Crow River Chapter Providing Hard Work, Expertise for Governor's Garden

By Mary Jane Miller

Last year, as his Eagle Scout project, my son, Mark Johnson (below, with Gov. Mark Dayton), installed a small vegetable garden for the chef at the Minnesota Governor's Residence at 1006 Summit Ave in St. Paul. It was funded by the SFA Crow River Chapter; members donated soil, plants and expertise, as well as the labor to maintain the raised beds.

Here's how it came to be.

One of my consulting clients offered my chef services at the residence for a charitable event. It went well, and I had the honor of occasionally stepping in as guest chef from then on. When an open seat came up on the Governor’s Residence Council, I was appointed by Tim Pawlenty, and Gov. Dayton recently renewed my appointment for a second term. The council was created to oversee the care of the property.

The residence chef, the property manager (Amanda Simpson, below right with Mark) and I became good friends (most important things in life happen in the kitchen, right?) and often talked about how handy a little garden would be. Mark needed a project, and I knew this would be good for SFA as well.
Because this started as an Eagle Scout project, it needed to benefit the public in some way. We used the vegetable garden as a way to show and teach visitors touring the grounds and the governor's guests how easy and attractive a veggie patch can be. We shared that not only is it pretty and the food delicious, but easy access to garden-fresh produce has a positive impact on general health.

The little raised beds were very productive. The chef put up pickles, froze beans and tomatoes, and served lots of pretty salads. The governor found the garden an easy topic to talk about at state dinners. Green beans are pretty good at bridging political gaps.

The gardener at the residence had a new baby last summer and made an effort to garden as organically as possible. She welcomed SFA's advice on how to achieve that in such an important public space.

This year, we have been asked to expand the garden, and our chapter heartily accepted. The size of the garden will more than double. We are also writing a few paragraphs about the garden for inclusion in the property's brochure and website. SFA is also providing volunteer docents to be on hand during the summer tours to spread the good word about growing and eating fresh local food.

We will be working on the new space in the next few weeks. The residence is open for free public tours six times throughout the summer. Stop by and see what we’ve been up to.

Locally Raised Meat Survey for Northern Minnesota Now Online

SFA and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture are working on a project to expand availability of locally raised meat and poultry in Minnesota, particularly in the northern part of the state.

Please take a few moments to answer this consumer interest survey if you live in northern Minnesota – and if not, please circulate to any friends, family or colleagues who are northern Minnesota residents. For the purposes of this study and survey, "northern Minnesota" is essentially considered as north of Hwy 210 on a line from Fergus Falls to Wadena, Brainerd and finally Duluth.

To take the survey, click here. These survey results will help us understand consumer interest and preferences for purchasing locally raised meat and poultry in Northern Minnesota.

Also, complete the survey and be entered into a drawing for great prizes. Three copies of the Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook and two SFA caps will be given away to survey respondents. Thanks for helping us take the crucial first steps in solving a problem facing the sustainable ag community.

Executive Director's

Chapter Update: Lake Superior

By Jamie Zak

The Lake Superior Chapter's annual meeting was held January 21 at Peace Church in Duluth. About 80 gathered to enjoy great food, great speakers, and great company. Two workshops were held concurrently before lunch: a Midwest BioAg session on interpreting soil tests and...
using organic soil amendments, and a Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture workshop about making local food accessible across the income spectrum. Gary Zimmer of Midwest BioAg delivered our keynote speech. Gary, an enthused and animated speaker, shared how we can grow nutrient rich, clean, high yielding crops sustainably. (excerpt from Spring 2012 Farm and Market News, written by board member, Kelly Smith).

Our annual spring fundraiser and community event, Farmers Take the Stage, was held at the Amazing Grace café in Duluth's Canal Park on March 23. Over a dozen acts showcasing poetry, a wide-array of musical talent, and skits were performed. Those in attendance had the opportunity to participate in a square dance lead by master of ceremonies, Terrence Smith of the Tamarack Dance Association. All left at the end of the evening feeling boosted-up and ready for the growing season ahead.

