



Kickapoo Visions

~ Promoting Stewardship, Connecting Communities since 2000 ~

www.kickapoovsn.org

Spring 2010 Volume X, Issue I

Buy Local! Buy-in to the VSN!

It's an investment in our quality of life!

Looking for a great investment? Some people might not think of a non-profit organization like the Valley Stewardship Network as an investment. But over the past ten years, dollars invested in VSN have paid off handsomely for residents of the Driftless region. VSN staff, board, members and volunteers truly live its mission—to balance natural resource conservation with the building of strong communities.

VSN is a great investment in a healthy environment.

VSN's Water Quality Monitoring program has partnered with other non-profits and local and state agencies to support trained volunteers in monitoring our waterways. Currently, the Water Quality Monitoring Program has expanded to include scientific research, well water testing and educational programs for citizens of all ages. In addition to protecting drinking water for residents and farmers, this crucial work is helping to preserve the world-class trout streams that draw throngs of fly fisherman to our part of Wisconsin each year.

VSN is a great investment in the local economy. Through its Food and Farm Initiative, VSN connects local growers with local eaters, thereby providing strong support for the farming economy and the wellness of residents. After commissioning a multi-county study to learn more about how our regional economy works and how it could become more self-sustaining VSN **took action** and innovated new ways of keeping local food dollars circulating in the local economy. Now VSN is partnering with Vernon Economic Development Association to link local producers with local consumers, businesses and large regional

institutions, including universities, schools and hospitals. This groundbreaking producer-consumer co-op is one of the first of its kind in the nation.

VSN is a great investment in a healthy population. Last year, the gleaning project of Food and Farm harvested 3000 pounds of local farmers' produce that would otherwise have gone to waste and distributed boxes of fresh healthy food to local senior citizens, along with cooking classes to introduce tasty preparation of the produce. This year we seek to expand the program by involving schools and church groups in extending this vital service to our low income population.

Help us double VSN Membership in 2010!

VSN is a great investment in natural resource education. Our stewardship education programming has provided reliable information on a wide range of topics, including our vulnerable karst geology, identification and control of invasive plants, plus outings for bird identification and other wildlife. We help people know and appreciate the land they live on more fully and richly.

VSN is a great investment in a bright future. VSN's "Kickapoo Conversations," a citizen-based forum envisioning the future of the region and ways to get there, helped spawn the Driftless Area Art Festival, a thriving enterprise that draws tourists from five states, and community radio station WDRT, which will hit the airwaves this summer. VSN continually strives to find ways of stimulating and supporting community initiatives, and to promote thoughtful, rational planning for enhancing the quality of life in the region.

Here's how you can help:

- If you are not a VSN member, **join now**, at the highest level of membership you can.
- If you are already a member, please consider **increasing your level of support**.
- **Encourage friends and relatives to join the VSN family**. Let them know about the value of membership and what a good investment it is.
- **Give a one-time donation** to VSN.
- If you are a business, please consider joining at the **Business Member** level.

It's easy to join us. Just go to www.kickapoovsn.org and sign up. Or print out the coupon on page 4 of this Newsletter and send in your support via regular mail.

Thank you for being a part of the Valley Stewardship Network!

We need Your Partnership!

So you can see, the Valley Stewardship Network is a wise and thoughtful investment in the well-being of the region—**local dollars creating significant local results**. But, to continue to serve the community, maintain our vital programs and to generate essential new initiatives, **we need your support**. To continue to do the good work we are doing, we must significantly broaden our base and increase our level of financial support.



Food for Thought

By Nicole Penick

It has been a busy year. We had terrific turn out at Fresh, the local food celebration and film showing at Green Man Music Hall in February. Many thanks to folks who came out to support us and partake in our 95% local foods dinner; it was wonderful to see so many new faces as well as old friends.



Participants at the "Fresh" event enjoy a 95 % local foods dinner, yum!

The staff and volunteers of the Food and Farm Initiative (FFI) are excited about this year's growing season. We are working on several projects that will meet our goals of engaging, educating and mobilizing a broad network of area residents and improving access to healthy, locally produce. Keep checking our website for updates on local foods and sustainable agriculture.

