



LCLT

Lopez Community Land Trust

Building a Sustainable Island Community

FALL NEWSLETTER 2017

Who Really Owns American Farmland?

(excerpts from *The New Food Economy* by Katy Keiffer, July 31st, 2017)



In Iowa the average price of farmland in 1970 was \$419/acre, but by 2016 it was \$7,183, an increase of 1600% in less than 50 years. This rise in value attracted international investors. Rather than goldmines and coal fields, investors are purchasing farmland. Investors who own land determine how and what is grown. Such decisions tend to favor fast market production over the cost to the environment, local landscape, culture and soils. Monocultures and genetically engineered agro-chemical crops are at the top of the list. This profitable trend continues to increase the price of farmland. Moreover many of these investors are from outside the U.S. "Foreign" buyers already own 25 million acres of U.S. land. That's about the size of Virginia....China now controls more than 400 American farms and owns the Smithfield Company, the largest producer of pork in this country. According to the USDA, 25 million acres or 2% of U.S. farmland is in foreign (con't. p.5)

Stonecrest Farmers Introduced—

LCLT is entering into a long-term lease with Meike Meissner and Mike McMahon for Stonecrest Farm. We let them introduce themselves:

"We have lived for the past 23 years in the high country of central Colorado, in a small community dependent on skiing and tourists on the one hand, and conventional ranching on the other. Our own path to farming came about when we took a short sabbatical to Marin County, California for Mike to finish a degree in culture, ecology, and sustainable communities at the New College of California. As you may know, the bounty of good food in the Bay Area is staggering, and we finally learned to enjoy in-season local produce, clean meat, and fabulous fruit. However, upon our return to Almont we came to realize that our mountain valley was in fact a food desert. There was so much land, yet so little food produced on it. (con't. p.4)

What is Happening to Housing?



The Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) is the centerpiece of local planning in our County. Like a business plan, the Comp Plan provides the framework for how our community will grow. County revisions to the Comp Plan are due to the state Growth Management board in June 2018. One of the Elements that is being revised is the Housing Element.

The first draft of the revised Housing Needs assessment was issued in August and reveals some harsh trends. 58% of homes of Lopez are vacant and 56% of all new housing created between 2000 and 2010 were for seasonal or vacation rental use.

According to the Washington Center of Real Estate Research Housing Affordability Index, housing in SJC is the least affordable in the State. Only 16% of the County housing inventory is renter occupied. The County is seeing a dramatic diminishing presence of people between the ages of 20 and 40, which includes the workforce and families with children in schools. The median age of the county's populations changed from 47 in 2000 to 54 in 2015. The median home value for the County now is \$465,500. In order to rent a home for \$1,250 a month, the household income must be \$45,000/yr. or \$22/hour for 40 hours a week. Imagine what the salaries would need to be for new: schoolteachers, clerks, restaurant workers, non-profit employees, County employees, deputies, small business owners, etc. Meanwhile, the county continues to maintain the lowest property tax levy in the State—\$6.82 per \$1000 of assessed value which is \$4.65 lower than the statewide average and \$2.08 less than the next lowest County (Wahkiakum).

LCLT has been building affordable housing for over two decades. Through access to stable and affordable housing we have seen small business owners thrive, essential services gain new volunteers, children perform better in school and less stress in the lives of families. LCLT provides 4% of the year round housing stock on Lopez and about 15% of all school age children live in LCLT housing. In 2018 we plan to build three more homes. Unfortunately the state legislature adjourned in July without passing a Capital Construction Budget. Meaning that the Washington state Housing Trust Fund (HTF), which LCLT relies on, was not funded. We hope that when the legislators reconvene that the first thing they do is their job – and pass a Capital Budget. HTF has been a real boon to LCLT since 1992. We typically receive \$50,000 per unit to help buy down the high cost of infrastructure. We can't build decent affordable housing without it or a new source of funding.

As recently noted by Kim Herman, the executive director of the Washington State Housing Finance Commission, "Affordable homeownership is integral to the health of our rural communities, offering individuals and families the opportunity for greater stability and financial security. The increasing squeeze on affordable rentals makes homeownership accessibility all the more imperative."

Over a decade ago Lorna Reece, along with her family and friends started the Len Kanzer Memorial Fund for Housing. Len was a dedicated LCLT board member. After his death the Fund was created and continues to be managed by LCLT. It serves the growing number of LCLT coop homeowners by offering low interest loans to those who don't have enough for the initial purchase price. We are pleased to announce that through steady and generous donations the fund is now at \$50,000. It is currently serving over 20 households. Big thanks and appreciation to all those who dreamed up the Fund and continue to nurture it. Len's legacy lives on in the same generous spirit in which he lived.



