

# Community Connections

---

An ear to the ground

---

volume xviii, # 1  
winter, 2004

## Grandpa Claus

by Laura Pheonix  
Rochester, Minnesota

Connections is a journal/newsletter published quarterly highlighting the program efforts of the Minnesota Project. Since 1992, we have also chosen to express the values of this organization using the power of story and poetry.

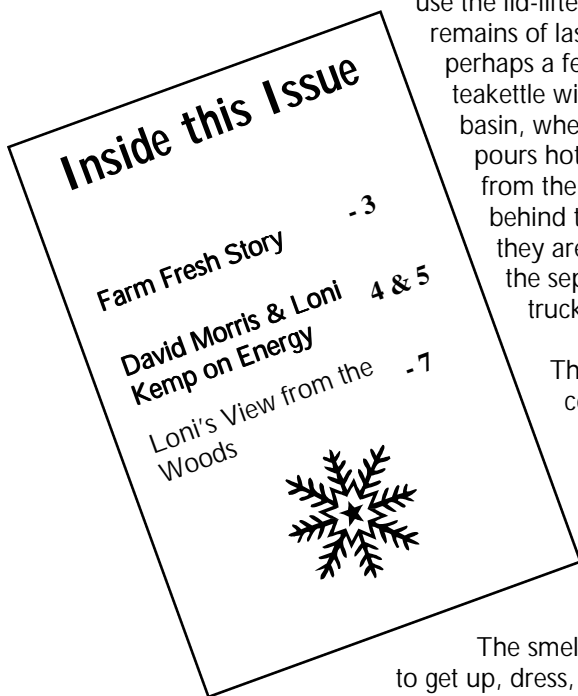
**W**hen we went up North to their Crow Wing County farm at Christmastime, Grandpa was always shoveling his way down his block-long driveway to meet us, Grandma yelling from the back step, "Stop it, Tony, before you have a heart attack!" We'd all take a turn at the shovels, along with some of the neighbors from across the road, and spend the first day getting our old Ford unstuck. Grandpa had chopped a little Jack Pine from the woods for us to trim with popcorn and cranberry strings and some of the felt tree trims my Aunt Ester created.

Grandpa Anton Claus was a little wiry man, barely five feet tall. In their wedding picture on the front parlor wall, he was standing to the side and slightly in back of my Grandma, who in her almost six-foot frame was sitting in an armchair. In her hands were the beautifully crafted artificial flowers made by Grandpa's family in Germany. On the wall next to their picture, the carefully box-framed flowers were preserved for all to see.

The first memories I have of Grandpa are not visual ones. I am in the attic room over the kitchen, where I usually slept when I visited them. It is late summer but still dark out, and I hear my Grandpa use the lid-lifter to lift the burner lid off the black iron wood stove and toss a log on the remains of last night's fire. Then I hear him use the poker to stir up the coals and then perhaps a few snaps of the wood catching fire, and he replaces the lid. I hear him fill the teakettle with the water dipper from the pail and another dipper-full goes into the wash basin, where I hear splashes of his morning wash up. When the kettle starts to sing, he pours hot water into his cup for coffee and puts the kettle on the back of the stove away from the heat of the fire. I hear "Boy," (all their dogs were called Boy), come out from behind the stove, his claws clacking on the linoleum floor. The screen door opens and they are ready to go downhill to the red barn to milk the six to eight cows and set up the separator in the cool pump house so the milk will be ready for the Land O' Lakes truck when it comes. Maybe it will also pick up some of Grandma's eggs.

The quiet sounds of Grandpa readying himself for his day are pleasingly comforting for me. The warmth of the fire comes up through the floor grate. I get up to use the thunder mug but quickly crawl back under my warm covers to listen for other sounds of the day, maybe fall back to sleep. I can't remember which I hear first, the rooster crowing, my Grandma shuffling into the kitchen in her slippers, or the caw of a crow shrieking, "Get up, get up!" Before I know it, the sun's light is creeping across the floor.

