

# Barn Raiser

2024

Impact  
Report



# 2024 *Barn Raiser* Impact Report

Dear Reader,

Since *Barn Raiser* made its debut in December 2022, we have set out to become an essential voice for rural and small town America. Thanks to the financial contributions from you and other readers, we are well on our way, as this 2024 *Barn Raiser* Impact Report demonstrates.

In our founding editorial “Welcome to *Barn Raiser*,” we pledged to uplift voices seeking to renew a sense of civic vitality that “revives the barn raising spirit, that calls together the people of rural and small town America to debate and address shared challenges, and, neighbor working with neighbor, to build a community where all may safely thrive and prosper.”

At *Barn Raiser* we spotlight the rural changemakers who are striving for a better future and working for the common good. We highlight the movements working to safeguard and revitalize the social imagination.

Anyone familiar with today’s nonprofit world will recognize “impact” as the buzzword *du jour*. Impact is how nonprofits seek to quantify to funders how they have fulfilled their mission. *Barn Raiser* understands the value of these efforts, and in this annual report we’re excited to share with you the numbers that demonstrate *Barn Raiser*’s reach and growth over the past year.

But as a news organization we know complex realities can’t be boiled down to metrics or reduced to standardized assessments of worth. When we talk about “impact,” it is not just a numbers game. *Barn Raiser* is trying to change the conversation in and about rural America, and that is done one reader at a time.

According to the 2024 *Barn Raiser* Survey, we are succeeding in that mission:

- 90% of respondents who live in rural areas and small towns say *Barn Raiser* helps them “learn about what is going on in rural and small town America.”
- 50% of rural respondents say *Barn Raiser* gives them “ideas about how to be active in the community.”

It’s no secret that rural communities around the country face daunting challenges: the loss of local newspapers, the prevalence of misinformation, an economic system that enriches corporations at the expense of local economies and an emboldened authoritarian movement that threatens our democracy.

Which brings us to another *Barn Raiser* survey result that stands out:

- 41% of survey respondents who live in rural areas and small towns say they feel “very unsafe” or “not very safe” expressing their political views in public. Those same respondents were also 2.6 times more likely than urban and suburban respondents to list “authoritarianism” as one of the three most important issues they face.

We find these facts disturbing. They also reinforce our commitment to *Barn Raiser*’s mission “to convene a space where big ideas and bold questions enliven local connections, where

daring criticism, rational debate and compassionate care will renew the social imagination to build common ground, encourage democratic participation and inspire change.”

This mandate will have us busy. Editorially, as all eyes turn to the upcoming presidential and congressional elections, *Barn Raiser* is working on a series of stories featuring rural organizers leading grassroots movements to defend democratic institutions. We will also be publishing articles that interrogate what a second Trump administration would mean for rural America.

Institutionally, in the coming year, *Barn Raiser* plans to focus on growing our readership. We will expand our collaborations with local and regional news outlets to get our journalism in the hands of even more rural and small town readers. We will also use promising test results from recent digital growth campaigns to craft an audience development strategy that will expand *Barn Raiser*’s reach and deepen reader engagement.

As a *Barn Raiser* supporter, you have played a vital role in sustaining these efforts. Thank you for being there with us. *Barn Raiser* couldn’t do this without you.

Let’s raise this barn together,



Joel Bleifuss  
Editor & Publisher  
*Barn Raiser*



Justin Perkins  
Deputy Editor & Publisher  
*Barn Raiser*

“ *Barn Raiser* shares voices far from media centers.

I’ve spent most of my life living in those places of forests, lakes and endless prairies, dirt roads, reservations, ranches and complex rural landscapes. This is where the wild things are, and this is where the extractive economy comes to roost. These are the places where Native communities continue to thrive, struggle and shape our futures

This is the place of stories, and they find a home in *Barn Raiser*.”

—Winona LaDuke

## Special Reports

On April 17, 2023, *Barn Raiser* released its first **Special Report**, a collection of stories that dives into a pressing topic or urgent concern facing rural communities. Special Reports showcase the changemakers and big ideas transforming the civic and political landscape in rural America, thereby providing readers with a catalog of the shared wisdom, tactics, failures and successes that inspire ordinary citizens to make a better world for themselves and their communities.



