Social Media Onrush Begins: Send Us Your News & Photos!

By Jason Walker • jason@sfa-mn.org

SFA is a member organization, so everything we do is focused on helping our members in their commitment to farming sustainably. From our survey on locally raised meat in northern Minnesota to the Minnesota Dairy Initiative to our series of Farm Transitions workshops, we're advocating for a sustainable approach to agriculture while working to ensure our members' farms thrive.

Now, we're adding a new piece to the puzzle: social media. Through our Facebook and Twitter pages, SFA is starting to work hard to spread the good news about what we're doing and keep the sustainable conversation moving. It may sound strange, but using Facebook and Twitter can help us reach more people than most any other way – and it's free, to boot.

To really do this well, though, I need your help. Specifically, I'm asking for three things:

- **"Like" us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.**
- Keep me posted on what events your chapter is holding, whether it's a regular chapter meeting or special event like Saturday's Central Chapter plant swap in Wadena. By posting details about these events on our social media pages, we can help spread the word about SFA to thousands of people.
- If it's bold, it must be really important, right? **Send me your photos.** Whenever you attend an SFA or other sustainable ag event, take photos with your camera or smartphone. If you have a new baby calf, take a photo to share with the SFA community. Raise a funny-looking carrot? Cook up a delicious seasonal soup? Snap and send away!

That last point may sound funny, but the fact is that having a fun, accessible presence on Facebook and Twitter is going to help strengthen and build our organization. Members can keep track of what's happening, and we can build membership by spreading the good word to more and more people in Minnesota.

Plus, you never know what might show up here in SFA Connect. We could start a member photo feature, or run photos and details from your events.

The more awareness of SFA we can raise, the more we can promote sustainable agriculture. Let's have fun with this. Email me your photos and happenings ... and photos of your happenings!

Get in touch at jason@sfa-mn.org or 612.605.9269.
Local 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 Note

Not often do I get to do a movie review, but I just wanted to share with you my impressions of Deb Wallwork's new film Dirty Work: The Story of Elsie's Farm.

Dirty Work is a look into the workings and the heartbreak of a year in the life of Elsie’s Farm, a Ridgeland Wisconsin CSA farm.

In addition to showing the cycles of farming from planting, growing and harvest, Dirty Work does something that few other films in this genre do. It shows the heart that goes into small scale direct marketing as well as the heartbreak of how difficult it is to make a profitable business.

The film details the hard work that Don Roberts and Joni Cash do to keep Elsie’s Farm running, and the disappointing last day at the farmer's market, when they end up telling their customers the uncertainty surrounding next year's growing season. There are tears, hugs and lots of head-shaking.

I like this film, because it is realistic about the real difficulties surrounding small scale, sustainable agriculture. This is summed up nicely by Don at the end of the film when he says, "The challenge is to keep the bottom line, so that the ideals actually work... that the ideals can be sustainable."

Excerpts from Don's interview with Renewing the Countryside's Brett Olson on the "Local Food Hero" radio show are also included in the film, and those comments are key to understanding the changes Don and Joni made in order to keep farming (and Brett deserves a credit line, too).

Do we need more sustainable agriculture documentaries like Dirty Work? There sure have been lots of them, and yes, I do think we need more. We need to tell the stories of the work people are doing to attempt to make a living on the land, provide healthy food and build a community around growing good food. We also need to look for models of success and growth in the sustainable ag food production portion of the total food system. Dirty Work does a great job of describing some of the issues we are facing as a movement.

I think there is room for more films about what we can DO as a movement to improve, become more profitable, so that more folks can keep farming this way for many, many years to come.

Chapter Update: South Central

By Jill Louters

After over 20 years of serving the South Central chapter, longtime president Jim Tjepkema has retired from the board of directors. The membership would like to thank him for his leadership as board member and past president and his generous contributions and commitments to sustainable agriculture throughout southern Minnesota. Jim has a rich and longstanding...
dedication to maintaining soil and community health, and his devotion has been evident throughout his professional and volunteer careers.

A graduate of Purdue University, Jim focused his research study on the areas of entomology and nematology, working for the Rodale Institute in Pennsylvania and, following relocation to Minnesota, Agri-Growth Enterprises. He transitioned to crop consulting, working with farmers by encouraging alternative management practices.

Jim has been invested in providing educational opportunities for practicing and potential farmers. He embraces the SFA vision, encouraging the organization to continue to strengthen its outreach and partnership programs. “I have seen the organization become more centralized over the years, but want to encourage others to work for more activity and visibility to address the changes in agriculture,” Jim said.

Preservationist is a term that he uses to describe himself. As a member of SeedSavers of Decorah, Iowa, he encourages other to reflect on the agricultural genetic heritage that we are leaving for the next generation. Thank you Jim for your faithful service to sustainable agriculture.

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.

Join Minnesota Organic Network for Local 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.

U. of M. Extension Hiring Executive Director in Brainerd

The University of Minnesota Extension is hiring an Executive Director for its Central Office of 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, probably in June. 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 help us determine the interest of our members and your thoughts about

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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.

Organic Farm School 2012: Farming and Food Justice

Join the Women’s Environmental Institute for ten weeks of exciting lectures on organic food production and agriculture from environmental, social, and historical perspectives, connecting environmental justice with agriculture and food justice. Participants will also have the opportunity to develop practical skills in organic horticulture through hands-on workshops at the WEI alternative farm campus and farm field trips.

Held weekly from June 11 through Aug. 20, speakers include Atina Diffley of Gardens of Eagan, Prof. Bud Markhart of University of Minnesota School of Horticulture, Meg Moynihan of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin of the Rural Enterprise Center in Northfield.