Our Kickapoo Harvest Gleaning for Healthy Communities project is now in its second year. The FFI team will be once again gleaning food from our local farmers and distributing fresh produce to the residents of Park View Manor, a senior housing center in Viroqua. We are extending the invitation to churches, food pantries and youth groups to join our gleaning efforts and to learn how to create and implement their own gleaning project in their communities. We are creating a gleaning training manual that will be available for any community member interested in initiating a gleaning project. We hope that next year there will be multiple gleaning projects happening throughout the watershed.



Volunteer gleaners weighing the harvest.

The Food and Farm Initiative Committee is updating the Vernon County Direct Marketer's List for this year's growing season. Generated from our

community food assessment work, the Direct Marketing List includes producers who sell directly to consumers. The updated version will be on our website under the Food and Farm page in early June. As we update this list we invite folks from Crawford, Monroe and Richland Counties to contact us if they are interested in creating a similar list in their counties.

FFI is excited to be partners once again this year with the Vernon Area Farm to School Program. Building on the success of last year's Harvest, the Laurel High School team made it to the finalist round for the National School Lunch Cooking competition held at the Farm to Cafeteria conference in Detroit Michigan. Bjorn Bergman, the local Americorps Farm to School member has been busy teaching about vegetables, wild foods and nutrition in classrooms at Viroqua and Westby Elementary and Middle schools. Look for more updates in our e-newsletters about upcoming Farm to School events and the results of the national cooking competition.

Contact Nicole at vsnnicole@gmail.com for more information.

Reflections on a River

By Sarah Grainger

The Water Quality Program is undergoing metamorphosis!

First, there was a change in the face of water quality monitoring program. The ever dedicated Gary Thompson has retired from managing the water quality program due to health issues. Thank you for your service Gary! To fill his big shoes Sarah Grainger has come on board with her skills and experience as an environmental engineer.

The Water Quality Program kicked off the season with the Big River event, where we showed the movie *Big River*, a companion to the popular *King Corn* movie, and presented information about our watershed and water quality. Thank you to all who attended. Your support is noticed and appreciated.



A rapt crowd at the Big River event.

Next we held three Water Monitoring Training / Refresher courses, one in each the lower, middle and upper Kickapoo watershed. These sessions were very well attended and were a lot of fun. Come join us next year, whether you want to become a monitor or are just interested in learning about monitoring.



Volunteer water monitors learn the ropes.

This monitoring season the water quality program is serving up a full plate of citizen-based monitoring programs. Our water quality monitoring program is gearing up from the training course and will be in full throttle from May to September. We continue to operate under the WAV (Water Action Volunteers) protocol with Level I, II and III. Special projects this year include assisting the Department of Natural Resources in obtaining temperature data for unclassified streams in the watershed, and monitoring with Crawford Stewardship Project around the Roth CAFO operation near Wauzeka, Wisconsin.

In addition to the cornerstone water monitoring program we are also hosting two new citizen-based monitoring initiatives; Project RED and the Mussel Monitoring Program of Wisconsin. These are each single day events where citizens are first educated and then take part in monitoring aquatic invasive species or fresh water mussels. These family friendly events will take place in July; see page 4 for more info.



Sarah helps kids create their own macroinvertebrate zoos at Kickapoo Earth Day in Readstown.

Lastly, the water quality program continues to participate in monitoring and studies that help protect our watershed. The well water testing services continue. If you would like Sarah to come to test your well, for a fee, please contact her at 637-3615 or vsnsarah@gmail.com.



VSN is monitoring spring heads and providing data analysis for the local Karst investigation funded by the Nuzum Foundation.

VSN is able and willing to provide testing and data analysis services for scientific research and investigation. Please contact Sarah at 637-3615 or vsnsarah@gmail.com if you are interested in acquiring VSN's services for a project.

Farm to Institution

Building a local food system in five counties.

VSN's Food and Farm Program Manager Nicole Penick is taking on an additional role as the Buy Local Development Coordinator for the Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin 2010 grant project for the next two years. In partnership with the Vernon Economic Development Association under the direction of Sue Noble, Nicole will help institutional buyers, local farmers and food processors develop the relationships needed to increase the purchase of locally grown and processed foods in La Crosse, Vernon, Monroe, Richland and Crawford counties.