**Enbridge Pipelines** features two reports by Indigenous authors on the Native-led resistance to Enbridge Line 3 and Line 5 pipelines in the Great Lakes Basin. “I like to describe [the Enbridge pipeline in] the Straits of Mackinac as the heart attack waiting to happen,” says Chief Whitney Gravelle. “The heart attack that kills the Great Lakes.” This Special Report also included an investigative article on how Enbridge Inc. paid the state of Minnesota for arresting pipeline protestors and a solutions-based article about five tribes that have established Rights of Nature laws to protect their natural resources.

**Rural Libraries** explores the crucial role libraries play in rural communities. Three of the stories reported how library supporters are fighting book censorship and attempts to defund library systems by far-right legislatures, city councils and groups like Moms for Liberty. In Hamilton County, Tennessee, the group targeted an elementary school librarian whose reading plan included *Stella Brings the Family*, about a girl with two fathers, and *Mother Bruce* by Ryan T. Higgins, about a bear who raises a gaggle of motherless goslings.







**Interviews with Rural Organizers** is an ongoing series of interviews with people working to bring change and strengthen democratic institutions in their communities. The series highlights voices from Wisconsin dairy farmer Hans Breitenmoser who is fighting for fair maps and against gerrymandering, to Louisiana organic farmer Iriel Edwards, the former farm manager of Jubilee Justice Black Farmers Project who now works as certification coordinator for the Real Organic Project, organizing with Black farmers in the South.

**Charting a Path of Rural Progress** features interviews with rural policy experts and organizers from some of the more than 30 nonprofit organizations that participated in the Rural Policy Action Summit in Omaha, Nebraska, in April 2023, sponsored by the Rural Democracy Initiative. The platform that grew out of that Omaha summit, “A Roadmap for Rural Progress: 2023 Rural Policy Action Report,” details 27 legislative priorities for rural and small town America on which candidates can run—and to which voters can hold their elected leaders accountable.



**Rural Communities Respond to the Long-Term Care Crisis** reports on the challenges rural communities face providing long-term care: nursing homes struggle to recruit and retain skilled workers, home care workers fight for dignity and fair pay, county-owned nursing homes face immense financial and political pressure to privatize. As the cohort of Baby Boomers moves further into retirement and closer to needing long-term care options, the loss of affordable publicly owned nursing homes will exacerbate a looming social and economic disaster.

## Newsroom Collaborations

The challenges facing local news and journalism in rural America are myriad and daunting. But there are bright spots—news outlets doing on-the-ground gumshoe reporting from places that have been overlooked by mainstream and traditional media. It’s more important than ever to bring these local and state-wide stories to a national audience. We’ve made collaborations part of our mission at *Barn Raiser*.

One way we have done this is by forging alliances with local and regional outlets to increase our reach in rural communities and to build our network of rural journalists. To that end, *Barn Raiser* has re-published and promoted articles from *Investigate Midwest*, *Wisconsin Watch*, *Harvest Public Media*, *Mississippi River Basin Ag and Water Desk*, *Flatwater Free Press*, *Montana Free Press*, *Flathead Beacon*, *High Country News*, *Grist* and *Sierra Nevada Ally*.



**“As Rural Hospitals Disappear, Air Ambulances Struggle to Fill the Gap”** resulted from a partnership between *Barn Raiser* reporter Meagan Day, the Economic Hardship Reporting Project and *Arizona Luminaria*, a state-based, community-funded news outlet. Meagan reported on how air ambulances—often run by private equity companies—are struggling to fill the gaps in critical infrastructure as rural hospitals disappear. Yet, the high cost of air ambulance service means that some people forgo air ambulance services because they do not want to go into debt.

