

Ice Out, Green Up, Leaf Out

by Edith Rylander, Grey Eagle, Minnesota

Taken from the longer essay, "Orgies and Corpses," found in the collection *Journeying Earthward, John and Edith Rylander, Big Swan Press, 2002.*



Skunk-cabbage pushes up through snow in early spring. The plant grows a single leaf-like sheath (a spathe) that protects the flowers.

EVERY PLACE HAS ITS OWN SPRING, and they are not all the same. Spring in the upper Midwest is three seasons — Ice Out, Green Up, Leaf Out.

To properly enjoy any of these spring phases, it is necessary to throw away preconceptions about spring based on the literature of other places. Those springs belong to different latitudes, different climatological zones, a different set of expectations. Milton and Keats and Wordsworth never went through anything like those storms Minnesotans give titles to: the Armistice Day Blizzard, the Superbowl Blizzard, the Great St. Patrick's Day Blizzard. If in Minnesota you wait for shirt-sleeve weather, green grass and "flocks of golden daffodils" before you start enjoying spring, you will miss half of what there is to enjoy.

The first signs of awakening life are tiny: a color change on a bird's beak, a pepper-scatter of snowfleas, a flash of tailfeathers, the distant cries of crows, which become restless and loud the end of February. But the first breaks in the ice of winter begin coarsely and pungently, with the smell of manure thawing and the waft of startled skunk over the snow.

The first day on which a country passerby can distinguish by smell whether he is passing a dairy barn or a hog barn is a red letter day. On such a day, jackets are partway unzipped. On such a day, seed catalogs, which arrived in the RFD mailbox just after Christmas are often opened and the order sent off right away.

Most animals in a state of nature breed so they can bear at the time of the new forage, or at the same time as those young that eat the new forage. Even where there is human imposition on the natural cycle, and

despite the best assistance of science and agri-business, delivery and birth are always perilous and exciting.

Life waits, waits, waits, waits. The snow comes again. The due date passes. Last year's ewe lamb, bred in the fall and round as a barrel, stands chewing and waiting, frosty breath jetting from her nostrils.

Then everything happens at once.

One day the snow is merely sagged and rippled, grubby at road edges, sinking into melt saucers around the trunks of trees whose dark bark concentrates heat. The livestock tender who makes her way to the barn to distribute food and water and see if any animals are in labor still slogs through snow and slithers over ice. Sometimes the footing is worse than a week earlier, because the top layer of mud has started to thaw over still frozen ground.

Then abruptly, dark patches begin to show on southfacing hillsides. Skunk-cabbage blooms in the woods. Along roadsides, everything the snow has covered, every advertising circular, beer can, and fast food carton surfaces — four months worth of human trash all at once.

A sweeter phenomenon is stirring the veins of the trees. The paraphernalia of birth is joined by the equipment for maple tapping. The first cries of newborn animals mingle with the "tunk, tunk, tunk" of maple sap falling into buckets. Smells of meltwater mingle with wood smoke and the sweetness of syrup, as clear sap boils down to brown goodness.

continued on page 6

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Inside this Issue

Conservation Is a Long-Term Investment in Agriculture 2

"That's Organic Produce for You!" 3

Getting a Handle on Climate 4

Princeton Farm Trades Carbon Credits 5

MN Energy Numbers 5

View from the Woods 7

Viewpoint

THE WESTERN world's food industries without even realizing it have precipitated an epidemic with enormous health consequences. — Dr. Philip James, Chairman, International Obesity Task Force

New studies have predicted that nearly half of the children in North and South America will be overweight by 2010. Because obesity tends to follow into adulthood, these children will be sicker as they age. Healthier food is available but not easily, or without cost. The processed food industry is built on ease, and very cheap calories. US food policy supports it and the growing of corn, wheat, rice, soybeans, and cotton, not fruits and vegetables, not sustainably grown or organic produce and meats.

US farm policy came out the crisis of the Great Depression, a solution to the problems of the 1930s when 40% of Americans farmed. Today we need a farm bill that anticipates the needs and opportunities of 2030. We need a farm policy that is not only about propping up producers of cotton, soybeans, corn, rice and wheat but about assuring a stable and secure farm economy that meets America's needs for food, fiber, and energy in the coming decades.

We need a food policy that insures that local and sustainably grown food is served in school cafeterias, hospitals, eldercare facilities, as well as white tablecloth restaurants. Sugar, salt and fat is a recipe for disaster.

