When Farming Reality Doesn't Match the Business Plan

As we all know, there continues to be a strong interest in beginning farmer education as more and more people see the need for healthy local food and have the desire and energy to pursue a career helping to meet the growing demand for it.

If you know people who have started farming recently, and you ask them for specifics on how their farm is developing, many will indicate that the plans they had at the beginning have changed and, in some cases, changed substantially.

One of SFAs unique roles in farmer education is helping beginning farmers to acclimate to the farming community; helping them to network, connect with other farmers and consumers. We help farmers advance, broaden, and expand their reach into sustainability and profitability. One expansive way we'll be doing that soon is the Adjust 2015 Project, starting this fall.

Adjust 2015 is an exciting project, funded by the North Central Region of SARE which will ask farmers for their stories of how things changed for their business once they got started, particularly in the first 3-5 years.

One of the most exciting aspects of Adjust 2015 is the $20,000 of funding available to pay farmers to participate in this project. Watch this newsletter for information this fall about how you can participate!

Executive Director's Note

No doubt, many readers of this newsletter will be starting in the fields and greenhouses this week, if you haven't already. Here's wishing you all the health, safety and bounty available to you in 2012.

Please remember to be safe if you are moving equipment up and down the roadways this spring. Over the weekend, a neighbor of mine was moving a large piece of equipment down the road to start his spring tillage, and there were a number of impatient drivers behind him. Every time I see that, I'm concerned about safety.

Not everyone understands the difficulties of farming. Be safe, be patient, and think!

Renewing the Countryside Hosting Producer/Buyer Networking Event

Join Renewing the Countryside this Wednesday (April 4) from 10-2 p.m. at the Community Room in St. Charles City Hall for a food producer/buyer networking event. Presentations will

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include farmer-buyer relationships, practical and legal considerations of providing local foods, basic practices and options for aggregation and distribution. There will also be face-to-face networking where farmers can connect with buyers. The $10 fee will cover a locally sourced lunch.

Please register online: [http://gotlocal0404.eventbrite.com/](http://gotlocal0404.eventbrite.com/) – if the hyperlink doesn't work, please copy-paste the address into your browser.

This is a great opportunity for farmers to expand their direct markets and for food service providers to learn more about sourcing local foods, whether direct from farmers or from a traditional distributor. For more information, contact Sarah Wolbert at sarah@rtcinfo.org or 612-871-1541.

## Annual Conference Photo Feature

Thanks to [Heavy Table](http://www.heavyytable.com) 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](http://www.heavyytable.com/).

![Annual Conference Photo Feature](image)

## SFA Member Included in CERT Greenhouse, Solar Projects

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.

![SFA Member Included in CERT Greenhouse, Solar Projects](image)
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.

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.

A new addition to Dinner on the Farm is that part of the price of every ticket will support the hard work people are doing right here in our community. From investing in permanent fencing for a CSA that gives to local shelters to funding a backyard composting program in St. Paul, Dinner on the Farm is working to bring your dollars full circle. 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. And funding would be available May-September.

An information session is 7-8:30 p.m. April 4 at Brookdale Library, 6125 Shingle Creek Parkway, Northfield workshop, so we'll keep you posted when there's an official date and site set. Meanwhile, visit our Farm Transitions homepage.

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 help us determine the interest of our members and your thoughts about the future of SFA.
Call for Session, Workshop Proposals for 2013 Organic Conference

Keeping in mind that old adage about early birds and worms, the 2013 Minnesota Organic Conference is issuing its first call for breakout session and workshop proposals. To receive full consideration by the planning committee, submit proposals no later than April 15, 2012. The conference will be Jan. 11-12 in St. Cloud.

In your proposal, include the following: session title; duration (1 hour, 1.5 hour, 4 hour or full-day); audience level (beginner, intermediate or advanced); presenter name and affiliation or qualifications; brief description of the session; names of co-presenters; and email and phone contact information.

