Marie Petry Ready to Revitalize Lake Agassiz Chapter

By Jason Walker • Communications Coordinator

A new voice has stepped up to revitalize our Farmer-to-Farmer Network in northwestern Minnesota.

Marie Petry is the new chapter coordinator and state board representative for the Lake Agassiz chapter and is now working to get the chapter going again, including planning an event for this summer. Previously, folks in the Lake Agassiz area who wanted to get involved with SFA would often join either the Central or the Western chapter due to local inactivity – and the vastness of the region definitely constrained cohesiveness – but Petry is determined to build a chapter that works for the farmers in the Lake Agassiz region.

Marie lives with her husband, Bob, on a 20-acre farm east of Wolverine.

"Since purchasing this place in 2009, we've been transitioning to intensive grazing pastures raising Jersey cows, a couple hogs, butcher and layer chickens, and a few turkeys," she said. "There is a large garden, and developing orchard, and a high tunnel being added this year."

Petry's personal history includes being an Ag Loan Officer followed by home schooling her two children, Elizabeth and Karl. With the nest almost empty, Petry (right) said she was looking forward to focusing on the growing farm and networking with other sustainable farm families.

If you are in or near the Lake Agassiz region – which is essentially along U.S. 59 from Fergus Falls northward – and want to get involved with the burgeoning chapter, please contact Marie Petry at grass@wtc-mail.net or 218.995.2002.

Watch SFA Connect for when Petry and the Lake Agassiz chapter announce details regarding their summer event. And thanks, Marie, for helping strengthen our network.

Central Chapter Co-Sponsor of Upcoming Pruning Workshop

SFA's Central Chapter is co-sponsoring a Pruning Workshop from 6-8:30 p.m. April 18 at Central Lakes College Ag and Energy Center Field Office in Staples. Suitable for all experience levels, the workshop is the second in a series on orchard management in cold climates and is taught by experienced horticulturists and orchard managers.
Horticulturist Thaddeus McCamant with Central Lakes College will lead the workshop and discuss basic techniques of pruning and training of apple and plum trees. Participants will be then given the opportunity to prune live trees at the CLC Ag and Energy Center demonstration orchard, which includes multiple varieties of vigorous and low-vigor apples and plums.

Cost is $15 per person or $20 per farm/orchard, and preregistration is required. Send checks payable to “Green Island, Pruning Workshop” and mail to Green Island, 850 Sheer Dr NE, Wadena, MN, 56482. For more information, contact Kent Scheer at rscheer@charter.net or 218.631.3084 or Jim Chamberlin at jchamberlin@hugllc.com.

The workshop is co-sponsored by SFA Central Chapter, the CLC Ag and Energy Center, Green Island Preserve, The University of Minnesota Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, Happy Dancing Turtle of Pine River, CLC Specialty Crops Program, University of Minnesota Extension Service, Living Legacy Gardens, and Central Lakes College Horticulture and Farm Business Management.

Diverse Seedling and Plant Swap/Potluck Planned April 20

SFA's Central Chapter and Happy Dancing Turtle are co-sponsoring the 2nd Spring Plant Swap and potluck lunch from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 20 at Hunt Utilities Group Campus, 2331 Dancing Wind Rd SW, Pine River. A regional exchange for plant materials of every kind and in any viable form, this is a swap meet for plant materials of any kind: seeds, starts, cutting, seedlings, etc. The event is free and open to the public.

Last year at the inaugural event over 100 people brought such diverse items as horseradish, garlic, 3-foot potted evergreen seedlings, 4-foot ball cherry plants, wildflower seeds, currant cuttings, house plants, and more. This swap is located on the Happy Dancing Turtle campus at Pine River where you can spend the day exploring sustainable living alternatives between swaps and workshops.

The two workshops are: Non-native Invasive Terrestrial Plant Species, 10 a.m., led by Jim Etzel, free; Mushroom Cultivation, 1 p.m., led by Jim Chamberlin, $15 fee covers two take-home Shiitake or oyster logs. Please RSVP for workshops to Jim Chamberlin at jchamberlin@hugllc.com or 218.587.5001.

