



November 2009

Dear LSP Member,

Standing on a flatbed trailer amidst the crowd at the farm of LSP members Eric and Lisa Klein on November 3rd while the USDA's Deputy Secretary announced the first grants from the national Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, I knew that a lot of different parts of LSP's work were coming together.

Proof of LSP's successful organizing, new farmer training, food system advocacy, community building, and leadership development were all there. But what I felt the strongest that day was this: **The Land Stewardship Project is an organization that provides voice and power to people who are caring for the land.**

That's why people who want to change our food and farming system from the ground up have been a part of LSP for the last 27 years – and that's why LSP will be a leader for family farms and the environment for many years to come.

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[Today, I'm writing to you to ask for a financial contribution – \\$35, \\$50, \\$100, \\$500 or whatever you can give – to help the Land Stewardship Project keep moving forward in our work for stewardship and justice on the land and in our food system.](#)

I hope you'll take a moment to read on. I would like to tell you about some recent LSP accomplishments, and how we're building off of them to create more positive change.

But first, I want to say thank you for supporting the Land Stewardship Project. As a member, your actions are making a difference for people and the land now and in the future. As LSP moves forward, your support will be critical to our success.

Standing Up for People and the Land – Stopping Factory Farm Expansion

Factory farms are a major threat to family farms, rural communities, and the land. LSP members have organized successfully to stop specific factory farms from being built, championed the rights of citizens to enact township and county ordinances to protect their communities, and fought

federal subsidies for corporate agriculture. As a result, LSP is nationally known for our work to stop factory farm expansion.

Right now LSP is helping lead a national campaign to suspend publicly subsidized loans from USDA to new and expanding hog and poultry operations. The loans are contributing to massive overproduction and historically low prices, leading to family farmers being forced out of business and helping corporate agribusiness and factory farms to seize a larger share of the market. LSP helped collect more than 25,000 signatures on a petition to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack to suspend the loans. As a leading member of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, LSP is continuing to keep the heat on USDA, generating hundreds of phone calls in early November to Secretary Vilsack to suspend the loans and stop this waste of public funds. The pressure on USDA to take action is growing and LSP will keep you engaged and up-to-date on the latest developments.

Building from the Ground Up – More Farmers on the Land

More than a decade ago a small group of LSP members who called themselves the “Wabasha County Give A Damns” approached the Land Stewardship Project about the need to start a training program for the next generation of farmers. Soon afterward, the Land Stewardship Project launched the Farm Beginnings® Program. Drawing from the knowledge and experiences of LSP members, the program has provided training to hundreds of new and transitioning farmers. Over the past dozen years LSP has gone from running a single class every year to running two classes annually, as well as offering a series of continuing education workshops. LSP has also expanded Farm Beginnings classes to six other states. Realizing the need for new farmer training was a national concern, LSP made public support for beginning farmer education, training, and support a top priority in the 2008 Farm Bill.

That’s why we took the lead nationally in the effort to pass legislation and secure funding to support beginning farmers, including improved credit options, stewardship incentives and training programs. At the center of this policy initiative was the **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)**, which Congress passed with \$75 million in mandatory funding as part of the 2008 Farm Bill. BFRDP is a national grants program designed to support community-based networks and partnerships that provide beginning farmer education, training and mentorships. LSP worked closely throughout all phases of the debate with Congressional leaders, including House Agriculture Chairman Collin Peterson, Senate Agriculture Chairman Tom Harkin, and bill co-authors Representative Tim Walz (in the House) and Senators Ross Feingold and Amy Klobuchar (in the Senate) to advance the legislation. Meanwhile, LSP organizers visited in-person with 16 other beginning farmer programs coast-to-coast to generate grassroots action to win passage.

It was in recognition of the Land Stewardship Project’s leadership in organizing support nationwide and in Congress for the new program that U.S. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan came to Minnesota to announce with LSP the first-ever BFRDP grants at the Kleins’ farm. The Kleins were among the first graduates of LSP’s Farm Beginnings class and now operate Hidden Stream Farm, a thriving, pasture-based livestock operation, and are mentors to new beginning farmers.

As LSP moves forward, we are seeking out new ways to improve our beginning farmer training. We are adding more farmer-to-farmer education opportunities, leadership development, and outreach to recent immigrants engaged in agriculture. Next year, LSP is also going to start focusing on one of the biggest barriers facing young farmers: access to land. These steps are key to establishing the next generation of farmers sustainably and successfully. As we build the program here in Minnesota, we are also networking with organizations around the country, assisting them with the development of their new farmer programs, and learning from their experiences along the way.

From a request by a small group of members to a national leader in new farmer development, the Land Stewardship Project has come a long way in the past 12 years, and [with your help a lot more is possible](#).

Gaining Ground – Winning Access to Land for Community Gardeners

In rural and urban communities alike, land access is largely controlled by powerful individuals and institutions that own the land or have the money to pay high rents. In January, a group of residents in the Standish-Ericsson neighborhood of Minneapolis set out to start a new community garden and ended up shifting the way we think about public land and food in urban communities.

Working with the Land Stewardship Project, residents and the neighborhood association have recently signed an agreement with the Minnesota Department of Transportation for use of land along the light rail corridor for a new garden. It's a great location with more than an acre of open level ground, good water access, and plenty of sunshine.

Although it might sound straight-forward to use land owned by a state agency to increase community food production, residents had to organize to overcome inertia, misinformation, and political hesitancy among institutions accustomed to selling state land to the highest bidding developer. With plans to break ground this coming spring, the new garden will be an example of how we can use public resources to increase people's access to healthy sustainably-raised food. There's more work to be done and the Land Stewardship Project will be there organizing to win long-term access to land and a permanent place for local and regional food systems in communities across the state.

LSP has already accomplished a lot this year, will you help us go farther?

Since 1982 the Land Stewardship Project has been working with farmers, urban and rural people to care for the land and build a more sustainable food and farming system. Other accomplishments in the past several months include:

- Organized 15 farm field days attended by more than 300 people. Many of the field days focused on building specific sustainable agriculture skills for new and transitioning farmers.

- Led the effort to turn back state legislation that would have seriously undermined the successful Green Acres Program. LSP worked to reform changes to this Minnesota program that penalized sustainable farmers and encouraged farmers and land owners to remove environmentally sound practices and replace them with damaging monocrop agriculture.
- Held well-attended workshops between farmers and other residents interested in building viable local food systems in Big Stone County, Minnesota; the St. Croix Valley; southeast Minnesota; and the urban core of Minneapolis.
- Published the first Farmer Network Handbook detailing literally hundreds of farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities on sustainable farms throughout the Upper Midwest.

More progress is possible with your help. We know that changing our food and farming system from the ground up is going to take focus, determination, money and action. We also know that caring for the land over the long term is not only possible, it is necessary. There is nothing more important than the long-term care of the land — it is what sustains us.

**Your support is critical to the long term care of the land.
Can the Land Stewardship Project count on you for a gift of \$35,
\$50, \$100, or \$500?**

To make a donation, please fill out the enclosed card and return it with your check or credit card information using the enclosed envelope to: Land Stewardship Project, 821 E 35th Street, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407. Donations can also be made through LSP's website at www.landstewardshipproject.org

If you have any questions or suggestions about LSP's work, please feel free to contact me. I'll look forward to talking with you!

Thank you,



Mark Schultz, Associate Director
Land Stewardship Project

P.S. Can the Land Stewardship Project count on you? Your donation of \$35, \$100 or \$200 helps new farmers get started, protects the environment, and improves all people's access to healthy nutritious food. [Please make a gift today!](#)