The smell of Grandma's pancakes makes me eager to get up, dress, and go down the steep stairs to my duties of swatting flies, setting the table—getting ready for when Grandpa and Boy finish the morning's chores and come back for breakfast. I don't remember any breakfast conversations besides "Please pass" and "Thank you," but I know I had at least a dozen of the small round pancakes... followed by my cod liver oil, of course. Grandpa went out to his fields and farm work, while I helped Grandma bake and clean house.



the  
minnesota  
project

(Continued on page 6)

## Dear Readers,

It is a cool moonlit evening in late fall. I walk to the end of Division Street, the dark end, the end with no streetlights, and stand in the light of the full moon. Arms raised, I praise the translucent globe and pray my thanks for another day, another week. I turn back toward my life, and my moon shadow stretches long in front of me. I walk into it, not expecting to reach it, and as I approach the street light my moon shadow disappears in front of me, and a darker light shadow crosses over my head and then reaches out behind me. I continue out of this cone of light and there it is—my moon shadow appears again in front of me, leading me into the next cone of light where it disappears, then re-appears and finally, patiently, leads me home.

There it is. It's that simple—the reflective, the intuitive, surviving the bright dominance in our world is there all along, steadily guiding us. It happens as we dare to go toward darkness, as we walk along in the beautiful rich winter darkness of our lives.

Sometimes I love to turn the socially positive "light" and the socially negative "dark" connotations inside out. However you coin them, the fact remains that a moon shadow is a beautiful thing, and I was reassured by its persistence. Alongside all the white-light dominance in our policy-making we need to call forth our intuitive selves. We must remember what we already know—what we knew all along—and let those deeper memories guide us.

Read the guiding memories of Laura Pheonix in the cover story, or Amanda's chicken-plucking story. Read with Loni as she remembers bygone programs of the Minnesota Project. Do memories warm our winter days? Always. Do memories motivate us to take the next step into our careers? Absolutely. Let us not discount memory as nostalgia but celebrate it in this issue of Community Connections. Enjoy the poems and send some of your own. Read these family stories and write your own. Let your moon shadow guide you home.

/Beth Waterhouse  
[beth.waterhouse@usfamily.net](mailto:beth.waterhouse@usfamily.net)  
(952)401-0591  
Editing Community Connections since 1992

# Director's Viewpoint

by Diane Jensen

It is not often that non-profit groups get awards. Most rewards come in the form of working for things that you believe in and value. Sometimes you really do win! Other times you win some and lose some and live to fight the good fight another day.

That is why we were so excited and honored that Minnesota Rural Futures chose the Minnesota Project to honor for its work and leadership on Agriculture. The Award was to be presented on November 24th— the date of the first real snowstorm— especially in rural areas. As a result the diner was cancelled, to be rescheduled in February. We will wait, with anticipation, and a true recognition that the award is shared with you and with all the people and organizations that work with us to promote profitable farms that protect the environment!

Of course I also must thank my staff and dedicated consultants: Loni Kemp, Lola Schoenrich, Mike McGrath, Amanda Bilek, Kris Weber, Beth Waterhouse, Karen Lehman, Arlin Wasserman, Ellen Titus, Dan Moring, Kim Austrian, Myron Just and Carl Nelson. Each person is exceptional and dedicated. They make us strong.

It is therefore with regret that I note that Carl Nelson— energy organizer, intervener and biomass researcher has left the Minnesota Project to take a great job with our ally the Green Institute to build and manage the new biomass electrical generating plant. We wish them both well.

We are quickly hiring staff with expertise in energy — we have a lot to do. Amanda is taking on more responsibility. We are happy to welcome new staff addition Kris Weber, who joins our administrative staff.

You may have recently received our annual fundraising letter. Thank you for reading it. This is an important source of revenue for our organization, especially since this kind of support — from our friends and associates that share our values— leverages dollars on a 10 to 1 basis from foundations. This year we have set both an ambitious goals for both our work and for our fundraising. We hope that you will join us by choosing to donate to our work using the enclosed envelope. We will work for you. We will win for you and for all Minnesotans that want a better future. Please donate today. Thank you.