**“Will Biden’s Historic Proposal Address the Crisis in Rural Nursing Homes?”** by Pulitzer Prize finalist Stephen Franklin examines how federal staffing minimums proposed by the Biden administration will affect rural nursing homes around the country. The nursing home industry opposes the first-ever staffing minimums but advocates say the proposed rules do not go far enough.

This story, featured in the Rural News Network series, *Falling Short: Rebuilding Elderly Care in Rural America*, included on-the-ground reporting from Rural News Network members

*The Maine Monitor*, *Carolina Public Press*, *Door County (Wis.) Knock* and *Mississippi Today*. Data analysis assistance for this *Barn Raiser* story was provided by *USA Today* and Big Local News at Stanford University. Support from The National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM) Foundation made the project possible. This story was also the first of a three-part Special Report on long-term care Rural Communities Respond to the Long-Term Care Crisis.





## The 15 Most-Read Stories April 2023 – March 2024

1. **What Liberal Elites Don't Know About Rural Americans Can Hurt Us**  
by Wendell Berry
2. **Lawn Fertilizer Bans Not Solving Manatee Crisis in Florida's Indian River Lagoon**  
by Emily Shepherd
3. **What *New York Times* Columnist Paul Krugman Gets Wrong About Rural America**  
by Wendell Berry
4. **This Teachers Union Leader Wants to Turn Rural Schools Into Community Hubs**  
by Joel Bleifuss & Justin Perkins
5. **Why the Health of Rural Communities Depends on Universal Broadband**  
by James Anderson

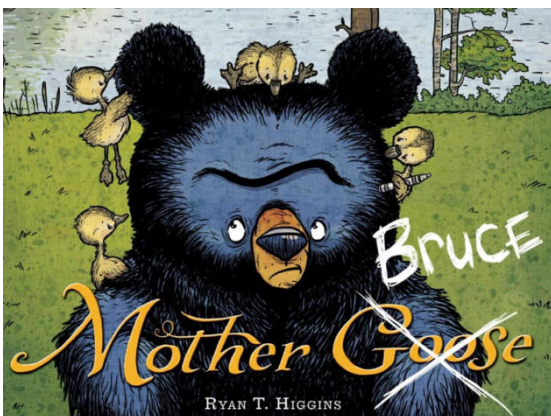
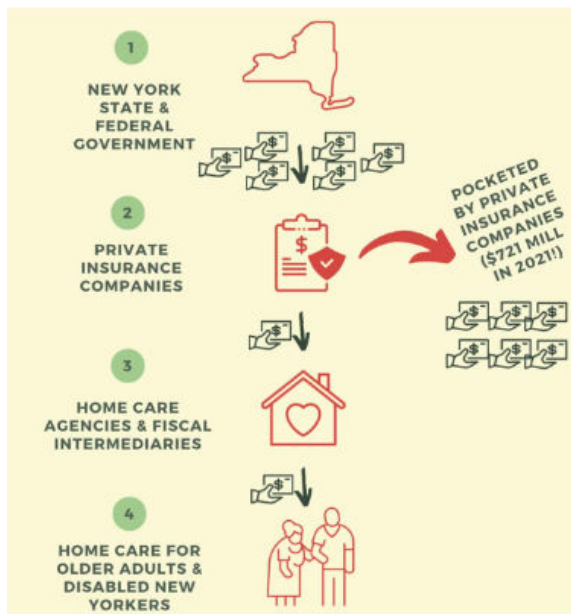


6. **Empowering Rural Co-ops with Renewable Energy**  
by Kristi Eaton
7. **Data Shows Rural America is More Diverse Than We Think**  
by Bryce Oates
8. **Native Communities Fight Oil Pipeline in Wisconsin and Michigan**  
by Perceval Calderwood
9. **The Appalachian Carpenter Organizing for Equitable Housing**  
by Justin Perkins & Joel Bleifuss
10. **This Montana Rancher Has a Beef with Corporate Meat Monopolies**  
by Justin Perkins & Joel Bleifuss