The \$40,000 grant, which was the largest in the state, was awarded in January at the grand opening of Premiere Meats in Viroqua. Since February, Nicole has been hard at work on the project's goal of developing a multi stakeholder cooperative that will ensure continued support to small and midsize farms. Through this co-op, institutions will be able to purchase vegetables, fruits, dairy, meat and eggs as well as value added products like sunflower oil and maple syrup, with the assurance of food safety and at a price that is affordable yet reflects the true cost of growing food in our watershed.

The first step in this project was to bring together key stakeholders to plan the formation of the cooperative. A multi stakeholder cooperative is one where the members of the co-op come from all aspects of the food system, including the farmers, food processors, food distributors, institutional buyers and the employees of the cooperative. The only other model for this type of food based cooperative is found in Chippewa Valley, where the Producers and Buyers Co-op was initiated by Sacred Heart Hospital's desire to purchase local and sustainable meat. Go to: <http://viroquafood.coop/viroqua-food-coop-blog/bid/19272/The-Chippewa-Valley-Buy-Local-Consortium> for more details!

Currently, the Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin co-op steering committee is developing a mission and vision statement and by-laws, and beginning the process of incorporating. Meanwhile, Nicole has been meeting with interested institutions to determine their interest and needs for purchasing locally raised vegetables, fruits, eggs, dairy and meat, with the goal of sourcing up to 10% of their food budgets over the next two years from the five county area. Through all of

Co-op Steering Committee

- Sue Noble, VEDA
- Jan Rasikas, Viroqua Food Co-op
- Cecil Wright, Organic Valley
- Ken Meter, Crossroads Research
- Margaret Bau, USDA Co-op Specialist
- Rufus Haucke, Keewaydin Organics
- Brian Wickert, Farms
- Marilyn Volden, Viroqua Public Schools
- Dan Murphy, Western Technical College
- Larry Riggenberg, UW - La Crosse
- Wade Miller, USDA Farm Loans
- Laura Brown, Crawford Co. Extension
- Bob Haugen, Software Developer
- Becky Comeau, Food & Farm Initiative

her related FFI work Nicole also is in contact with interested farms and is compiling their product availability. Local software specialist Bob Haugen is providing software development and logistical support once the co-op is open for business.

For the spring and summer of 2010 the goals are to incorporate the cooperative and seek memberships from interested stakeholders and community members who want to invest in the co-op. The second goal is to begin providing institutions such as Western Technical College, Three Rivers Waldorf School and University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with locally grown vegetables, meat from Premiere Meats and some dairy from the Westby Co-op Creamery. These initial food deliveries will help support the development co op's business plan.

Much of the support and excitement around this project has come directly from the institutions and farmers, which demonstrates the need for developing the marketing and distribution level of our local food system. For more information or to find out how to get involved, please contact Nicole Penick at the Valley Stewardship Network's office: phone 608-637-3615 or email vsnnicole@gmail.com.

Participate in Project RED

The VSN is partnering with the River Alliance of Wisconsin to host Project RED for the Kickapoo Watershed! What is this Project RED? RED stands for Riverine Early Detectors, a project launched by the River Alliance of Wisconsin to identify invasive species that are a growing threat to our flowing waters. Standard Project RED involvement provides you with the necessary tools to identify 15 invasive aquatic and wetland species and report their presence. In this Kickapoo Watershed series the River Alliance invasive species experts will teach us about the invasive species that are threats to the Kickapoo Watershed such as Japanese knotweed and purple loosestrife.



In the photograph above, Japanese knotweed is found on the banks of the Kickapoo River near Soldiers Grove. Japanese knotweed is also found in Stueben and upstream near Wildcat State Park. Japanese knotweed can cause erosion of streambanks and decrease habitat for birds and other wildlife that depend on the river corridor.

Join the VSN and the River Alliance for invasive species detection and reporting training on July 31st at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. All ages are welcome! Children must be accompanied by an adult.

For more information contact Sarah at the VSN (608) 637-3615 or visit the River Alliance website www.wisconsinrivers.org.



Valley Stewardship Network
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Viroqua, Wisconsin 54665

VSN News Has Gone Tree-Free!

Send your updated email address to vsngeneral@gmail.com so you don't miss out on the next issue!

Support VSN Today!

- VSN Student or Senior \$25
- Valley Steward \$35
- Business Membership \$75

— Additional Support —

- Watershed Sustainer \$50
- Watershed Patron \$100
- Watershed Guardian \$250
- Visionary \$500
- Other \$

Please make checks payable to VSN or donate on our website at www.kickapoovsn.org.