- Diane Jensen

## Community Connections

An ear to the ground

Send stories, poems,  
or letters to:  
The Minnesota Project  
1885 University Ave. W.  
Suite #315  
Saint Paul, MN 55104  
Phone: (651) 645-6159  
FAX: (651) 645-1262  
[mnproject@mnproject.org](mailto:mnproject@mnproject.org)

Staff:

Diane Jensen/Executive Director  
Loni Kemp/Senior Policy Analyst  
Lola Schoenrich/Senior Program Director  
Karen Lehman/Food System Specialist  
Mike McGrath/Agriculture Policy Specialist  
Amanda Bilek/ Program Coordinator  
Kristin Weber/Office Assistant  
Dan Moring/ Intern

**A**s the winter snow begins to fall and cover the ground with a beautiful white blanket, I find myself reflecting to my youth on my parents' farm. My most vivid memory is that of butchering chickens throughout each summer. While my city friends spent their summers riding bike to the park and the community swimming pool, I spent my summer plucking chicken feathers.

My father would arise before the sun and rouse my brother and I. Once my Mom had ensured that there was food in our stomachs, my Dad and brother would go down to the barn to gather 60 chickens for butchering that day. Mom and I would head out to the garage and fill pails of hot soapy water and start scrubbing all the tables, knives and equipment needed for the day.

Shortly after the sun made its appearance, great aunts and uncles would start to arrive. Greeting one another with a hug and hearty hello, they would grab a cup of coffee and visit until it was time to start.

As my Mom and I finished scrubbing the equipment, aunts and uncles took their places, and my father would begin the process by playing the necessary role of executioner. After a few years of processing using the traditional method of chopping the chicken's head off and letting it run around and bleed to death until it fell down dead, my parents developed a contraption that executed the chickens in a more humane and efficient manner. We fondly called it the "wheel of misfortune."

My Dad shaped twelve individual cones out of sheet metal and suspended them from an old iron wagon wheel. He would squeeze a chicken upside down into the wide end of the cone pulling the head through the narrow part of the cone and quickly slit the chicken's throat with a well-sharpened knife. Since the

chicken was hanging upside down, blood would run faster, speeding up the time it took for a chicken to die. After each chicken was well past dead, my father dipped the body into a pot of scalding water. That water had to be kept at just the right temperature—too hot would rip the chickens' skin and too cold made the feathers difficult to pluck.

Once a chicken was dipped in this way, my father ran each one over an automatic chicken plucker. This device sped up the butchering process immensely. It had an electric motor in the middle of a steel seven-inch wide cylinder with rubber fingers about two inches long. As the cylinder spun around, the fingers would pluck the majority of the feathers from the chickens' softened skin. The chicken was then plunged into an old bathtub filled with cold water to cool the body temperature of the chicken. Then each was pulled from the water and moved to the first of three processing stations.

---

**At the time, I didn't fully value the conversations that I had with my mother over a sink of cold water scrubbing a chicken with a washcloth, but now I wish I could do it all over again.**

---

My role in this entire process was that of floating laborer and human conveyor belt. Being the youngest and the most agile, I bounced between all the stations, except for helping my Dad. I didn't have the stomach to kill anything, even though I knew it was for a good purpose. I let my brother assist Dad, and I floated around the garage from one station to the next, helping my great aunts and uncles so they didn't have to get up and down from their seats. I liked the role because I also got to listen in on conversations happening at each of the stations.



I would start by snatching a batch of chilled chickens from the old bathtub and dropping them over at the table that was responsible for removing the wing feathers and any fine strands of hair that might have been hidden under the mass of feathers. Either my great uncle Olie or Ves would hold the chicken's body at just the right distance above an open flame of a two-burner gas stove, singeing off strands of hair without scorching the skin.