SFA-Related Events Planned in Central Minnesota

Several upcoming events in the Fergus Falls and Wadena areas include SFA members and will be relevant to many. The events:

Introduction to Cheesemaking (April 20), led by SFA members Sue Wika and Tom Prieve, owners of Paradox Farm, Ashby, Minn., and homestead cheesemakers. Both sessions are at Faith Haven Bible Camp, on Eagle Lake south of Battle Lake, Minn., and are limited to 10 people. Students can participate in the class as a demonstration, or they can bring the necessary supplies to make their own cheese. Students will learn the essential processes, techniques and ingredients involved in cheese-making to make a stretched curd/pasta filata and a brined cheese. We will make mozzarella and Greek-style feta. Cost: $50. Call 218.747.2202 or email paradoxhomestead@gmail.com for more information.

A “Pork on Pasture” Workshop will be held from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. April 27 at 18618 Co. Rd. 23, Verndale. As part of the M-State Sustainable Food Production program’s short course series, SFA members Kent and Linda Solberg will be sharing information on how they successfully raise pork on pasture. Presentation will include how hogs fit into their pasture rotation, fencing, feeding strategies, farrowing on pasture, marketing, castration, and managing sows and pigs overwinter. Cost: $50/person or $75/family; bring a sack lunch. Beverages provided. For more information, call 218.445.7580 or email sevenpinesfarmandfence@gmail.com.

Holistic Management of Goats Workshop is 10 a.m.-4 p.m. June 15. As part of the M State Sustainable Food Production program’s short course series, this day features a hands-on opportunity to learn about incorporating meat and milk goats into a farming operation. Topics: animal selection for a forage-based system; nutrition requirements; planned grazing; fencing; shelters, animal handling. Instructors are Sue Wika and Tom Prieve of Paradox Farm, a forage-based, permaculture farm featuring integrated livestock systems located at 11643 State Highway 78, Ashby, Minn. Cost: $50/person; $75/family. Bring a sack lunch. More information: paradoxhomestead@gmail.com or 218.747.2202.
State Wetland Restoration Funds Set Up to Help Farmers

The MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has approx. $5 million allocated for restoring drained and partially drained marginal fields (click here for more information). These grants are based on the following regional locations: west central, up to and including Norman and Mahnomen counties; central, up to southern Crow Wing and Aitkin; southwest, including parts of Le Sueur, Waseca, and Freeborn counties; and all of the metro counties.

If you prefer speaking directly to a person (instead of navigating the State agency website) call Beth Markhart at 651.203.6019 for a simple, straightforward explanation of what this program means for you and your land. Beth has over 20 years of experience with restoring wetlands and other natural resources in Minnesota. As BWSR has prioritized the restoration of "less-wet" wet prairies and meadows, Beth can discuss with you the feasibility of restoring these specific areas on your land for payment and also using them for mob grazing or other activities. Most importantly, this program does not require you to do the restoration yourself!

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer Crystal Liepa documented our SFA Annual Conference again in 2013 at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Watch for a new photo each issue of SFA Connect and learn more about Crystal at her website.

SFA Photo Contest Winners: Dan Fabian, Emmy Tolbert

Who doesn't want to win a free T-shirt, let alone a cool SFA one? Here's your chance. Send communications coordinator Jason Walker your photos, and the best each month, chosen by a panel of distinguished judges, gets an SFA T-shirt. What kind of photos are we seeking? Simply anything from your farm, family, garden or kitchen – anything that's related somehow to sustainable agriculture that you'd like to share with SFA members.

Send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org, and we'll include the winner in SFA Connect. Check out our Facebook page for all the photo submissions.

February's winner: Dan Fabian
March’s winner: Emmy Tolbert

U. of M. Extension to Host Urban Ag Expo

The 2013 Urban Agriculture Expo, an event is for those who currently have an urban farming enterprise, are considering starting one, are supporters of urban farming, or are just curious to learn more, will be held from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. April 20 at the Sabathani Community Center, 310 E 38th St, Minneapolis.