On March 25 we gathered for a board retreat at Joel Rosen’s home. We spent an extended afternoon on strategic planning, defining our goals and outcomes for the upcoming year. We determined the need to form a “Farmer Resource” committee devoted to developing and bringing to fruition more resources for our membership. Joel heated up the leftovers from Farmers Take the Stove, Fall 2011, and others brought goodies to add to the table. We left full and ready to take initiative!

We are currently in collaboration with the Good Food Network (GFN), a conglomeration of organizations in the NE Minnesota and NW Wisconsin area working on our local food system. GFN is getting corporations in the Duluth area to have a stake in sourcing from local growers, developing a local food hub, and creating more access for more people.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Thanks to Heavy Table photographer Crystal Liepa, we have a stockpile of awesome photos from our 2012 Annual Conference, held Feb 18 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph. Look for a new photo in each SFA Connect, and read Heavy Table writer Tricia Cornell's story about the conference here.

SFA Work

Minnesota Dairy Initiative
The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is working on creating opportunities for beef and dairy producers to graze Wildlife Management Areas. Information: 651-259-5014. Kent Solberg, MDI Coordinator

Meat Processing
Our meat processing survey is now live. Anyone living in northern Minnesota can benefit from this project, and the first step is gathering your feedback. Help us expand access to local meat and poultry in our state. Take the survey here.

Farm Transitions
Our Browerville and Clearwater workshops are behind us. Next stop: Northfield. There’s already been plenty of interest in a Northfield workshop, so we’ll keep you posted when there’s an official date and site set. Meanwhile, visit our Farm Transitions homepage.

The Farm Transitions project is in conjunction with Renewing the Countryside.

Public Policy
Are you interested in state and federal ag policy? Offer your feedback by taking our Public Policy Survey. It will take about 10 minutes, and will really
Through several greenhouse projects, the Clean Energy Resource Teams have had the pleasure of working with people passionate about incorporating energy efficiency and renewable energy into their operations, ranging from local commercial endeavors to school projects. There are several case studies in the project, including one with SFA member Dallas Flynn (right) and another with SFA Annual Conference presenter Philip Rutter of Badgersett Farms.

Also from CERT, the Rural Minnesota Solar Initiative is a resource to help farmers and small business owners learn more about how solar can work for them, and provide the needed assistance to catalyze projects. A case study involving Flynn's farm is also available within this study.

To learn more, visit the homepages for the greenhouse study and the solar energy study.

Central Chapter of SFA Plans Plant Swap, Birding Event

Save the date: April 28 is the Sky Dance Plant Swap. The SFA Central Chapter present a 100 Orchards project – from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., enjoy a regional plant swap with an evening birding event at Green Island in Wadena. Events include: barter and exchange plants and plant materials of every kind, witness the woodcock's sky dance, free workshops and a book reading.

Green Island is at 850 Scheer Dr NE (off Highway 71) in Wadena. For more information, call 218-631-3084 or email rscheer@charter.net.

Plant Trees at Gardens of Eagan Crop Mob Event

Gardens of Eagan is planting shelter belts – banks of trees protecting the farm from wind, providing habitat for wildlife and helping to limit erosion – and is seeking help. This is a big job for a small farm crew, and without community support these trees couldn't be planted. Training will be provided, no experience is required, and lunch is included.

The event is from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 28; exact location to be determined but will be in the Farmington/Northfield area. Information: https://www.facebook.com/events/163822553740579/ or contact libby@gardensofeagan.com or 612.867.0854.

Spring Soil Fertility Management and Plant Transplanting Workshop

What should you add to your soil to help ensure a successful crop? The Permaculture Research Institute will decipher a soil test and discuss spring soil fertility management options in a hands-on workshop at 9 a.m. April 28 at the Cornercopia Student Organic Farm, Dudley Ave and Field Rd N, St. Paul We will also demonstrate various ways of incorporating amendments into the soil. Price is $25. Information: www.pricoldclimate.org.