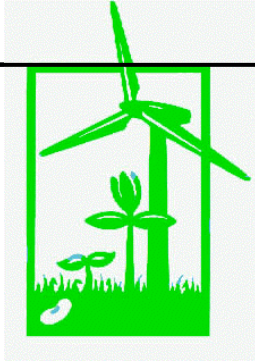
Next I would grab these chickens by the legs and bring them over to a tub of cold water where my mother and I would wash the birds with old washcloths, removing any yellow skin and leaving the chicken with a milky white complexion. The real tedious work at this station was to look for small feathers embedded close to the skin. These pinfeathers would strain my eyes; however, since this part was tedious I often had to pitch in and help here the most to ensure that Mom didn't get too backed up. This also gave my Mom and I an opportunity to talk. At the time, I didn't fully value the conversations that I had with my mother over a sink of cold water scrubbing a naked, dead chicken with a washcloth, but now I wish I could do it all over again.

After the chicken's exterior was given one last inspection by my mother, I would plop the bird on Ida's table. For as long as I could

*(Continued on page 6)*

# Minnesota's Energy Choices Take a Step Backward

by Loni Kemp



It is a shame that Minnesota seems to be stuck in the past on energy choices. Building a new coal electrical plant on the Iron Range would be like buying a new manual typewriter in the personal computer age. It is a technology that may have served well in the last century, but it is outdated. It is also expensive and devastating to the environment.

Even with the new bells and whistles of coal gasification, this 1,000-megawatt generator would still have the fundamental flaw of all our current fossil fuel power plants— it emits carbon dioxide, which contributes to global climate change.

The tragedy is that there are much better ways to generate electricity.

I have seen the energy future, and it is clean, affordable and secure.

I recently had an opportunity to travel to northern Europe to tour renewable energy sites. I went with a delegation of stakeholders from industry, government and citizen groups, led by *Powering the Plains*, to find out if there was anything we in the Midwest could learn from them. Like most Americans, I went assuming we, the richest country in the world, had the best ideas and research.

In fact, the most advanced and extensive renewable energy installations are already in use in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and even Iceland. These countries were rocked by the oil shortages of the 1970s and started aggressive energy conservation programs. Evidence of global climate change now has them seriously worried about rising ocean levels, and they are turning away from

fossil fuels like coal and oil and embracing renewable energy.

What I saw amazed me. In Denmark, I could look out from our bus across the agricultural countryside and see modern wind turbines turning slowly off in the distance in nearly every direction. Denmark generates 25 percent of its energy from wind, and plans to produce even more with giant turbines out in the North Sea. The Danish headquarters of NEG Micon is an engine for economic growth, as the world's leading supplier of turbines.

**Most fascinating was the general European perception that renewable energy is an engine for economic growth.**

The northernmost state in Germany is also getting a quarter of its electricity from wind, and leaders expect that figure to climb to half in the next six years. Compare that to Minnesota where we are just now reaching roughly 2 percent wind generation.

Most fascinating was the general European perception that renewable energy is an engine for economic growth. New technologies, new companies, greater efficiencies and meeting society's environmental expectations are how renewable energy in fact drives economic growth there.

We seem to be stuck in the past, showering scarce taxpayer resources on this behemoth coal plant, all for an exaggerated promise of jobs for the Iron Range. The truth is, megawatt for megawatt, renewable energy could bring more jobs to Minnesota than the proposed coal plant. Government is trying to lard it with public subsidies, exempt it from normal environmental review, force utilities and their customers into purchasing potentially very expensive electricity, and is even granting eminent domain powers to

allow the operators to grab land from unwilling sellers. Instead of driving growth, it would suck up precious public resources.

Renewable technologies are widely used in Europe. I was amazed to hear from every person we met, whether conservative or liberal, urban or rural, that they were committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and embracing renewable energy. They foresaw many options, not just one silver bullet. But the end goal has been agreed to by the public, leaders and industry.

What is holding us back in America? All we need is a public agreement that we should reduce dependency on fossil fuels and instead grow renewable power. The Iron Range deserves good jobs, but not from this boondoggle of a project that is being peddled to them.