The future of farms and the future of our children's health are linked. It is time to get involved in food and farm policy for our future. ☘



Diane Jensen, Executive Director

Dear Readers...

I HEARD A CARDINAL singing his full spring song the other day, not the chirp of winter. My body heard it more than my ears, and it surprised me — as if I had not fully expected to survive this long dark season.

I've been writing a quarterly letter to you, dear readers, for twelve years — over 48 letters — and we nearly know each other, yet not really. We just love the same stuff: a seasonal poem or recipe, a pithy commentary about the land, an essay that captures the essence of ice, or harvest, or spring melt.

This winter, my husband, Don, had pneumonia during all of December and now inflamed lungs and hospitalization in February. Argh! Health is everything, and he truly has not enjoyed health this winter — yet the seasons still click around, the Cardinal still sings in the same huge Cottonwood at the back of

our lot. Have we grown any wiser for the expense of energy just healing during this long season? It's hard to say, but it was there to be done. Life doesn't always ask our permission, does it?

What I do know is that the frogsong of spring will help. The sunshine of spring will boost spirits and bring back body memories. I do know that the planet heals, continually, and that we are part of the community of all beings. I do know that I love this life and want to deepen, to learn and deepen in all of life's lessons.

Enjoy Edie's fine memories of a past spring at Earthward and Loni's love of pruning, this year on her new ladder. Learn with the Minnesota Project about earth-issues we all need to understand. Let the season bring you 'round.

— Beth E. Waterhouse, Editor,
Community Connections, since 1992
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Conservation is a Long-term Investment in Agriculture

by Mike McGrath, Minnesota Project

FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS, the Minnesota Project has been working with Soil and Water Conservation Districts in southeastern Minnesota encouraging farmers to enroll in conservation programs to protect water and soil resources, and to increase fish and wildlife habitat. A noble task, but not easy.

In a geographic area that is dominated by corn and soybean production, and with current farm policy dominated by financial incentives that encourage corn and soybean production, farmers often perceive that they cannot afford to incorporate conservation practices into their operations.

At the local level, every county in Minnesota has a Farm Service Center where agricultural programs are administered by government. In the southeast, some of these service centers pay over \$30

million a year directly to farmers in their county who are enrolled in subsidy programs for corn and soybean production. For farmers, enrollment in production programs is easy, and payments are guaranteed up to limits so high that most farmers will never reach them.

This subsidized production of annual crops such as corn and soybeans is a short-term investment in the land. Each year a new crop is planted, sprayed, harvested and sold. It's a production system with an annual cycle that utilizes technology to maximize short-term gains from the land, and, if left by itself, it will continue to whittle away at our natural resources as well as our taxpayer wallets.

As a counterbalance to this emphasis on production, local service centers also

continued on page 6

"That's Organic Produce for You!"

College Students Sustain Local Food and Farming

by Day Burtness and Dan Borek,
St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota

WE STARTED St. Olaf Garden Research and Organic Works Farm (STOGROW) on the campus of St. Olaf during the fall of 2004 in the hopes of sharing with the St. Olaf community the amazing experiences we've had growing food. The joys of understanding where vegetables come from, the prospect of digging in and getting your hands dirty, and the sense of reward that comes after a full day of honest work — we were sure that students would benefit from learning about sustainable farming.

With financial support from our student government and campus entrepreneurial center, as well as encouragement from our professors and friends, we bought a greenhouse, started transplants from seed, and got our hands on a rototiller. The first full sunup to sun-down days of getting transplants in the ground were long and hot, but all of our hard work was worth it when we gradually saw the rows of tomatoes, eggplant, squash, peppers, and herbs.

Early in the summer, after days of planting, weeding, and watering, we had our first harvest and delivery of salad mix. Under the "STOGROW Produce" sign on the way into the cafeteria, we high-fived each other as we witnessed summer school students digging into our very fresh and very local salad greens.

The day after we dropped off the lettuce mix, Peter Abrahamson, the Executive Chef at the St. Olaf College, had a story to tell us — it seemed as though we had not only delivered high

quality organic salad mix, but a little surprise as well.

"Yesterday I was approached by one of the students in our lunch crowd. He said that while he was eating his salad, he noticed that a piece of his STOGROW lettuce was moving. Turns out, it was a little caterpillar covered in Ranch dressing!"