Registration includes three Saturday field days. Classes start at 6 p.m. June 11th at the Midtown Global Market, 920 E Lake St, Minneapolis. Full class registration is $120; a drop-in class costs $20. Information: 651.583.0705 or register online at w-e-i.org.

Minneapolis Public Schools Fair to Link Farmers, Schools

Minneapolis Public Schools Culinary and Nutrition Services invites farmers to tour its Central Commissary and learn about plans for expanding the school district’s participation in Farm to School at 10 a.m. May 7.

Bertrand Weber, Director of Culinary and Nutrition Services for Minneapolis Public Schools, invites area farmers to learn more about product procurement needs for the Minneapolis School District. The Minneapolis Public School Culinary and Nutrition Services Center is located at 812 Plymouth Ave. in Minneapolis, just west of I-94.

Weber invites family farmers in the region who have capacity to sell to institutions. Products sought for the 2012-13 school year are fruits and vegetables, grains and ground beef. He has also invited distributors and processors to the first Farmer Fair to help bring new fresh and local farm products into the Minneapolis school system. He will encourage smaller producers to network with other growers to meet the district’s demand.

Iowa Group Seeking Candidate for Livestock Coordinator

Practical Farmers of Iowa is seeking a bright, motivated, and personable individual to join its staff as Livestock Coordinator. The selected person will work with Practical Farmers’ group of farmers who have beef, pork, poultry, sheep, goat and other livestock operations.

The deadline for applications is April 30. Please submit your resume, cover letter, and references. Both email and regular mail applications accepted.

Duties include: Organize and staff PFI’s grazing cluster events; arrange for dynamite farmer-led livestock programming at PFI conferences and workshops; lead PFI’s livestock-related on-farm research and demonstration projects, including facilitating project selection, working one on one with participating farmers, and writing research reports; and provide staff support where needed.

This is a full-time position at a family-friendly employer. The position includes full health care benefits, a flex plan, short- and long-term disability, life insurance, and generous paid time off. Please apply with resume, cover letter and references to: Teresa Opheim, Executive Director, Practical Farmers of Iowa 600 Fifth St, Suite 100, Ames, IA  50010 or teresa@practicalfarmers.org. Direct phone inquiries to Teresa at 515-232-5661.
Workshop Series on Mushrooms, Beekeeping, Chickens

Always want to raise chickens, start a hive, or add mushrooms to your homegrown meals? Then check out this Permaculture Research Institute workshop series of hands-on practicums that give participants real skills. The series includes: Mushroom Cultivation Basics, 9 a.m. May 5; Shiitake Log Cultivation, noon May 5; Urban BeeKeeping, 9 a.m. May 12; Urban Chickens, 9 a.m. May 19; and Using Pest Management Tools in the Garden Plot, 9 a.m. May 26.

To learn more, click here or email Emily@pricoldclimate.org.

Winona Co-op Seeking General Manager

Bluff Country Co-op, a 3,500 square-foot store staffed by 26 employees who help to generate about $2 million in annual sales, is seeking a General Manager to lead the co-op so that it achieves the vision determined by our Board of Directors. Qualifications include: knowledge of natural foods industry, understanding of the local and sustainable food movement, experience working with a Board of Directors and experience with policy governance.

Please send your cover letter addressing the qualifications above, a resume, and contact information for professional references to: gmsearch@bluff.coop, or mail it to GM Search, c/o Bluff Country Co-op, 121 W 2nd Street, Winona, MN, 55987.

Minnesota Food Association Hosting Open House, Plant Sale

Minnesota Food Association will host its annual spring open house and plant sale from noon to 4 p.m. May 12 at Big River Farms, in the Wilder Forest in Marine on St. Croix, Minn. MFA’s Big River Farms is a comprehensive production, distribution, training, and education program that trains new farmers, promotes local food systems, and practices sustainable, organic agriculture. Come meet the farmers, staff, and board, walk the fields, meet folks with similar interests, and enjoy a hayride. The event is a potluck, with some light food and beverage provided; please bring something to share if you can. Families and children are very welcome, and bring your friends. We will also have our plant sale, with many varieties of certified organic flower bedding plants and certified organic vegetable and herb bedding plants.

Information: Glen Hill, glenhill@mnfoodassociation.org.

Attend Free Screening, Discussion of Farm to School Doc

Attend a Free Screening & Discussion of Farm to School Documentary

Attend a special screening and discussion of "Farm to School: Growing Our Future." This 30-minute documentary provides an in-depth look at Farm to School Partnerships in Minnesota and how communities can work together to improve children’s health and education. Don’t miss this opportunity to come together as community leaders, schools, farmers, and parents to build healthy, sustainable communities. There will be seven regional screenings and discussions scheduled around Minnesota this spring.

To RSVP and for more information, click here.

USDA Seeks Applications for Farm to School Grant Program

The USDA released a Request for Applications (RFA) for a new farm to school grant program on April 17. The RFA is now posted on grants.gov and the USDA Farm to School website. There will be two types of grants available:

- Planning grants are intended primarily for K-12 school food authorities who participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program that are in the beginning phases of their farm to school efforts.
- Implementation grants are geared towards advancing existing farm to school initiatives. K-12
school food authorities who participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program, along with State and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, and non-profit entities working in partnership with school districts, may apply for implementation grants.

For more information, visit the USDA Farm to School website.

**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 bypass 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 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 database and take special care to avoid affecting the certified organic land.

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 to learn more.

**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.

**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 for non-members. Children 12 and under are free. Information and reservations: www.slowfoodmn.org/events.html.

NCR-SARE Call for Professional Development 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.

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
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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