), Rochester, Minn. (see page 25)  
 → **FEB. 7—Managing for Stewardship: Women Landowners & Digging Deeper into Conservation on Your Land**, Willmar, Minn. (see page 24)  
 → **FEB. 13—Managing for Stewardship: Women Landowners & Digging Deeper into Conservation on Your Land**, northern Twin Cities metro area (see page 24)  
 → **FEB. 14—Managing for Stewardship: Women Landowners & Digging Deeper into Conservation on Your Land**, Albert Lea, Minn. (see page 24)  
 → **FEB. 15—Workshop on Building Soil Health**, with farmers Dawn & Grant Breutkreutz & Tom Cotter, Preston, Minn.

(see page 17)

→ **FEB. 16—Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Rochester, Minn. (see page 23)  
 → **FEB. 16—LSP Farm Beginnings class** (*Record Keeping & Accounting*), Rochester, Minn. (see page 25)  
 → **MARCH 2—Farm Beginnings class** (*Legal Issues, Business Structure & Resources for Beginning Farmers*), Rochester, Minn. (see page 25)  
 → **MARCH 7—Roller Crimper, Weed Control & Soil Health Workshop**, with the University of Wisconsin's Dr. Erin Silva, Rushford, Minn. (see page 17)  
 → **MARCH 13-15—Holistic Management Training**, with Tara & Joshua Dukart, Spring Valley, Minn. (see page 17)  
 → **MARCH 16—Farm Beginnings class** (*Final Presentations of Farm Proposals*), Rochester, Minn. (see page 25)  
 → **MARCH 16—Farm Transition Planning Workshop**, Rochester, Minn. (see page 23)

## Make a Stewardship (Fashion) Statement

Land Stewardship Project staff member Josh Journey-Heinz has designed a light, comfortable t-shirt that shows off the wearer's support of "keeping the land and people together."

The shirts are "avocado" green, and come in various sizes, with women's and men's cuts available. They are ring-spun 100 percent organic cotton and made in the United States. There is eye-catching artwork on the front and the words "Keeping the Land and People Together" on the back.



The price is \$20, and the shirts are available from our offices in Lewiston (507-523-3366), Montevideo (320-269-2105) or Minneapolis (612-722-6377), as well as at LSP events and meetings. Shirts can also be ordered from our online store at <https://landstewardshipproject.org/store>.