11. Could Raw Milk Reinvent the Future of Dairy? by Abby Rockefeller
12. Tribes Call on NASA to Halt Desecration of the Moon by Stephanie Woodard
13. When Moms for Liberty Cancelled a School Librarian's Mother's Day Lesson, Concerned Parents Fought Back by Joel Bleifuss
14. Taking Stock of Rural America's 'Hidden' Homeless' by Kristi Eaton
15. New York State Legislators Take Historic Stand Against Privatization of Home Health Care by Michael Solow



## Letter from the CEO

Dear Reader,

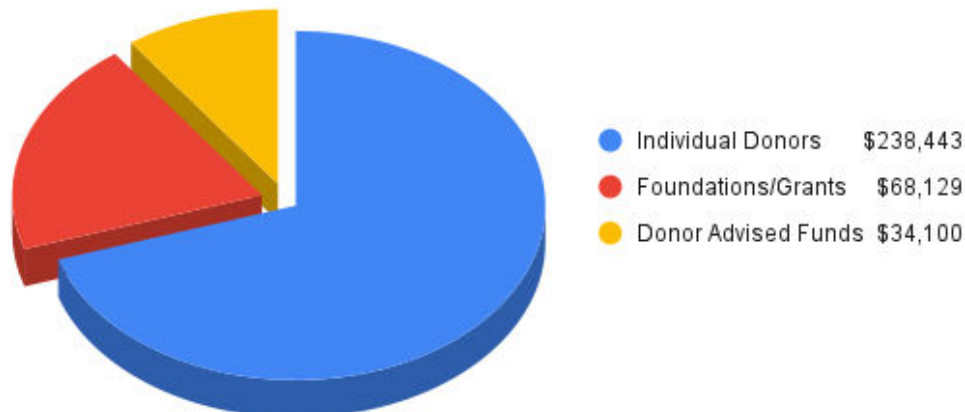
As *Barn Raiser* closes its second fiscal year we're proud to report our financial picture is strong and our engaged audience growth is exceeding our projections. Below is a recap of our key indicators as well as a snapshot of where we plan to go in our third fiscal year.

**Our diversified income stream:** Barn Raising Media raised \$399,140 in our second year, with three large donors contributing \$215,000, four foundations \$68,129, seven donor advised funds \$34,100, and 225 individual donors who contributed a total of \$23,443.

In November and December 2023, we participated in our first NewsMatch, a matching fund program sponsored by the Institute for Nonprofit News, of which *Barn Raiser* is a member. We raised a total of \$51,587 through the challenge, with our readers contributing \$18,858 in Q4 and the Miami Foundation and LoudHound matching those gifts with \$32,629.

Building our individual donor base has been one of our main objectives since we launched, and we exceeded our goals both with the number of individual donors and the dollars generated.

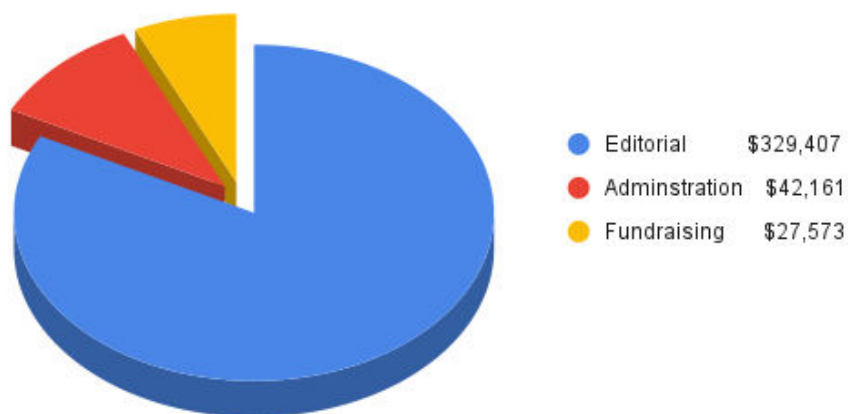
April 2023 to March 2024 Income



**Our expenses are tightly managed:** Our fiscal year began with carry-over cash of \$97,789 and we spent \$399,140 during the year. Our largest expense is Editorial, including the salaries for our two full-time editors, payment for our freelance writers and audience development support. Our CEO, yours truly, is part time and she splits time between program/audience development, administrative, and fundraising support, with help in the year from Page Consulting which provided guidance on grant writing and foundation outreach.