*Note: at this time it appears that the energy bill has failed because congress would not remove liability for corporations that are producing a fuel additive that is hazardous to human health and polluting groundwater. The coal project is still in process..*

*Kemp of Canton is the senior policy analyst at the Minnesota Project .*

## Winter Poem

by John Caddy  
Forest Lake, MN

Morning's frosted windows leap time to when I'd press coins into ice on my bedroom window, ice thick as the thin glass between winter and my skin. The Indian's face dotted the lower left I could barely reach from bed, the closer right was filled with buffalo. The whole herd stood still, waiting in a field of ice to vanish in the sun that follows nights of bitter cold.

# Energy Doldrums

by David Morris

Editor's Note: This commentary appeared in the Minneapolis Star Tribune on Sunday, November 9, 2003. We thank David for sharing it here with our readers.

**W**e're coming up on the 10th anniversary of a Minnesota legislative session described by two veteran political reporters of the Star Tribune at the time as "one of the most divisive and emotionally draining in memory." The key issue was the expansion of a permanent radioactive waste site at Prairie Island.

The debate was heated. But along with heat came light. State residents, in extended legislative hearings or on the op-ed pages of newspapers or on radio and TV, engaged in an intensive conversation about Minnesota's energy future.

Out of that hard-hitting and far-reaching debate and the rough and tumble of the legislative process, a remarkably coherent energy strategy emerged. Minnesota would move away from a reliance on nuclear power and coal by rapidly expanding investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy.

In the decade since the tumultuous and momentous legislative session of 1994, Minnesota has failed to live up to its promise. Spending on energy efficiency has actually gone down. Renewable energy goals have not been met. The delays and increasing uncertainty encouraged entrepreneurs to lobby the Legislature to change its energy policy to enable their own individual technologies. This has led to a dangerous and dispiriting dynamic in which Minnesota's energy future has been hijacked by narrow interests pushing an even narrower agenda. And unlike the process in 1994, decisions have been and are being made with little or no public debate or participation.

The result? An increasingly incoherent energy policy that at times verges on the bizarre. The 2003 Legislature, for example, declared natural gas a renewable energy source. In Minnesota, garbage, too, is now considered a renewable fuel. Coal is defined as "clean

energy" so long as the electricity produced generates lower emissions (excluding carbon dioxide, the principal cause of global warming) than "those of traditional technologies."

In retrospect, the unraveling began several years ago when a British company called Fibrowatt came to America to sell the idea of incinerating poultry manure. It wasn't an easy sell. Unlike wet manure from hogs and cattle, dry manure from poultry is easily transported and stored. In the last 10 years, the market for dry manure has expanded rapidly as farmers rediscovered its value as a fertilizer and soil builder. In 2002 all of the turkey manure generated in Minnesota was easily sold to Minnesota farmers.

---

**At a time of budget cutbacks, the Legislature has awarded more than a billion dollars in out-of-pocket subsidies to two companies to undertake activities that have little or no public benefit. How far we've come from the hard fought and well-earned successes of 1994.**

---

Fibrowatt went first to Washington, where its lobbyists convinced Congress to add poultry manure to the list of renewable resources eligible for substantial federal incentives if used to generate electricity. The company then came to St. Paul, where it convinced the state Legislature to award it an even more handsome subsidy: a guaranteed long-term electricity contract with a price tag three to four times higher than that for conventional or even wind-generated electricity.

This year another newly formed company, Excelsior Energy, copied Fibrowatt's strategy, although it went in the opposite direction for subsidies: state Legislature first, Congress second.

Excelsior has been so successful in its lobbying efforts that one could argue that in the process of giving Excelsior what it wanted, the Legislature, with little debate, has dramatically changed energy policy and, conceivably, Minnesota's energy future.

The Excelsior project will be the largest electricity-generating complex in Minnesota and by far the largest coal gasification plant in the world. The 2,000-megawatt project could meet virtually all of Minnesota's electricity growth for decades, diminishing the market for wind energy and forestalling any expansion of high efficiency on-site electrical generation technologies.