We froze. Even though we had rinsed the lettuce and Bon Appetit had triple washed it, one of the little pests from the farm had sneaked in! Oh no, we thought, they'll never take our produce again! We cautiously inquired about what had happened next.

"Oh, I just told him 'That's organic produce for you!!' We made sure to rinse the little guy off and put him back outside."

The benefits that result from a dedicated commitment to local food on campus are many, and this story illustrates just a few of them.

One of the main barriers in the struggle to save rural communities and family farms is the lack of connection most Americans have with their food. This is no different for college students. Multiple times each day we head to the cafeteria between classes and studying to refuel, but we don't often think about who grew the vegetables, milked the cows, or butchered the chickens. Even though caterpillars in the lettuce aren't something to strive for, when cafeterias serve and tell the story behind local foods, it gives context to their sandwich or salad, and will hopefully lead students to care about how their meal came to be.

In addition to maintaining an organic presence in the cafeteria with our fresh produce, the STOGROW group has been offering classes, events, and programs that raise awareness about agricultural issues and practices. From

continued on page 6

Provencal Tian

FILLING:

6 large STOGROW heirloom tomatoes
4 garlic cloves
6 small STOGROW eggplants, thickly sliced lengthwise
3 STOGROW zucchini, thickly sliced lengthwise
½ cup olive oil, plus extra for brushing
2 large red onions, thickly sliced
2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme
salt and pepper

TOPPING:

grated zest of 1 lemon
3 garlic cloves, crushed
about 1 cup of dried breadcrumbs
½ cup freshly grated parmesan cheese
sprigs of basil to serve

PREPARATION: Put the tomatoes on a baking sheet, cut side up, and push slivers of garlic into each one. Roast in a preheated oven at 400° F for about 30 minutes to remove some of the moisture.

Put the sliced eggplants and squash on a plate, sprinkle with salt, and set aside for 30 minutes to extract some of the moisture. Rinse and pat dry with paper towels.

Heat the oil in a large skillet, add the onions, and sauté until softened and translucent. Remove from the skillet and spread over the base of a tian or other shallow ceramic ovenproof dish.

Arrange overlapping layers of the tomatoes, eggplants and squash on top — arrange them in lines across the dish, like fish scales. Tuck the chopped thyme between the layers.

Brush with the olive oil and cook in a preheated oven at 400°F for about 20 minutes.

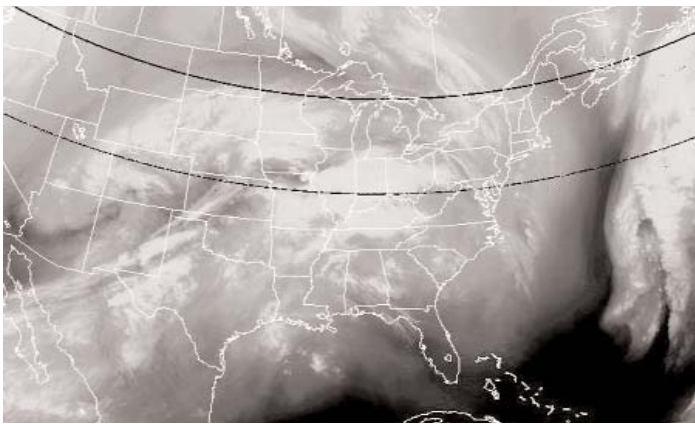
Meanwhile, to make the topping, grate the lemon zest into a bowl, add the crushed garlic, and mix well. Stir in the breadcrumbs and cheese, then sprinkle over the top of the tian. Continue cooking for at least 30 minutes or until browned, finishing under a broiler if necessary. Serve topped with basil leaves.

*Recipe compliments of Sous Chef Cory Mahlke,
St Olaf College with Bon Appetit.*

Getting a Handle on Climate

by Brendan Jordan, Great Plains Institute for Sustainable Development

SOLVING GLOBAL WARMING is one of the most difficult scientific and technical challenges human society has ever encountered. There is the complexity of climate science with many uncertainties regarding things like the impact of clouds. There are local impacts of global warming and countless other issues. If you're willing to accept the climate science, which virtually all scientists do, then you have another challenge — what do we *do* about it? Will solving global warming destroy our economy and send us spiraling into the next Great Depression? Or will it stimulate economic growth? What options do we have?



Satellite weather image courtesy of NOAA.