Fax your proposals to 651-201-6120 or email Meg Moynihan at meg.moynihan@state.mn.us.

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.

Cost is $20 and advance registration is required here or by contacting Fruits of the City via email (fruits@mnproject.org) or phone at 651-789-3321.

Half-Million Students Now in Farm to School Program

Schools serving over 558,000 students – more than 68 percent of the state’s K-12 student population – are now engaged in the Farm to School program, according to a pair of surveys released today by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and the Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA). Farm to School efforts make locally grown vegetables, fruits and other healthy choices an integral part of school meals while educating students about where their food comes from.

The surveys gathered feedback from school food service leaders and local farmers, and serve as a snapshot of Farm to School from both perspectives. Participation in Farm to School has risen from fewer than 20 districts in 2006 to 145 in 2011. IATP estimates that $1.3 million of Farm to School foods were purchased by Minnesota school districts last year alone.

Farmers cite their desire to educate children, increase access to locally grown food, build community relationships, and diversify their markets as key reasons for supporting Farm to School, according to Doug Peterson, president of the Minnesota Farmers Union.

A full list of participating schools is available at www.farm2schoolmn.org. Read more about IATP’s Farm to School and other local foods efforts at www.iatp.org.

Farming in Your Future? Attend 'Farm Dreams' Workshop

Is Farming in Your Future? Land Stewardship Project's "Farm Dreams" Workshop gives participants the opportunity to explore this question with an upcoming workshop from 1 to 5 p.m. April 15 at Eastside Food Coop, 2551 Central Ave NE, Minneapolis. This workshop is designed to help people who are seeking practical, common sense information on whether farming is the next step for them. In this workshop you will assess your resources, skills and motivations for
farming; plan your educational path toward farming; learn about regional training opportunities and support networks and prioritize your next steps.

The registration fee is $20 for Land Stewardship Project (LSP) members and $40 for non-members. Pre-registration is required. For more details or to register, contact Nick Olson at 320-269-2105 or nicko@landstewardshipproject.org.

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.

Local Food Resource Hubs Open to Minneapolis Residents

Minneapolis residents who want to learn how to grow their own food and those interested in low-cost seeds, seedlings, compost or classes can now become part of a neighborhood-based support network of urban gardeners and local food advocates. The Local Food Resource Hubs Network, an initiative from the City of Minneapolis, community partners and Gardening Matters, is designed to get Minneapolis residents and community gardeners the tools and education they need to grow, preserve, cook and compost their own fresh produce by offering supplies, classes and connections. Hubs benefit communities by connecting neighbors and have been established in four Minneapolis areas: north Minneapolis, south Minneapolis, Phillips and
Residents can join a hub and select the type of membership. Small garden memberships will receive 10 packets of seeds and 12 seedlings, medium garden memberships will receive 20 packets of seeds and 24 seedlings, and large garden memberships will receive 50 packs of seeds and 72 seedlings. Members can pick up packets of seeds and seedlings at their hub’s distribution event this spring. Seeds and plants will be distributed April 14 and May 19. More information about distribution events will be sent to members and be available at www.gardeningmatters.org.

Memberships are available on a first-come, first-served basis. To reserve a membership spot, residents can contact Gardening Matters at 612-821-2358, download the membership form (in English, Spanish, Hmong or Somali), or sign up at www.gardeningmatters.org/hubs.

Linden Hills Farmers Market Seeks Vendors for Upcoming Season

The new Linden Hills Farmers Market in Minneapolis still has some vendor spots open. The market, held 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sundays June 3-Oct. 28, will be held in the Settergren Ace Hardware parking lot, 2813 W 43rd St, Minneapolis.

Just down the street from the Linden Hills Co-op, the market will be set in a vibrant neighborhood where residents value and appreciate eating local food from local farmers and purveyors.

For more information, contact market manager Kate Ostheimer at 612.345.0946 or kate@lindenhillsmarket.org. Visit the market on Facebook at www.facebook.com/lindenhillsfarmersmarket.

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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