Grow! Group Hosting Plow Day Event

Grow! Twin Cities invites you to join in on a wonderful day full of old-fashioned horse plowing, educational workshops, plant sales, and tasty food from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. April 28. Workshops include Compost: From Garbage to Garden Green, presented by Russ Henry/Giving Tree Gardens; Small but Mighty: Growing Pea Shoots and Microgreens, presented by Bossy Acres; and Mushroom Log Cultivation in 30 Minutes, presented by Cherry Tree House Mushrooms.

Also, Grassroot Growers and Cook Water Farms will be available for sales, questions, and
gardening advice; Foxy Falafel will serve organic food starting at 11 a.m.; and beautiful and powerful Percheron horses will plow, disc, and drag the fields to prepare for spring planting. Tickets and more info: [http://growtwinitiesplowday.eventbrite.com/](http://growtwinitiesplowday.eventbrite.com/) or contact Mark Friederichs at 763.591.1642 or sellersusa@comcast.net.

Join Minnesota Organic Network for Local Organic Ag Updates

The Minnesota Organic Network connects people who want to share information about organic agriculture, kick around ideas, ask each other questions, and work together on projects. It includes farmers, researchers, extension people, and nonprofit organization representatives, along with people from public agencies who also work in organic agriculture. Subscribe by emailing Meg Moynihan at meg.moynihan@state.mn.us or click [here](mailto:meg.moynihan@state.mn.us).

U. of M. Extension Hiring Executive Director for Brainerd Office

The University of Minnesota Extension is hiring an Executive Director for its Central Office of Regional Sustainable Development Partnership in Brainerd. Candidates must have an understanding of university-based research, education, and outreach processes; a basic knowledge of agriculture, natural resources, tourism and/or sustainable development; an ability to lead a process of shared decision-making between local citizens and University faculty; and community engagement skills that build partnerships. See the job posting [here](mailto:here).

Minnesota DNR Stream Habitat Program Hosting Workshops

Registration is open to farmers, landowners and other citizens for the following two Minnesota DNR Stream Habitat Program workshops:

- **The Science of Healthy Waters, The Dam Dilemma:** Designed for anyone involved in watershed issues including water quality (rivers, lakes, wetlands), aquatic and terrestrial habitat, land use, wetlands, and flooding. This workshop will unpack the science and implications involving dams in terms of: effects on connectivity, hydrology, geomorphology, water quality, and aquatic habitat; societal and ecological implications of these structures; and the challenges, benefits and design approaches of dam removal, dam modification, and by-pass fishways. Class is May 21-23 in Fergus Falls. Cost is $300.

- **The Science of Healthy Waters, The Ditching Dilemma:** This workshop unpacks the science and implications of ditching in terms of: effects on hydrology, geomorphology, water quality, and aquatic habitat; societal and ecological implications of these practices; and alternative design concepts and approaches that work towards accomplishing sustainable agricultural goals while improving water quality and restoring channel stability and ecological health. Class is July 16-18 in Fergus Falls. Cost is $300.


Driftwatch Registry Now Available to Certified Organic Growers

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture is making the Driftwatch sensitive crops registry available to certified organic growers in the state in an effort to reduce the risk of crop damage from pesticides and fertilizers that are applied nearby.

This new, voluntary program is offered by the MDA through a partnership with Purdue University. Farmers can identify the locations of their certified organic fields and pastures using Google Maps. Commercial fertilizer and pesticide applicators can then check the
The registry is available to growers and applicators at [www.driftwatch.org](http://www.driftwatch.org). In addition, the MDA offers metal “Organic Farm – Please Do Not Spray” signs. Click [here](http://www.driftwatch.org) to learn more.

### Join Sen. Franken's Staff for Farm Bill Discussion

As the U.S. Senate begins debate the 2012 Farm Bill, members of Senator Al Franken's staff will hold a Farm Bill Nutrition Listening Tour across the Twin Cities to update those concerned about nutrition programs, public health, school nutrition and hunger programs on the status of the Farm Bill and to hear their concerns. Senator Franken will use the input he receives from these meetings during the upcoming Senate debate to ensure Minnesota’s interests are reflected in the bill.