Welcome Jennifer Contreras to LCLT's Board of Directors!

I am a homeowner in Common Ground with my partner Victor. I love my neighbors and the way we are working toward a common goal together. I have moved a lot in my life, and I am very grateful for the opportunities afforded me by living in Common Ground. I enjoy hands-on, outdoor work and work that is new every time. I enjoy hiking, swimming, camping and traveling. My favorite author is the Brazilian Paulo Coelho. My partner and I also run "taco 'bout it," delicious tacos sold at various events. I work on Sperry Peninsula. Being part of the board is a great opportunity, and I enjoy helping people.

Latest LCLT Award—We recently received another award for our affordable housing and sustainability. The International Living Future Institute awarded LCLT with the Living Building Challenge Certification for Common Ground. Common Ground was LCLT's first net zero neighborhood and the only affordable housing neighborhood in the U.S. to receive this award. The Living Building Challenge goal, in the words of Buckminster Fuller, is to "make the world work for 100% of humanity in the shortest possible time through spontaneous cooperation without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone."



Camp Nor'wester girls

LCLT Work Parties

LCLT welcomes volunteer work parties anytime. Each summer both Camp Nor'wester girls and boys come to LCLT to volunteer for everything from weeding to sign painting to pathway repair as part of their community service camp experience. Boy Scouts troop 515 volunteered this summer and helped with fencing. In the past we have had high school classes in sustainability come. We provide an orientation to the work before the tasks begin and have treats awaiting. The entire experience is educational, helpful to LCLT, and yes, fun!



(Stonecrest Farmers, con't.) A short growing season, very cold winters, and a commodity cattle market dictated that local stores were entirely dependent on petroleum and trucks to provide for restaurant and homemade meals alike. And while 50 years ago the valley had big potato farms, strawberry patches, various grains, huge home gardens, poultry and sheep production, we were now only looking at fields of hay and beef cows. There was no food security and very little discussion at the local level about what that even meant. We decided that that was unacceptable for our young family; if we were going to eat, we were going to farm.

We began our seven acre homestead in 2005 and within three years were able to build a small strawbale home and a working farm. Meike had recently toured with a fringe farmer activist in Virginia named Joel Salatin and was inspired to start raising chickens and pigs immediately, even before the house was complete. We were soon raising 600 chickens annually to sell at the local nascent farmers markets, leased out our goat herd to the Town of Crested Butte to manage weeds, raised a dozen hogs, a small herd of sheep, plus a couple of milk cows – all on this small place at 8,000 above sea level in a Zone 3 climate. Our intensive grazing and grass management paid off, and it was exhilarating to see.

While we continued to work off-farm jobs, in 2009 we took over the management of the Anders Ranch, a 874-acre piece upon which we custom grazed cattle during the summer and fall seasons, and produced a hay crop for our own animals. Mike took holistic grazing classes and Meike completed the Holistic Management International's Ranch Management course. Using this knowledge we were able to use other people's animals as a tool to regenerate the over-grazed rangelands and make the hay meadows more drought tolerant. Earlier this year we received the Gunnison Conservation District's Conservationist of the Year Award for our work in upgrading the ranch's inefficient irrigation systems, collaborating with Trout Unlimited and other water users, and regenerating habitat for the threatened Gunnison sage grouse on the property.

In June we sold our home and left our life in the mountains for several reasons. First, we needed to move closer to family - Meike's parents and quadriplegic brother live near Tacoma. We were also finding that the long, cold winters are exactly that – too long and too cold - and we could not see ourselves growing old in an area where few elders live. And lastly, we wanted to live someplace near the water – we are sailors and the draw of the ocean is undeniable. However, in looking at farmland in the western PNW we have found that the price of productive farmland, much less any acreage, is unattainable, especially for someone who wants to start a grass-based grazing operation. We have been forced to look at less expensive acreage on the east side of the Cascades – poor ground in very isolated areas – which we know we could work with, but would still leave us with empty land and little capital left over to invest in animals, equipment, or shelter. Beginning farmers (and we are still technically labelled as such under USDA guidelines) face steep startup costs, and in many of the rural locations where we could afford land there is no local economy to support small farmers, or the off-farm jobs that would be needed to make ends meet. In seeking a long term lease at Stonecrest we would be able to focus our resources on a viable farm enterprise that meets our personal goals of providing an excellent quality of life for our family, while living in a community that supports regenerative agriculture, creative change-makers, and sustainability. **(con't. p. 5)**

(Who Owns Farmland, con't.) hands. These countries include Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, and Italy.