### April 2023 to March 2024 Expense



**Our audience is growing and highly engaged:** Since our launch in December 2022, we’ve built an audience both on our website and on our email newsletter list.

- Website: Barnraisingmedia.com averages over 20,000 monthly visitors. Our engaged readers spend an average of two minutes per visit on our site.
- Email Newsletter: From April 2023 to March 2024, *Barn Raiser*’s email newsletter list grew from 674 to 3,163 active subscribers. (As of July 2024, our list now exceeds 4,200 active subscribers.) Our newsletter open rate averages over 45% and our click through rate runs between 10% and 15%. These are extremely high compared to industry averages and reflect our readers’ high level of engagement.
- Donor Base: Nearly 10% of our email subscribers have become donors, with nearly half of them signing up to give recurring donations.
- Additional Reach: *Barn Raiser* content is now being syndicated on Smart News, Apple News, NewsBreak App, and others. This additional reach is significant, and in some months exceeded Barnraisingmedia.com’s direct traffic.

**Looking forward:** Our strategic plan for our April 2024-March 2025 fiscal year calls for a 10% increase in our income and 5% increase in expenses. Budget increases are planned for targeted marketing campaigns with the goal of growing our email list with engaged readers some of whom will become engaged donors.

As *Barn Raiser* grows as an organization, it is our readership that will form the foundation of the following three streams of sustainable revenue:

- Donor income from those *Barn Raiser* readers whose philanthropic contributions support our mission.
- Earned income from readers whose purchase of *Barn Raiser* postcards, calendars, seed caps (baseball caps) and print editions, which are currently in development.
- Institutional support from foundations, which require *Barn Raiser* demonstrate its impact, that it has reached an audience and thereby is fulfilling its journalistic mission “convene a space where big ideas and bold questions enliven local connections, where daring

criticism, rational debate and compassionate care will renew the social imagination to build common ground, encourage democratic participation and inspire change.”

Thank you for providing the support that enables *Barn Raiser* to pursue that mission. We couldn't do this without you.



Anne Mollo-Christensen  
Chief Executive Officer  
Barn Raising Media

“ I find the rural focus and populist approach of *Barn Raiser* to be a breath of fresh air. It is a much-needed space in an otherwise bought-and-paid-for media landscape.

—Mario Machado

## Individual Barn Raisers

Anonymous	Edoardo Bellando	Doreen and William	Ellen Duff
Cynthia Aguilar	Lon Berg	Cary	Curtis Duffield
Ron Alexander	Chris Bleifuss	Laurie Cavender	Edward Duhaime
Theresa Alt and	Meredith Bleifuss	Michelle Chavez	Joseph Dumas
Wayles Browne	Patti Bleifuss	Brian Cluer	Paul Engleman
Stuart Ambler	Maria Nieves	Carolyn Coglianese	Neil Fagerhaugh
Frank Andersen	Bolanos	Ira Cohen	MaryAnna Feitler
Jamie Anderson	Chris Bolgiano	Marge Cohen and	Charles Feldman
James Aronson	Joseph Boyle	Gordon Schiff	Shawn Finlinson
Sue Atkinson	Margaret Brewster	J. Patricia Connolly	Robert Fireovid
Steve Babson	Joanne Browne	Louise Cort	Cindy Fountain
Paul Baicich	Amrita Burdick	Cami Crane	Susan A. Fox
James Baldwin	Elissa Burke	Ronnie Crocker	Susan Garteiz and
K.A. Balthrop-	Michael Burns	Richard Davis	Matthew Shapiro
Lewis	Richard Butz	Daniel Dean	Kevin George
Paul Beach	Carolyn Byerly	Bernardine Dohrn	Douglas Giles
Tammy and Ted	Babara Carney	and Bill Ayers	Lawrence Gilley
Becker		Brian Drake	Marci Gittleman