A research team at the University of Minnesota sought to clarify some of these issues by developing economic scenarios for a transition to a reduced-carbon world. Their goal: reduce emissions of the carbon dioxide responsible for global warming from the electric power sector by 80% over 1990 levels. This is the level of reduction that an international panel dealing with climate change has recommended for avoiding some of the most dangerous impacts, and it's a tougher challenge than you might realize. We've continued to increase our emissions since 1990 at a rate of roughly 2% per year.

This kind of change requires dramatically changing our entire electric power system. The good news: we have time to do it. The U of M study sets an ambitious goal of an 80% reduction by 2055, but according to the international panel in charge of studying climate change, we must make an 80% reduction by 2100. Since typical power plants last for no more than 50–60 years, 50–100 years is enough time to replace the entire system with something new. This is the premise of the research.

Virtually the only source of carbon dioxide emissions from the electric power sector is coal. Although we also produce electricity from natural gas and oil, these pale in comparison to coal-fired power. After coal power, the largest sources of power in our region are nuclear power and hydropower, which for all intents and purposes do not contribute to global warming.

So what options are available to us if we want to switch to a dramatically carbon-reduced electric power system? One of them is clearly not the continuation of the status quo. Fortunately we have tremendous resources at our disposal. There is enough wind in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Minnesota, and Iowa to power the entire nation, assuming you can develop it all and move the power to where it is needed. We have large biomass resources, although these might be better suited for producing liquid fuels like cellulosic ethanol. Manitoba has the ability to more than double its hydropower production. Interestingly, even our region's large coal resources could be used in a carbon-neutral fashion. If we used a different type of coal technology, we could capture most of the CO₂ produced and inject it into the ground. A plant in North Dakota is doing this right now, and our region has vast underground sequestration resources. We also have the option of building more nuclear power plants.

Returning to the question of cost — according to our research, it costs something, but not as much as some have feared. It seems as if we could make the changes we need with an increase in the cost of power of about 20% over a business-as-usual scenario, and with an even smaller increase (less than 5%) over current electricity costs. Although they could change over time, these numbers surprised even the researchers on this study.

The study also showed us that there are many possible paths to solving the global warming problem, and that there are a lot of winners. Think about what, for example, 40,000 MW of wind power would do for depressed rural economies in the Great Plains. What about the economic impact of allowing farmers to sell new crops into a new market — the energy sector?

So now we throw it back at the world. We have the tools at our disposal for dealing with global warming. We have some idea of the costs. What we lack is a plan and the societal will to implement that plan. ♣

Princeton Farm Trades Carbon Credits

by Amanda Bilek, Energy Program Associate

IN NOVEMBER, the Haubenschild dairy farm near Princeton, MN added another “one of the first” distinguished honors to their list. Other honors have included the first methane digester built in Minnesota and the first digester in the world to run a hydrogen fuel cell off of biogas.

Now the Haubenschild’s are one of two dairy farms in the entire nation to be trading carbon credits from methane captured by an anaerobic digester. The credits provide an additional source of revenue for the farm and address a growing, serious concern: global warming. The carbon credits in this case were calculated based on the amount of methane prevented from entering the atmosphere during the anaerobic digestion process. Although Haubenschild’s farm is too small to work directly with the Chicago Climate Exchange, Environmental Credit Corporation, a credit aggregator and a leading supplier of environmental credits to global financial markets, partnered with Haubenschild to certify and register his credits with the exchange, ultimately trading them for cash. Environmental Credit Corporation calculated that in the last two and a

half years, the Haubenschild digester captured 525 tons of methane, which is equivalent to 9,587 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

The credits were certified and sold on the Chicago Climate Exchange — the first and only established market for greenhouse gas pollution credits in the United States. Large power and manufacturing companies volunteer to be a part of the Chicago Climate Exchange and can buy carbon credits, like those sold by the Haubenschild farm, if they cannot reach greenhouse gas reduction goals on their own. Exchange members commit to reduce emissions or trade to meet the goal of a 1% reduction per year in greenhouse gas pollution between 2003–2006.

The Haubenschild’s are pioneers in the area of renewable energy and are now demonstrating new leadership to address global warming. Private partnerships, like this are happening despite the lack of public policies to address global warming. Such partnerships prove that it’s possible to develop solutions to address this complex problem. Our policy makers should follow their lead. ♣

Dennis Haubenschild (left) discusses his methane digester system with reporters and tour participants after receiving a check from Ed Heslop, CEO of Environmental Credit Corp. (above) for carbon credits traded on the Chicago Climate Exchange for anaerobic captured methane.