The meetings will be led by Senator Franken’s Minnesota Agriculture Advisor, Al Juhnke. They are free and open to the public but your RSVP is requested at [rsvp@franken.senate.gov](mailto:rsvp@franken.senate.gov) or 651-221-1016. Meetings:

- 10 a.m. April 18, Friends in Need Food Shelf, 255 E 3rd St, St. Paul Park
- 4 p.m. April 18, Eagan Resource Center Pantry, 3904 Cedar Grove Pkwy, Eagan
- 3:30 p.m. April 19, Crossroads Elementary School, 543 Front Ave, St. Paul
- 10 a.m. April 20, The Farmstead Senior Living (use entrance facing round barn), 13742 Marigold St, Andover

### Seward Co-op to Host CSA Fair to Link Farmers, Buyers

Searching for the freshest local produce, dairy and meat produced by local farmers? Find it from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 21 at Seward Co-op’s Community-Supported Agriculture Fair. Meet farmers, learn about CSA options, and select a CSA share. This year’s fair will take place, rain or shine, in Seward Co-op’s parking lot, 2823 E Franklin Ave, Minneapolis. For more information and a list of participating farms, visit [www.seward.coop/CSA](http://www.seward.coop/CSA).

### Join Online Market for Sustainable Ag Buyers, Sellers

Have something to buy or sell? Post it to the "SustAgMarket" listserv. SustAgMarket was set up to handle buying and selling activity related to sustainable agriculture. For subscription information, [click here](http://www.seward.coop/CSA).

### High Tunnel Workshop Planned May 5 Near Winona

Winona County and University of Minnesota Extension will be holding a high tunnel construction workshop from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. May 5 near Winona that will be an opportunity for a hands-on experience of building a low-cost high tunnel for season extension. Get an overview of high tunnel construction with information and schematics for the construction of your own high tunnel. Demonstrations will include everything from pounding posts to bending hoops, the construction of end pieces, and installation of plastic film. Cost is $20/person and includes lunch. Pre-registration is required. Information: Clara Dux at [cdux@winona.co.mn.us](mailto:cdux@winona.co.mn.us) or 507-457-6574.

### Join Slow Food Minnesota for Spring Foraging Dinner

Slow Food Minnesota is hosting its 2012 spring foraging dinner May 20 at Hazelnut Valley Farm in Lake City. There will be tours and talks so guests can learn about foraging and what makes a healthy farm ecosystem, followed by a hearty and delicious dinner designed around foraged foods, with wine and beer included. Chefs are Greg Jaworski of Nosh Restaurant and Dan Patterson of Rabbit's bakery, both in Lake City. Tickets are $40 for members and $50
NCR-SARE Call for Professional Development Program Preproposals

The 2012 North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program's (NCR-SARE) Professional Development Call for Preproposals is now available. NCR-SARE provides funds for professional development projects that provide sustainable agriculture training to agricultural professionals and educators in the Cooperative Extension Service (CES), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), other governmental agencies, and educators in the profit and nonprofit sector serving the food and fiber system.

Projects can be up to three years in duration, and funding level is capped at $75,000 for each project, but projects requesting less than full amount are encouraged. Approximately $400,000 will be available for funding projects.

Any questions regarding the North Central SARE PDP program should be addressed to PDP Regional Coordinator, Dr. Rob Myers at 573-882-1547 or myersrob@missouri.edu. The deadline for preproposals is 4:30 p.m May 16.

Dinner on the Farm Sets 2012 Schedule of Events

Dinner on the Farm, a series of unique events designed to celebrate and support local farms, just released its schedule for summer 2012. The past three years of farm dinners have sold out so quickly they have added more events for this season, meaning more opportunities for people to leave the city and spend a lovely Sunday afternoon on a farm. Each dinner includes local food prepared by local chefs and paired with local beers and other beverages. Please click here to see the Season 4 schedule.