The Excelsior law overturns regulatory and public oversight measures painstakingly developed over the past 30 years. The Legislature bypassed the normal competitive bidding process by requiring Xcel to buy 450 megawatts of electricity from Excelsior. That is almost twice the amount of wind-generated electricity the 1994 Legislature required Xcel to purchase -- even though wind energy eliminates pollution, while coal gasification has no impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

The Legislature also gave Excelsior the right to expand the size and footprint of its power plants and all associated transmission lines without asking state agencies (or neighbors) for permission.

Even more shocking, the Legislature granted Excelsior the right of eminent domain, that is, the right to seize private property. Eminent domain is usually reserved for use by governments, not private corporations.

The recent changes in energy policy will be expensive. Fibrowatt, which has not yet broken ground on its incinerator, will receive a direct subsidy of some \$20 million a year, almost half a billion dollars over the life of the contract. The contract for Excelsior's electricity has not yet been negotiated but the subsidy could be even higher than Fibrowatt's.

At a time of budget cutbacks, the Legislature has awarded more than a billion dollars in out-of-pocket subsidies to two companies to undertake activities that have little or no public benefit. How far we've come from the hard fought and well-earned successes of 1994.

*David Morris is vice-president of the Minneapolis-based Institute for Local Self-Reliance ([www.ilsr.org](http://www.ilsr.org)) and author of Seeing the Light: Regaining Control of Our Electricity System.*

## Grandpa Claus con't from pg. 1

I spent most of my first ten summers on the farm. After breakfast if she, or Grandpa with his beautiful script, had written letters the night before under the kerosene lamp, it was my chore to bring them down the block-long driveway to the mailbox. I must not forget to put up the red flag so the mailman will pick them up. Boy will trot with me down the sandy road, grasshoppers attacking us all the way. Just before lunchtime, I see the dusty streak that stops suddenly at our driveway, and I run back down it in the sweaty heat to get the mail. Grandma calls, "Paaaaa, lunch!" He is usually already on his way in from the fields, because he too has seen the mailman's dust trail.

After we eat lunch, Grandpa sits in his highback black wooden rocker in the cooler dining room to sort through the mail. I sit and listen to my grandparents tossing messages back and forth; maybe there is a letter from Grandma's family in Ireland. Always a letter from one of

Grandma's seven brothers and sisters here in our country, or from one of the 4-H students my grandparents have helped over the years. Maybe a card from my folks saying when they plan to come take me back home to the Cities and school. There is usually the *Brainerd Times*, *The Farmer*, *Ladies Home Journal*, the *4-H Newsletter*, or the *University Extension Service Bulletin* to glance at and save for evening reading.

Grandpa, being over sixty, is then ready for a little nap, so he stretches out on the dusty hard daybed. I must be quiet and take a nap myself, or tip-toe through the kitchen, out the screen door, and run to my favorite place downhill to the apple tree beyond the granary. There I can climb up its slippery arms, and sit and dream my own adventures while watching chickens hollow out cool nests in the shady dust beneath my tree.

All too soon, it's the end of summer and my parents come for me. I can still hear

my Grandpa's parting words to us, "I don't suppose I'll ever see you again." And my dad would always laugh and say, "That's what you always say, Tony, and you know we'll be back and you will be here." And my mother would whisper to me, "Grandpa's so sentimental." Off we would go, our car trunk full of canned fruits, vegetables, and meat; bread, cookies and eggs—all things I'd helped Grandma get ready. We called it our "care package."

These feelings of warmth and security are there for me. These memories are my own personal care package, and they carry me over the rough roads of today's world, and they give me hope.

*Laura Pheonix writes memoir and poetry from her home in Rochester, Minnesota. A quilter, a walker, a reader, Laura is also an organizer and peace activist since the 1950s. She hopes that in her writing people hear something universal, so that, as she says, "they can write their story from my story."*

---

## Farm Fresh continued from pg 3

remember, my Great Aunt Ida had always been the surgeon of the entire operation. Ida would make a two to three inch incision above the chicken's tailbone. She carefully reached in and removed the intestines, pulling out the heart, liver and gizzard. She would sever these and the heart from the rest of guts, carefully cut off the green bile sack from the liver, slice open the gizzard and remove the grainy remnants of chicken scratching, and then pull off the tough inner layer of yellow skin.