Norbert Goldfield	Sherry Kempf and	Matthew Moehr	Gladys Miller
Martha Goldin	Ethan Bleifuss	George Ashley	Rosenstein
Leonard Goodman	Ellen Keneshea	Moretz	Neal Rosenstein
Neva Goodwin	Wendy Kennan	Mary Margaret	Margaret Rung and
Suzanne Gordon and	Al Kenneke	Morris	Andres Virkus
Steve Early	Roger Kerson	Mike Morton	Jay Schaffner
H. Candace Gorman	Samantha Kooney-	Amy Morton and	Laura Schauland
David Grandgeorge	Collins and Dan	Rob Milburn	Ole Schenk
Gary Green	Collins	Luann Mostello and	Abby Scher
Heather Greenwood	Walt Kosty	Arthur	Beverly
Nina Gregg and	Bruce Kraig	Milholland	Schmidkunz
Doug Gamble	Lorenzo Kristov	Mary Mulari	Boido
Paul Gregor	Nancy E. Krody	Robert Mulqueen	Frank Schneider
Janet Gregor	Daniel Kuruna	Nancy Fleck Myers	T.M. Scruggs
Douglas Gregor	Brooks Lamb	Sara Nelson	Kathy Shimata
Paul Gross	Rob Latousek	Robert Nixon	James Smith
Alexandra Gruskos	Kate Laughlin	Elizabeth Novak	Elizabeth Smith
Bruce Hamilton	Elly Leary	Jane Oitzinger	Michael Solow
Jenny Hammer	Eric Lessinger	Laura Orlando	Emily St. James
Patricia Handlin and	Sandra Lewis	Paul Orlando	Lauren Steiner
Flint Taylor	Kyle Lindh	David Orr	Judith Stetson
James Harkin	Jillian Linster	Adelaide Park	Chris Stidley and Ed
Bart Harloe	Anthony Litwinko	Gomer	Bedrick
Jay Harris	Rochelle Lodder	Rick Perlstein	Susan Streitz and
Fred and Marjorie	Otis Maclay	Michael Peshkin	Mike Zlonis
Harrison	Alex Madonik	Richard Peterson	Mary Summers
Kimberly Harrod	Oriana Magnera	Maxine Phillips	Kris Surbaugh
Emily Harting	Patrick Maier	Bob Scott Placier	David Howe Sweet
William Heinrich	Diana Markel	Maria Plaxco	Warren Taylor
Jeanne Heuser	Peter Martinazzi	Kim Pohl	Regi Teasley
James P. Higgins	Calvin P. Martindale	Blanca Poteat	Steve Thomas
Jayne Hileman	Donna Martinson	Dale Preston	Dian Thomas
Sidney Hollander	Maureen McCarron	Stub Primm	Charlotte Thomas
Mark Hoose	Lance McCold	Philip Prince	Amy Thornton
David Howe	Matthew McKinnon	Gordon Quinn	Erwin Ting
Polly Howells	John McLees	Michael Reed	Paul Tippery
Steve Hudson	Birgitta Meade	Kimberly Roberts	Cynthia Towne
Dan Hyslop	Tim Melin	Rita Roberts	Bob Trevail
Richard Irvine	Maria Mendes	Conrad Robinson	Bethene Trexel
Rebeca Itzkowich	Janet and Richard	Abby Rockefeller	Michael Ugarte
and John Ireland	Metcalf	Gregory Rodd	Susan Weltman
Celeste Januszewski	Sonia Mikolic	Joel Rogers	Laurie Wermter
and Dan Miller	Torreira	Ken Rolling	Linda Werner
Harvey Johnson	Keith A. Miller	Richard	Jon Williams
Sarah Kaplan and	Don Mills	Rosengarten	Tracey Wilson
Leon Steinberg	Dana Miranda		

## Institutional Barn Raisers

Arts Midwest  
Miami Foundation  
Loud Hound

Park Foundation  
Peggy Meyerhoff Pearlstone Foundation  
Puffin Foundation

## Barn Raiser Staff



**Joel Bleifuss** is *Barn Raiser* Editor & Publisher and Board President of Barn Raising Media Inc. He got his start in journalism in 1983 as a feature writer and photographer for his Missouri hometown daily, the *Fulton Sun*. Bleifuss joined the staff of *In These Times* magazine in October 1986, stepping down as Editor & Publisher in April 2022, to join his fellow barn raisers in getting *Barn Raiser* off the ground.