Minnesota Energy Numbers

#1 – Minnesota’s rank as the largest importer of electricity in the nation (Mosedale, 2005).

X 2 – Minnesota’s approximate increase between 1960 and 2001 in annual consumption of motor gasoline and natural gas (Energy Information Agency).

3.5 billion – Dollars leaving the state each year to pay for imported natural gas (Midwest Natural Gas Initiative).

X 4 – Minnesota’s approximate increase in annual coal consumption between 1960 and 2001 (Energy Information Agency).

40 – Percentage of U.S. energy consumption made up by oil (Gaw, 2006)

60 – Percentage of U.S. oil consumption that is imported (Gaw, 2006)

100 – Percentage of Minnesota fossil fuel consumption that is imported from outside the state

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ICE OUT *from p. 1*

At Ice-Out, everything — fields thawing, animals giving birth, sap rising in trees — happens at once. The cold familiar castled landscape of tree and hillside and barnyard goes to bare branches, bone colored grass, slick mud sometimes in a day.

And all across the changing landscape, the birds return, beginning with the birds of prey. Big red-tailed hawks take back their soaring stations as the fields lose their snow cover. The bald eagles move up river valleys. The bright little American kestrels space themselves out at regular intervals on the telephone wires along country roads.

Now the water birds sail north in their skeins and V's. Our Chinese and Toulouse geese used to answer the north-going calls of Canada and snow geese, dormant wild instinct stirring briefly in their chubby breasts. Tundra swans and cormorants fly over, as do ducks of every size from mergansers to teal. White pelicans wheel on updrafts. Rarely and wonderfully, we see a line of sandhill cranes. Herons, egrets, loons come north as they have for millennia, following the open water. Birds we last saw six months ago plop down with joyous cries into ponds and potholes and those low places in fields some thrifty farmer hasn't yet ditched and tiled. They fly the width of the continent to ride once again the waters of Big Swan Lake as the ice draws away from the shore. ●

John and Edith Rylander lived and taught in sunny California in the early 1960s. By 1964, a student asked John the classic question. "What would you do if you could live your own Walden, Mr. Rylander?" He came home and told Edie about that discussion. Before long they had reached an agreement. One day they left it all behind, as much as a person can leave it all behind, left the suncoast and comparative sophistication, moving to borrowed accommodations 17 miles from Sinclair Lewis' Gopher Prairie. And thus begins the journey that they describe as "earthward" to the place they name "Earthward" near Grey Eagle.

THAT'S ORGANIC PRODUCE *from p. 3*

hands on experiences like canning tomatoes to screening documentaries about the dangers of genetically modified organisms, we try to offer a full spectrum of information about the nature of our food. The purpose of our organization is so much more than growing vegetables — it is an opportunity to share our homesteading skills and passions with our peers, to shed light on critical and important food-related issues, to practice stewardship and being, and to continually find new ways of reconnecting with a holistic and sustainable way of living.

College food service programs have the potential to sustain local farmers with their purchasing power. In the case of STOGROW, a guaranteed market with Bon Appetit made it possible to pitch our idea to the student government. Another local producer — Deja Moo, a creamery in Bismarck, ND — was actually able to reopen and rehire ten employees after Hays Atkins, the General Manager of the St. Olaf College cafeteria, signed a letter of intent to purchase rBGH-free milk from the company. If each college campus in Minnesota made a commitment to buy more from local producers, imagine how many small farms, rural communities, and regional economies would be supported all around the state!

At STOGROW Farm, we're looking forward to our second bountiful season, full of fresh veggies and new ideas about sustainability.

Now if we can just keep the caterpillars out of the salad mix... ●

EDITOR'S NOTE: Day Burtness is a junior Environmental Studies major and Dan Borek is a senior Environmental Studies and Political Science major at St. Olaf College. Both St. Olaf College and Bon Appetit Management Company are involved with the Heartland Food Initiative.

LONG-TERM INVESTMENT *from p. 2*

administer an almost overwhelming number of agriculture conservation programs, none of which are guaranteed, none of which pay as well as the production programs, and all of which have competitive enrollment because of insufficient funding to meet the demand.

