



Community Supported Stewardship Agriculture

When we see land as a community to which we belong we may begin to use it with love and respect... That Land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. That land yields a cultural harvest is a fact long known, but latterly often forgotten.

ALDO LEOPOLD, 1948

Vilicus Farms is a 12,508-acre bright spot of biodiversity in the ocean of earth known as the Northern Great Plains. Vilicus is Latin and translates to “stewards of the land”. We take this name seriously. Our long term and diverse crop rotations, field layout with embedded natural areas throughout, organic and biodynamic farming system, our care for pollinators, and the next generation of agrarians sets us apart. Of the 18 million acres of crop land in Montana less than 1% of that is certified organic.

Growing food takes effort. It also takes capital.

As first-generation farmers, over our 13 seasons, we have concluded that for agriculture to work better for everyone (farmers, eaters, soil, wildlife) the long-term service work of land stewardship must be decoupled from the income stream of annual farm production. In years where climate change impacts our cropping, we have still done the work of stewardship and incurred the expenses associated with providing that service across our 12,508 acres. Cover crops were still planted. Cattle were still grazed. Pollinator habitat was still planted and maintained. People were still paid to make all that happen. Working with natural systems requires patience. You cannot build soil on quarterly profit reporting cycles.

Stewardship agriculture pays a price for using biodiversity as its guiding star. We don't crop every acre we possibly can to maximize production income. And we are excluded from the broader support structures that underpin more conventional agricultural operations. Subsidies are less, and crop insurance is more complicated when you grow 20 things instead of one or two. We have lower yields per acre, but we take far less from the land, and strive to give back what we take. We are striving to avoid the transactional model where money and yield define agricultural success. Yet, we cannot deny that the absence of certain revenue streams and limited access to capital stifle Vilicus' potential.



Community Supported Stewardship Agriculture

At Vilicus we have been actively exploring ways to be better supported for the critical service of agricultural land stewardship. The emerging market of ecosystem services seemed promising. But diverse, complex operations like ours are 'too complex to model' and as early adopters of organic regenerative practices we do not meet "additionality" requirements to qualify for the majority of today's market mechanisms. Even if we could model the impact of our operations and participate in these markets we are concerned about the broader consequences of this move to commodify mother nature more by separating and reducing her into seemingly disconnected components to be bought and sold. We do not want or need another market where farmers are paid last. We are wary that the current ecosystem service market structure will only further disconnect the credit buyer from the actual people doing the work and their place and purpose in the world. We have seen the impacts of decoupling eaters from the farms that produce their food - we do not want this perpetuated in other realms as we undertake the biggest mission for all of us- caring for our one and only planet.

Ever wonder what you, as an individual, can do to heal a wounded planet? Every day, many of us attempt to use resources more wisely: we drive less, use fewer plastics, buy energy efficient appliances, and insulate the heck out of our homes. Some can afford to install solar. Some conscientious souls financially support organizations that battle one of our key challenges: climate change.

Still, a sense of frustration remains. We would like to suggest a third way: directly support those who are on the land, growing, experimenting, and putting climate change abatement into daily practice. Agriculture – especially biodynamic and organic agriculture – and land stewardship is one the lead tools at our disposal to address climate change.

The outcome of our efforts to explore options for more long-term system-oriented stewardship funding is the development of a Community Supported Stewardship Agriculture (CSSA) shares program. CSSA's add a twist to the successful history of Community Supported Agriculture, also known as CSA's. Rather than pre-purchasing and receiving a share of farm produce, with a CSSA you purchase a share that supports the land stewardship work across the 12,508 acres of Vilicus Farms.

Farms like Vilicus do so much more than grow food. Their integrated systems of care for land and people, take care of things that support all of us - our air, our water, our soil, and our biodiversity. This is the service of stewardship.

What is Stewardship Agriculture? Care of the land (particularly the soil), care of the people who tend the soil, and care of the communities in which these people live.

SAM WESTERN (author <http://samuelwestern.com>)



Community Supported Stewardship Agriculture

At Vilicus we are focused on the service of nurturing the conditions that are conducive to life in addition to growing food. We believe farming and nature can co-exist. We believe in creating an economy based on care. We believe that together we can build community resilience and ameliorate climate chaos. At Vilicus Farms, nothing – beside our commitment to stewardship agriculture – is set in stone. We are constantly evolving, adapting our practices to encompass the most holistic approach to working with the earth, not against her.

