



# LSP Myth Buster #3

An ongoing Land Stewardship Project series on ag myths & ways of deflating them.

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**Myth:** *There are so few small- and medium-sized farms left that it is not worth saving them.*

## Fact:

The vast majority of farms in rural America are still family-sized operations. It just seems like the majority of farms are mega operations

with thousands of acres under cultivation and tens of thousands of animals. That's because all of the headlines—most of them negative—are grabbed by these industrialized operations. In Minnesota, for example, 96 percent of dairy operations have 200 or fewer cows, 86 percent of hog operations less than 2,000 head, and 99 percent of beef operations less than 1,000 animals, according to *Minnesota Agricultural Statistics 2002*. This publication also shows that The average Minnesota farm is 361 acres.

Looked at this way, small- and medium-sized farms are still the backbone of many small Minnesota towns. Now here's the bad news: The handful of mega-operations in Minnesota and other states are gobbling up the lion's share of the commodity market, meaning that family farms are given less of an opportunity to contribute to the economic

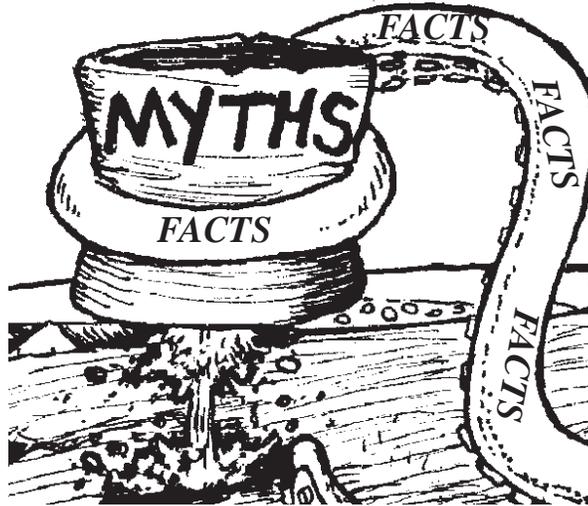
health of local communities—hence the shuttered storefronts, closed churches and empty schools that characterize many farm towns these days. Studies show that fewer, larger operations are bad news for Main Street economies.

Minnesota has lost 10,000 farms of all kinds in the last decade, and with that trend has come numerous problems. Consider what's happened in a sector like hog production: From 1991 to 2001 the state lost 7,500 swine farms, but gained 800,000 hogs. In other words, more hogs are becoming concentrated on fewer farms. That concentrates manure in a smaller area. It also concentrates wealth.

## More Information

◆ See *Minnesota Agricultural Statistics 2002*, published by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, at [www.Nass.usda.gov/mn/](http://www.Nass.usda.gov/mn/).

◆ "Impacts of Concentration in Hog Production on Economic Growth in Rural Illinois: An Economic Analysis" is at <http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/aaea00/sp00go03.pdf>.



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*This Myth Buster is brought to you by the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization devoted to fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland and to seeing more successful farmers on the land raising crops and livestock. For more information, call 651-653-0618 or visit [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org).*