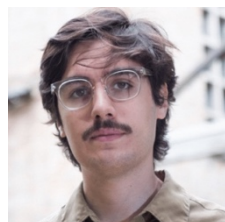
**Anne Mollo-Christensen** is the Chief Executive Officer and Ex-officio Board Member of Barn Raising Media Inc. Anne was most recently Executive Vice President and Chief Digital and Strategy Officer at Outside Integrated Media, home of *Outside* magazine, Outside Online and the Outside Podcast.



**Justin Perkins** is *Barn Raiser* Deputy Editor & Publisher and Board Clerk of Barn Raising Media Inc. The son of a hog farmer, he got his start as a writer with his Nebraska hometown newspaper the *Papillion Times*. He has contributed reporting for Rural America In These Times and *In These Times* which led him to recognize not only the widespread decline of local, independent journalism across rural America but the promise of rural communities uniting together for the common good.



**Laura Orlando** is *Barn Raiser* Contributing Editor and Board Treasurer of Barn Raising Media Inc. She is the Senior Science Advisor at Just Zero, Adjunct Professor of Environmental Health at the Boston University School of Public Health and a co-founder of the Ecological Health Network. Laura grew up on her family's farm near Benton Harbor, Mich. Her expertise in ecological restoration, environmental systems and sustainable agriculture will deeply inform *Barn Raiser*'s editorial mission.



**Paco Alvarez** is *Barn Raiser* Assistant Editor. Previously, he was the Don and Doris Shaffer Research Fellow at Type Investigations and a staff writer for the immigration newsletter *Migratory Notes*, and a Fall 2020 Civic Reporting Fellow for City Bureau, where he covered the 2020 elections and political participation in immigrant communities.





**Lydia Moran** is the guest editor of *Barn Raiser*'s Reimagining Rural Cartography series. She is a former lead editor at *Minnesota Women's Press*, the oldest continuously-published feminist print publication in the country. Lydia grew up in the Minneapolis area and is an avid backpacker, dabbles in film photography, and freelance writes about music for Minnesota Public Radio and others.



**Bryce Oates** is *Barn Raiser* Contributing Editor (Rural Community Organizing) and writes *The Cocklebur* on Substack. Bryce studies how the federal budget affects rural counties, farm and food policy, public lands and conservation issues, climate change, economic inequality, rural demographic data and rural politics. A former farmer, rural economic developer and community organizer, he lives and works in Oregon's Willamette Valley.



**Kristi Eaton** is a freelance journalist in Oklahoma and writes the Rural Dispatches column for *Barn Raiser*. She formerly reported for the AP in Oklahoma and South Dakota. She covers social justice issues, gender, travel and more, with a focus on solutions-based stories. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and elsewhere. Visit her website at [KristiEaton.com](http://KristiEaton.com) or follow her on Twitter @KristiEaton.

“ The tradition of barn raising rises organically from America's core community value: The Common Good.

That's the fertile ground that *Barn Raiser* constantly covers, uniquely focusing on the good, bad, ugly... and especially on the uplifting BEAUTY of the vast America that national media and politicians rarely visit ... or consider.

This scrappy publication is not only by, for, and about grassroots country people, but especially useful for urbanites who frequently ask, 'What's gone wrong in rural America?' *Barn Raiser* answers that with blunt-force reporting on corporate and governmental plundering of isolated communities 'out there.' But most usefully, it tells urban readers about the gutsy progressive movement that is literally on the move, even in the most unlikely rural zip codes. By raising hell and raising hope, *Barn Raiser* shows why rural and urban must unite to forge a progressive future for all.”

—Jim Hightower



# THANK YOU

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