To finish cleaning the inside of a chicken, Ida used a unique tool—a scraper with a long metal shaft and about eighteen sharp metal teeth—which she would run across the rib cage of the chicken, scraping out the lungs and other excess innards. This tool saved tremendous strain on arthritic fingers. Next, the chicken would be plunged into a large bucket, rinsing out any excess remains or blood and finally immersed into an old bulk tank filled with extremely cold water.

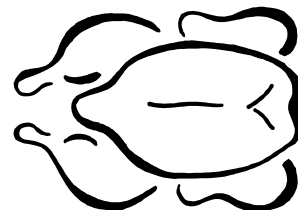
Of all the stations that I filled in at throughout the day, helping Ida was by far my favorite. It is an indescribable feeling to reach into the warm interior body of a chicken still filled with guts, cup your hand around the inside reaching towards the neck, and pull out as much as you can. The steam of the body heat met the outside air and created a unique odor—like the odor that I could still smell on my

hands days later.

When all the day's chickens were soaking in cold water and all the tools, tables, and plastic sheets were cleaned, scrubbed, and sanitized, the crew would break for lunch. After lunch, we'd package the chickens individually and folks from town would drive out to the farm to pick up their "farm fresh" chicken processed "the very same day."

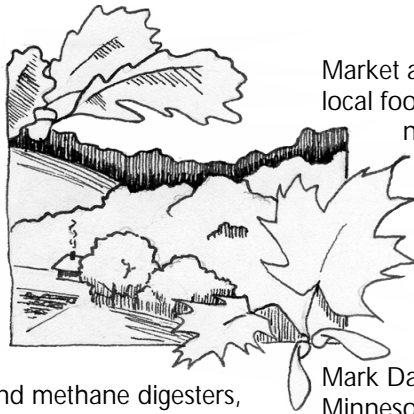
Although chicken butchering is a process no longer actively pursued on my parents' farm, my memories are vivid and the experience invaluable. I'm sure free-range chicken is still the most delicious food I will ever consume. Although the taste is not quite the same if it is not my own labor in the butchering, the homegrown farm-fresh taste is still there.

*Amanda Bilek grew up in West Central Minnesota on her family's diversified crop and livestock farm. Amanda currently works for the Minnesota Project as a Program Coordinator on energy and agriculture issues.*



# View from the Woods

by Loni Kemp



Market and worked on promoting local food networks and neighborhood farmers' markets. This year we co-hosted the Minnesota Food Summit and are working on ways commercial wholesalers can facilitate local food systems.

## Paging Through Time

**W**orking from a small home office has its pleasures and perils. It is nice to avoid commuting and dressing up; however, one absolute requirement for family harmony is that one not overflow the office with piles of papers, reports and files. We designed our compact home with no excess storage space, and boxes of office papers are unwelcome in the upstairs hall, thus I've become an aggressive paper recycler.

So it was that I found myself the other day, sifting through piles of old *Connections* newsletters and keeping only one copy of each issue published since 1979. I have the 20 issues of *Minnesota Connections*, published through 1983, and the 47 issues of *Community Connections*, re-birthered as a literary newsletter since 1992. As the Minnesota Project approaches its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2004, it seems an appropriate time to pause and reflect on the early days.

The very first *Connections* issue noted that an energy crisis, threatening high prices and shutoffs for those who could not afford to pay, opened an opportunity to discuss alternative energy policies. Maybe small farm energy projects like "gasohol stills" would be better for citizens than large-scale, centralized, non-renewable energy systems. We helped two communities get started on their ethanol plants, as we call them today, and twenty five years later this same

alternative energy path, which now includes wind and methane digesters, still drives our work.

The second *Connections* issue alerted the state to an opportunity to save the fourteen remaining community district heating plants because of energy conservation, electricity production, potential for use of renewable fuels, safety, and sprawl prevention. We failed to save the plants—only one plant in St. Paul remains today – but a new generation is now turning to our old research to examine opportunities for co-generation and district heating.