This year's farm schedule is full. If you would like to host a future Dinner on the Farm event or for more information, please contact Monica Walch Latz at dinneronthefarm@gmail.com.

Grants Up to $1,500 Available for Community Gardeners

Exciting news for Hennepin County gardeners and growers: Gardening Matters is administering a community garden mini-grant program in 2012, awarding five mini-grants for up to $1,500 each to help in establishing a community garden in one of the following eight cities identified by the Hennepin County Food Insecurity assessment: Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center, Crystal, Hopkins, Mound, New Hope, Osseo and Robbinsdale.

This program has a very short turnaround time for applicants – April 22nd is the deadline. Funding would be available May-September.

An information session is 7-8:30 p.m. April 4 at Brookdale Library, 6125 Shingle Creek Parkway, Brooklyn Center. The application, FAQ, and further details on this funding is available on the Gardening Matters website. For more information, contact Margaret Shields at 612-821-2358 or margaret.gardeningmatters@gmail.com.

Soil Basics Class Offered at Bachman's in Minneapolis

The Minnesota Project will be presenting a class, Soil Basics for Thriving Orchards and Gardens, at 6:30 p.m. April 17th at Bachman’s Heritage Room, 6010 Lyndale Ave S, Minneapolis. This class will be taught by Fred Rozumalski, an ecologist and landscape architect with the water resources division of Barr Engineering Company in Minneapolis. Soils are the first critical component of a successful orchard or garden. It's a deep subject, but understanding the basics of soil nutrition, aeration, drainage and the soil food web can go a long way in setting up for success. This 'how-to' course will have you walking away with exact steps for conditioning and maintaining healthy soil.
Scholarships for Transitioning and Recently Certified Organic Farmers

While transitioning to organic farming can present financial uncertainty for farmers, there’s a special program in Minnesota to help them accomplish their goals. The “Tools for Transition” program, led by the University of Minnesota (UMN), Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and other partners, provides farm business management scholarships of up to 90 percent to qualifying farmers.

"Tools for Transition" is aimed at helping clarify the cost and process of transitioning to organic. Minnesota field crop or dairy farmers who have any acres in transition or who have been certified fewer than three years are eligible to apply, and project leaders are eager to expand the program to more farmers this year.

Farmers in "Tools" work directly with a farm business management instructor on a personally designed program to help them understand and better manage their own cost of production, profitability, and other financial measures. UMN agricultural economists analyze the data to look for patterns and trends, while carefully protecting the privacy of all participants’ financial information.

Program participants get the chance to participate in special workshops and to receive a discount to attend the annual Minnesota Organic Conference. To learn more about the scholarships, call administrator Meg Moynihan at 651-201-6616.

Specialty Crop Growers: Apply for Business-Boosting Grants

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has received $700,000 in federal funding to help promote and enhance the specialty crop industry. Fruit, vegetable and other specialty crop farmers can apply for Specialty Crop Block Grants to help them compete in today’s marketplace. Grant projects may include outreach to increase consumers’ nutritional knowledge about specialty crops, assistance in the development of good agricultural practices, investment into specialty crop research, development of new and improved seed varieties, and pest and disease control.

MDA Marketing and Development Director Mary Hanks says growers of fruits, vegetables, culinary herbs and spices, medicinal plants, tree nuts, flowers, and nursery plants are eligible to apply. MDA will accept grant applications through April 20, 2012. A list of eligible and ineligible commodities can be found at www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp. A grant manual is available on the MDA website at www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx.

Questions regarding the grant program or the application process can be directed to David Weinand at 651-201-6646 or email David.Weinand@state.mn.us.

SFA Connect is your bi-weekly link to the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota

The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota is a chapter-based, statewide non-profit organization that supports the development and enhancement of sustainable farming systems through innovation, demonstration, education, and farmer-to-farmer networking. If you, your farm or organization has any upcoming events that you would like posted on the SFA Community Calendar, email info@sfa-mn.org.

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