States like Iowa have banned the sale of farmland to foreign buyers and other states have laws that limit the number of acres that can be legally sold, but it can be quite tricky to tell who is doing the buying. So just how much of our farmland are we willing to sell? And who decides? Civil-rights leader Fanny Lou Hamer bought hundreds of acres of Mississippi Delta farmland, so poor blacks could grow their own food. “When you’ve got 400 quarts of greens and gumbo soup for the winter, nobody can push you around or tell you what to say or do,” Hamer said. (David Bollier, director of the Reinventing the Commons Program at the Schumacher Center). We need to heed her advice.



(con't. p. 4) Our approach to farming at Stonecrest will be the same as it has been in Colorado: to manage the landscape holistically by looking at all of the parts of the sun-soil-grass-animal-human cycle and to make them all successful. In touring the farm we know that we would be grazing with multiple species, including cows and sheep, followed in the field by chickens and/or hogs. We have extensive experience with portable electric fencing and would seek other pasture in proximity to Stonecrest to help sustain ruminants and grow our herd while the fields at the farm convert back to perennial grasses. Initially, we will not be making hay at Stonecrest and we would purchase, if necessary, from neighbors. Our main product will be a mixed meat CSA that will be made available locally and at a couple of sites on the mainland. In addition to our grass-fed meat and pastured poultry and pork, we will maintain a farm stand garden that will be accessed by the public at the Stonecrest entrance with potential value added products such as Meike’s almost-famous sauerkraut and Mike’s smokehouse bacon. We would both equally share in the work of animal husbandry, grazing management, and gardening on the farm, along with the help of our three children, Hetty (14), Lolo (12), and Andris (9).

Part of our schooling in California entailed courses at the Occidental Arts & Ecology Center, where we both learned about Bill Mollison and permaculture, but more importantly about the importance of cultivating ecological literacy, leading by example, and “being the change” we wanted to see in the world. We are both very keen on collaborating with the LCLT in training and education programs, and have taught various classes in the past on backyard livestock, chicken rearing (and processing), traditional foods preparation (Meike was co-founder of the local Weston A. Price Foundation chapter), one holistic management. the local Weston A. Price Foundation chapter), and holistic management. The future of food and the future of farming will be tied to our ability to teach others and provide access to land and resources collectively. The business of shifting paradigms aside, we acknowledge that farming is tough work and can be both physically and financially challenging. Our plan is to have a successful enterprise at Stonecrest Farm within three years, and in the interim we are both prepared to work other jobs and have savings set aside to use, if necessary. Mike has more than 20 years of experience in the construction industry, including building with alternative methods such as strawbale and timberframe; he is also an electrician. Meike has worked for many nonprofit organizations as a development director and grant writer, and has a skill set that includes wedding and event planning, as well as property management, housekeeping, and catering. A lease with LCLT will allow us access to land for our grass-based farming operations in a community that values regenerative agriculture and is supportive of families and farmers. In return, we will commit to being excellent stewards and holistic managers of a local landmark, while producing nutritious, delicious food, and having honesty and integrity in all of our relationships.”



International Visitors: LCLT has been blessed by international visitors this summer. Jackson Moulding, the Director of **Ecomotive** in Bristol, UK, and his family came by to explore our work. Their SNUG home design was awarded first prize in the most recent Grand Design's 'Self Build on Shoestring' competition in the UK. Ecomotive is a social enterprise working to create a more sustainable and affordable homes and communities by supporting and enabling self build and custom build group projects. Shortly after their visit, a delegation from **Green City Builders** of Salt Spring Island, Canada, came to consult with us. They want to create a down-to-Earth, green building company with a lot of soul. We had great exchanges.

Jackson Moulding & family

HARVEST DINNER OCTOBER 21, 2017 5 P.M.

**Presenting Meike and Mike
New Farmers for Stonecrest Farm
Lopez Center for the Community and the Arts**

Doors open at **5 p.m.** **Silent Auction begins.**

Judging of dishes ends at 6:10 Dinner begins soon after.

Special Presentation at 7:30 by new Stonecrest Farm family.

Everyone is welcome. Please bring your own plates and cutlery and a potluck dish of local foods. Prizes are awarded for best presentation and best use of local foods.

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Unleashing the Power of Community



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