In contrast, conservation payments are a long-term investment in the land. With incentives, farmers can address resource needs on their land and install practices that prevent soil erosion and protect water quality, such as grassed waterways, buffer strips, contour strip planting, and crop rotations that include perennials like hay and pasture.

These practices have a long life span.



Authors Day Burtness and Dan Borek at the STOGROW farm near the St. Olaf College campus in Northfield.

They are installed to protect, enhance, and build resources for the future. One doesn't plant a grass waterway this year and plow it out next year. Future generations will reap the benefits of these investments.

Knowing the difference, farmers still find it hard to resist the pressure to go the short-term route. There is a saying that is often heard these days in local agriculture circles in anticipation of the upcoming 2007 Farm Bill debates: "It's hard to be green if you are in the red."

It almost sounds like something Kermit the Frog would say after he accidentally hops into a bucket of barn paint.

continued on page 7

Pruning in Collaboration

by Loni Kemp

OF ALL THE SEASONAL GARDEN TASKS, I think pruning is my favorite.

It is the first real outdoor gardening activity of the year, beginning on a day when spring is in the air even if snow is still underfoot. The orchard calls me when the wood is thawed but the sap is not yet rising.

This year I'm excited about the impending delivery of a new orchard ladder — a tripod affair with a wide base and a narrow top that can nestle right up into the center of a tree. No more shaky step ladders for me; I'm going to climb high and be stable.

After twenty years, our apple trees want to grow up to the sky, but I won't let them. For one thing, the best fruit grows on strong horizontal branches. But even more to the point, fruit that grows beyond my reach is fruit that I can't pick.

"Pruning is the way the tree and I collaborate to form its life's destiny."

Thus, pruning is the way the tree and I collaborate to form its life's destiny. The tree gets to decide where a branch is possible by throwing out various suckers and new shoots, while I get to decide where a branch is desirable by pruning out all but a few chosen twigs.

I enjoy this partnership with many different trees and shrubs, each at its proper time throughout the year. I try to understand the nature of each species and balance that knowledge with what I want to happen.

- A hydrangea loves to send out enormous papery white flowers at its tips in the fall — so big they flop to the ground, unless I trim the side branches up.
- A red-twigged dogwood turns dark and dull as it ages, so removal of a few of the oldest stems every year results in a shrub throwing up bright red stems.
- A pagoda dogwood wants to form a layered cloud look, but it needs me to thin the branches that obscure the form.

Even the century-old oaks, maples and basswood trees, which surround our house (trees which surely got along fine without us all their lives) appear even grander for the limbing up we have done over the years. We learned from Thomas Jefferson who favored this practice at Monticello, opening up a cathedral of dim, airy space within the leafy forest.

Mysteries remain, however. Everyone knows grape vines need thinning to bear fruit, but I've tried several pruning systems and don't feel I've absorbed the secret yet. Each variety of clematis comes with a different pruning rule, it seems, while roses are even trickier. I confess I've failed in those relationships at times.

Collaboration is always about learning from one's partners. We make our mark on nature, and nature makes its mark on us. 🌱

INVESTMENT *from p. 6*

But what it really means is that farmers view conservation as a luxury that they can only afford if they are first subsidized in their production of commodity crops. Then, conservation can be considered, but only if it includes opportunity cost incentives.

It is not that farmers do not want to install conservation practices on their farms, it is just that for far too long the system has conditioned them to maximize the production of row crops without requiring a long-term investment in the conservation of natural resources.

In a recent speech, outgoing Minnesota Farm Bureau President Al Christopherson countered those who seek to increase funding for conservation in the next farm bill with a statement that reflects the myth that causes the disparity in funding between production and conservation: "The prosperity of our rural communities is dependent more on the returns to ag production than to conservation and recreation. We need to remember that ag production helps maintain the infrastructure for 12 months of the year."

Maybe in the short term this is true. But in the long term, it will be the natural infrastructure — healthy soils, clean water, and clean air — that maintains our prosperity in rural America. Until we look at conservation programs as an investment in the future of agriculture and rural communities, we are doomed to overproduce ourselves into resource oblivion at the expense of our grandchildren's ability to live in rural communities and a clean environment.

It may be hard to be green if you're in the red, but it's definitely hard to be green if you are paid not to be green. It's time for a new long-term vision for agriculture and our rural communities. 🌱

the MINNESOTA PROJECT

working for strong local economies,
vibrant communities, and a healthy environment

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