The Expo will include three different topic categories; growing topics, business topics, and people topics. The growing topics will include water management, unique growing systems, and soils management. The business topics will include record keeping skills and tips, understanding your cost of production, and assessing which market option is right for you. Lastly, people topics will include updates in local food policies, the Urban Agriculture Alliance, and engaging communities around you.
No preregistration is required for the event. There is suggested donation of $5 to attend. For information, visit www.misa.umn.edu and click on the ‘Urban Ag Expo’ pdf or contact Betsy Wieland, Agriculture Extension Educator, at 612-596-1175 or eliza003@umn.edu.

**WEI Hosting Series of Upcoming Sustainable Ag Events**

The Women's Environmental Institute is hosting the following upcoming events. To RSVP, visit www.w-e-i.org; For more information, contact Anika Walz at anika@w-e-i.org.

- **April 13, Planting Apple Trees**, WEI Farm Campus, North Branch, 8:30 a.m. – We will be planting 40 new apple trees with your assistance. Learn how to plant and to care for two year old apple trees. Resources shall be provided on organic orcharding. Work will start at 8:30 a.m. and continue till all the trees are planted.

- **April 14, Folk School: Bread Making**, WEI Farm Campus, North Branch, 1-5 p.m., $30 – Flour, salt, water, and yeast, magically combine to make a staple of many of our diets: bread! Learn about gluten, different types of flours, recipes and techniques for making breads. Then, on from theory to practical, you will, under the great tutelage of local baker Cecilia Coulter of Red Door Bakery, make your own pizza dough, pretzels, and sourdough.

- **April 21, Earth Day with Little Earth**, Little Earth Urban Farm, E 25 1/2 St & Ogema Pl, Minneapolis, noon-4 p.m. Come with your boots, gloves, and tools to help move compost and plant seedlings with the Little Earth of United Tribes at their Urban Farm in Minneapolis.

- **April 27, Prairie School: Spring Edibles & Medicinals**, WEI Farm Campus, North Branch & Wild River State Park, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., $25 – Eat your yard! In this first of the 2013 Prairie School Series, Retired Naturalist Dave Crawford will take students out to the prairies of Wild River State Park. You will learn about area native plants that are tasty, healthful, and healing and learn about early spring flora and fauna active on our local prairies.

**USDA Audit Prompts Organic Crop Insurance Program Shifts**

On Feb. 22, 2013, USDA's Office of Inspector General issued an audit of the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance program for organic farming practices. The audit found that Transitional yields* (T-Yield), offered to organic growers generally exceeded what they had produced using organic farming practices for the crop years of 2008-2010. In response to this audit, RMA plans to make several changes to their Federal crop insurance program for organic farming practices - including eliminating the 5 percent organic surcharge and changes to the T-Yields offered to organic producers beginning with crop year 2014. RMA is also working toward having organic prices in crop year 2014 or 2015 for almonds, apples, barley, blueberries, oats, pears, additional stonefruits, table grapes and wheat.

A transitional yield, in this instance, does not refer to the yields during the transition to certified organic production. For crop insurance purposes, a T-yield is an average yield for a county, determined by RMA in the collection of producer data, which may be used to substitute for low yields in a producer's yield history ('yield substitutions') or to ensure an overall minimum level of insurance coverage. The purpose of the T-Yield is to minimize the downward impact on insurance coverage that can occur after an unusually bad year, or series of years.

USDA Risk Management Agency has posted two documents concerning its response to the audit of organic crop insurance performance:

- **2103 Organic Crop Insurance Fact Sheet**
- **Organic Crop Insurance Audit and Next Steps Questions and Answers**

These documents can be found on the RMA "Current Issues/Organics” page. There is also a link from the RMA main page. Organic Producers should contact their approved insurance provider/Agent should they have any questions about the changes to Transitional yields and guarantees.

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*SFA Connect is your bi-weekly link to the Sustainable Farming Association*  
The Sustainable Farming Association 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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