We invite you to join us in this inaugural year of our CSSA.

For the 2022 season we are selling 12,508 shares in our Community Supported Stewardship Agriculture program. \$100 = 1 share and supports the cost of stewardship for 1 acre of land

\$100/acre is the base income necessary to cover the expenses we incur to provide the service of stewardship across the entire farm. If we are able to receive pledges for all of our shares we will significantly lower our dependence on outside loans to support our operating expenses and we will be much less dependent upon crop sales which is critical in years with extreme climate variability.

Examples of our stewardship activities include:

- Crop rotations- we care for 20-30 crops including green manure cover crops over the course of our crop rotation schedule allowing for growth of diverse roots in our soil, keeping soil covered as much as possible and avoiding consumption of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer manufactured using natural gas which is a significant contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions.
- Integrating grazing and using local manure as a fertilizer- Our shared land and labor agreement with P/N Custom Grazing and the utilization of manure from other local ranches contributes critical nutrients to improve the health of our soil.
- Establishing over 400 acres of permanent pollinator habitat (with many of those acres in native plants)-This habitat is part of the 27% of our land that has been left for insects, birds, and other wildlife. This includes 338 acres of native rangeland left to serve as a baseline for future ecological monitoring efforts.
- Making compost on the farm to bring nutrients back to the soil
- Transitioning thousands of acres of land from wheat / chemical fallow system to a diverse and long-term Organic crop system.
- Continued progress towards biodynamic certification ([Learn about biodynamic agriculture](#))
- Solar power producing approximately 46% of all electricity use at our Headquarters



Community Supported Stewardship Agriculture

What we gain from Stewardship Agriculture:

- **Direct Farm Connection** - purchasers of shares have a direct connection to Vilicus Farms and their active implementation of stewardship agriculture in the Golden Triangle in Montana. This is not like buying carbon credits where you are likely to never have a direct connection to people doing the work of sequestration. Vilicus will provide each shareholder at the end of the year a roundup of the stewardship activities and practices implemented. We welcome questions, ideas and visits (if scheduled in advance at a time we can accommodate). (Please have patience during the busy seasons of seeding and harvest). The work of stewardship can be messy, hard, inspiring and beautiful. We will quantify outcomes as appropriate but some might be better articulated qualitatively.
- **Expansive Community** - Stewardship Service shareholders are part of a global human community that cares deeply about enabling agriculture that focuses on biodiversity, land stewardship and care of people. We are an international network building an economy rooted in love, where farms are acknowledged for their role in creating, and nurturing our ecological community on behalf of our human community. We envision shareholders to be both local and not so local.
- **Risk Sharing** - The cumulative funding from the purchase of stewardship shares offset the farm's need to borrow operating capital to implement stewardship activities and ensure a base stable income for the farm. Additionally purchases of shares assure that stewardship activities can be implemented regardless of the income of crop production. Stable income is much like a long-term land lease. It allows farmers to make additional investments in soil building, staffing, equipment, and other infrastructure to assure the long-term viability of the work of implementing stewardship agriculture.
- **Stewarding the whole** - All shares purchased will be pooled on behalf of the farm as a whole. We recognize it would be fun to have a direct connection between shareholders and individual acres. All acres are important and unique and what's most important is that they are all cared for in a way that enhances biodiversity and keeps their connectivity as parts of a whole farm organism.

For those who would prefer to make a tax deductible donation in lieu of purchasing shares you can do so through Vilicus Training Institute. ([Patagonia Action Works](#)). Your unrestricted donation will support Northern Great Plains Stewardship Agriculture work including organic grain farming apprenticeship, implementation of associative economy principles and expanding cultural programs.

In future years we plan to donate a portion of proceeds received from stewardship shares to support implementation of the first Montana Agrarian Commons ([Agrarian Trust](#)) and to develop methods to support other operations implementing stewardship agriculture



Community Supported Stewardship Agriculture

Thank you so very much for being a member of a community that cares about the stewardship services that Vilicus Farm provides