

# *The Multiple Benefits of Agriculture*

*Analysis and Policy Development for Social, Economic, and Environmental Benefits in Agriculture*

Issue #1, June 2000

## *Coordinator's Notes:*

Welcome to this first issue of *The Multiple Benefits of Agriculture*, a newsletter to keep you up to date on the progress of the Multiple Benefits from Agriculture Project. So where are we now?

We are working in two Minnesota watersheds. The first, a subwatershed within the larger Chippewa River watershed, drains to the Minnesota River. The second, Wells Creek in southeastern Minnesota, drains directly to Lake Pepin on the Mississippi. We selected the watersheds based on natural, farming, and social characteristics. We have established our methodology for the community participation portion of the research, begun surveying farmers about their practices to support the biophysical modeling, and conducted an initial focus group in the Chippewa. In June, we will revisit the Chippewa and conduct focus groups in Wells Creek.

— Mara Krinke, Project Coordinator

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## *Multiple Benefits in a Nutshell*

The Multiple Benefits from Agriculture project is an exciting, interdisciplinary effort to estimate the environmental, economic, and social effects of different farming practices. While certain farming practices may have considerable off-farm benefits, the market often does not reward these approaches. We hope to estimate the values of some of these benefits, then to identify policies that would encourage the use and adoption of the practices.

The project is using sophisticated environmental modeling to evaluate the impacts of different practices, and will use contingent valuation surveys to estimate the value of off-farm benefits to consumers and taxpayers. By choosing to focus our attention on two very different Minnesota watersheds, we not only hope to illuminate the impact of on-farm choices in these areas, but also to draw conclusions about these practices across a broader region.

The Multiple Benefits from Agriculture Project is guided by a 14-member steering committee, composed of farmers, academics from a variety of disciplines, agency staff, and representatives from non-profit organizations.

### **This is a publication of The Land Stewardship Project**

Need more information? Contact  
Mara Krinke at (612) 722-6377  
Email: [mkrinke@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mkrinke@landstewardshipproject.org)  
Web: [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org)

## *Policy In Focus*

The **Land Stewardship Project's Federal Farm Policy Committee** continued to press the case for the Farming Results Index (FRI) proposal it developed last year. The FRI would shift federal farm payments away from commodity support and toward a system that rewards the provision of public benefits through farming and conservation practices. At the end of February, Committee members Dan Specht, Dan French, and Dave Serfling traveled to Washington, D.C., to the Annual Meeting of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, where they encouraged the Campaign to adopt key FRI provisions within the Campaign's policy positions. This work is clearly reflected in the National Campaign's "Stewardship Incentives" proposal.

Iowa's **Senator Tom Harkin** is preparing to introduce legislation that could represent an important first step toward recognizing and supporting multifunctional agriculture. The Senator's **Conservation Security Act** would reward farms that employ practices with substantial off-farm environmental benefits. The Act would include a scale of benefits that would reward farmers for greater and greater adoption of practices, including whole-farm approaches, which provide significant conservation benefits.

## *The Watersheds*

### **Wells Creek Watershed**

The Wells Creek Watershed lies in southeastern Minnesota, a region characterized by blufflands. The Wells Creek watershed has a low valley, rolling hills, and an upper flatland area. The watershed is comprised of 52,000 acres and is home to approximately 1,500 people. Wells Creek drains into the Mississippi River north of Lake City near historic Frontenac and Frontenac State Park.

Since 1993, Wells Creek has had an active Watershed Partnership composed of residents and agency people working to improve the conditions of the area.

### **Chippewa River Watershed**

The Chippewa River watershed lies in western Minnesota. The watershed is comprised of 1.3 million acres and is home to approximately 37,000 people. Sixty percent of the watershed is in agricultural use, and over 75 percent of the land is tilled. This research project focuses on the southwestern part of the watershed, in northern Chippewa County and southern Swift County. This area of the watershed has several streams and rolling hills.

There are many groups working in the area, including the Chippewa River Watershed Project and the Whole Farm Planning and Monitoring Team.

## *News and Notes from the Multiple Benefits of Agriculture Project*

### **The Multiple Benefits Team -- A Productive Partnership**

The Multiple Benefits from Agriculture Project is proceeding with substantial work from a number of different institutions and organizations. Working together on this initiative are:

**University of Minnesota:** Biophysical modeling, sociological analysis;

**Bemidji State University:** Interviews and survey to support contingent valuation;

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources:** Technical support and map development;

**Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP):** Policy analysis; website design, focus group planning, project integration; and

**Land Stewardship Project:** Overall project direction, facilitation, and analysis.

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The Land Stewardship Project  
2200 Fourth Avenue  
White Bear Lake, MN 55110

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