All contributions are tax deductible.

Thank You!

Watershed Calendar of Events

2010 Gleaning Dates: June 18, July 16, August 20, September 17, and October 22. Please contact Nicole at 637-3615 for times and locations.

JULY 10, 9:00a.m.-12:30p.m.: Mussel Monitoring Workshop at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, led by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

JULY 24-25: Kickapoo Country Fair in La Farge. The VSN booth will feature our Water Quality Monitoring Program and the Food & Farm Initiative. Contact Organic Valley at 625-2666 for info.

JULY 31, 1:00p.m.-4:00p.m.: Project RED (Riverine Early Detectors) Training at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve,

led by The River Alliance of Wisconsin.
AUGUST 21: Ecological Restoration Workshop with ecological restorer, Steven Apfelbaum, in collaboration with the Round River Institute. Details forthcoming.

OCTOBER 13: 2nd Annual Harvest Challenge Tasting and Gala at Viroqua High School Cafeteria.

VSN Board Meetings are on the third Tuesday of each month from 6:00-8:00p.m. Everyone is welcome. Please call the office for meeting location.

For more information about any of these events, please contact the office at 637-3615 or vsngeneral@gmail.com.

To stay current on all VSN events and news, visit our website at www.kickapoovsn.org. We have a fresh new look and you have the wonderful option of donating online. We encourage you to take a tour of the website and let us know what you think!

Thank You Members and Donors

We very much want to thank those who have contributed with their membership or special support since our last newsletter.

Andy & Dian Lopez, Barry & Susan Paull, Ben Logan, Bill & Barbara Motlong, Charles & Gwendolyn Hatfield, Charles & Patti Knower, Chris Hewitt, Couleecap, Cynthia Olmstead, Hans Verick, Dan Flaherty, Dana & Bob Van Hoesen, Dani & Michael Lind, Daniel Arnold & Susan Johnson, Daniel Badtke, Daniel Stohr, David Ebbert, David Warburton, Donald Stirling & Mary Sundberg Stirling, Ed & Barb Christie, Edward & Barbara Martinez, Ellen Brooks & Dave Hackett, Ernst Lubbe, Evan Jones & Joel Johnson, Glenn & Barbara Lepley, Greg Wahl, Harriet Behar, Harry & Sylvia Peterson, Idelle Fauske, James Gay & Linda Robinson-Gay, Jamie & Dan Johnson, Jane Keeley, John & Andrea Kenny, John & Patricia Pfitsch, Joseph & Patricia Biebl, Julie & Gilford Hoel, Karen Hermsen, Kathleen Crittenden, Kathy & Paul Fairchild, Kathy Doerfer, Kathy Niedert, Kathy Rohr-Ninmer, Kelvin Rodolfo, Ken & Michelle Workowski, Kristine Snowdeal, Larry & Kelly Jansen, Laura Brown, Laura Hewitt, Lynn & David Chakoian, Maggie Jones, Mia Sondreal, Martha Atherton, Mary & Lloyd Croatt, Mary Leuther, Michael & Bernadette Link, Michelle Hays & Andrew Anderson, Nancy Piehl, Natalie McIntire, Neil & Mary Bard, Paul & Bernadette Hayes, Paul & Paula Grenier, Paul Bergquist & Carole Austin, Pete & Nora Knapik, Philip & Kathleen Acker, Ralph & Kathryn Lemley, Richard & Marge Peters, Richard & Mildred Jawson, Richard Smith, Robert Horwich, Roger & Patricia Martin, Roger & Phyllis Krause, Ronald & Karene Uhe, Royal Bank, Sally Colacino, Sara Martinez & Matt Urch, Senn Brown, Sharon Miessner, Sheryl Scott & Leigh Welper, Steve & Mary Christenson, Steve & Therese Laurdan, Steve Hanson & Sue Hulsether, Sue Noble, Tamara Dean, Terry & Jean Beck, Theresa Marquez, Tom & Danelle Weston, Tom Lukens, Verland & Pauline Evans, Barbara Wettengel, and William & Melissa Hendrickson.

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Promoting Stewardship, Connecting Communities in the Kickapoo Valley Region

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