The third issue in 1980 highlighted a connection between increasing farm size and soil erosion. Our "farm structure" project with Minnesota Farmers Union developed policy recommendations for then-U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland and the state to strengthen the family farm with policy changes for agriculture, tax and transportation. Today we call the issue by different names, citing concentration in agribusiness and water quality impacts, but we still are working to change the damaging policies that drive these trends. We have come a long way but still have far to go.

By 1981, the Minnesota Project was deeply involved in food systems work, noting that despite huge agriculture production, Minnesota nevertheless imported 80-90 percent of its food. We helped promote the St. Paul Farmers'

Mark Dayton, founder of the Minnesota Project along with Alida Messinger, announced in late 1980 that he was resigning to "explore the possibility of running for office." Of course we know he ran for the U.S. Senate then, and finally took his seat in 2001.

Those early newsletters also describe issues that were effectively resolved and dropped. We successfully organized citizens to prevent uranium mining in Minnesota. We successfully raised concerns to prevent large-scale mining of peat for electricity export. We joined with others in blocking siting of high and low level nuclear waste in our state. We helped form the Historic Bluff Country Association, which has gone on to become the premier example of rural tourism promotion. We helped a number of counties set up recycling programs, formed a recycling alliance, and supported state policies and funding that eventually helped make recycling an accepted service of government.

I tuck away these old newsletters feeling affirmed by the fact that I am part of the Minnesota Project's commitment to long term work, whether we win or lose. Knowing that we have funders who sustain us, a Board of Directors that supports us, various staff teams that keep plugging away, and partners who trust us, we can all feel confident that we are doing work that needs to be done.

*Loni Kemp joined the Minnesota in 1979 shortly after its incorporation, and now serves as Senior Policy Analyst basing from her home office in Canton, Minnesota.*

**Please take the time to make a contribution.  
Use the enclosed envelope to help us with our  
vital mission.**

**The Minnesota Project is there  
when you can't be.**

**Give a tax deductible donation today!**

## Conservation Security Program Clears Congress with \$41.4 Million for 2004, and Hope

**T**he Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a new federal farm program that will provide financial incentives and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers who develop conservation plans on their working lands. As authorized by Congress in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, the Conservation Security Program offers a new paradigm for federal farm programs — rewarding agricultural producers for the environmental benefits they can provide through the implementation of comprehensive conservation plans that protect the resources of concern on their agricultural operation.

The House-Senate conference committee on Appropriations released their approved bill which includes a measure to fund the Conservation Security Program at \$1.4 million for the remainder of fiscal year 2004. Even more significant, it lifted the \$3.77 billion multiyear budget cap imposed earlier this year to help pay for farm disaster assistance.

Now the program is restored to its original design, whereby all farmers who qualify by implementing approved conservation plans will receive incentive payments, with full uncapped entitlement funding for the national program.

Both the House and Senate are expected to approve the conference measure.

The next step needed is for rules to be released. After a 90 day delay while the Office of Management and Budget held up a draft rule, the US Department of Agriculture now has the authority to issue the rule.

Minnesota Project staff will join with others to urge Secretary Veneman to issue rules immediately. Please contact Secretary Veneman for more

## Century Farm

by Larry Schug  
Avon, Minnesota

We've bled on this land,  
cried on this land,  
been born and given birth,  
some of us have died on this land.  
It seems like this land  
belongs to us.

Not so, says the native.  
No way say the children.  
Not really say the stones,  
the soil, the water,  
the creatures who crawl or swim or fly.  
I think not says the scientist—  
it's a case of relative perception.  
One hundred years seems a long time  
because the atoms in people  
move so fast  
relative to the atoms in say, a rock,  
whose atoms move so slowly  
that human lives pass over them  
like the shadows of migrating hawks  
gliding over the geography.



THE MINNESOTA PROJECT IS  
A PROUD MEMBER OF



the  
minnesota  
project

1885 University Ave, W., #315  
St. Paul, MN 55104  
(651) 645-6159

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN  
PERMIT NO. 3992