It's a Sellout: Fall Farm Skills 101 Semester is Full, but Spring 2015 Semester Dates Already Announced

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

SFA's Farm Skills 101 is a popular, intensive skills-training course geared for the forage-based livestock farmer.

How do we know it's popular? The Fall 2014 semester is now completely full, two months before it begins.

But if you were still hoping to enroll in Farm Skills 101, or know somebody who was thinking about enrolling, fear not. Dates for the Spring 2015 semester of Farm Skills 101 have been set: April 17-18 and 24-25 as well as May 1-2. Registration is not yet open but should be soon once lodging options are nailed down; keep watching SFA Connect for updates.

Given the sold-out fall semester, Dr. Sue Wika, Sustainable Food Production Program educator, said she was happy that demand for the practical education contained in Farm Skills 101 continued to be so high. Other farmer-educators in the program include Tom Prieve, DVM; and Kent Solberg, SFA Livestock & Grazing Coordinator.

“We provide the intensive skills training and holistic philosophy that can help beginning farmers have a realistic and well-planned entry into the farming world, and that’s exciting,” Wika said. “Plus, our low student-teacher ratio ensures all students have ample opportunity to engage in discussion and hands-on activity.”

With its emphasis on practical farm knowledge and skills training, the overall SFP program fits well into SFA's niche as a Farmer-to-Farmer Network® organization. John Mesko, SFA Executive Director, said the curriculum was emblematic of where SFA can best contribute to sustainable ag in the Upper Midwest.

“It includes both the philosophy of sustainability and the practical hands-on skills, plus it’s taught by real farmers,” Mesko said. I have no doubt several of the next generation of SFA leaders will come through the SFP Program.”

For more information about SFA's Sustainable Food Production Program, as well as Farm Skills 101, visit our SFP homepage or email Dr. Sue Wika at sue@sfa-mn.org.
Impromptu Garlic Festival Photo Feature

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

In honor of the stinky fun experienced by attendees of Saturday's Minnesota Garlic Festival, I'd like to share this photo of my daughter, Nettie, with Gertie Garlic. Eating delicious garlic ice cream, kettle corn, heirloom tomatoes, steak sandwich and sweet corn would make any 3-year-old smile.

Also, check out the Garlic Festival photos from Minnesota Public Radio's Jennifer Simonson. And thanks to all who attended!

SFA's Gearld Fry Events in Morris, Wadena Canceled

SFA had scheduled two events with cattle breeding expert Gearld Fry as part of our GrazeFest series and the Keep Cattle in Minnesota Project. Unfortunately, Gearld is in poor health, and the events have been canceled.

These events were scheduled for Aug. 14-15 in Morris and Wadena. If we are able to reschedule with Gearld, we will let you know here in SFA Connect.

Check This Out

A new SFA Connect feature, “Check This Out” is a section of links to articles and videos chosen by SFA staff that you might enjoy. Consider:

If we gave awards for Quote of the Year, DeEtta Bilek would probably win for her amazing comment in this story about politicians courting the farm vote at FarmFest. Read it in the fifth paragraph here.

The University of Minnesota has named its 2014 Farm Families of the Year, and the list includes several SFA members and their families. Read more about the SFA farmers honored in the Aug. 25 edition of SFA Connect. The basic list is available here.

Farm Foundation and the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation have created a new initiative, the
Soil Renaissance, to advance soil health and make soil health the cornerstone of land use management decisions. SFA is working with Soil Renaissance to spread the word about soil-health initiatives in the upper Midwest, like our Midwest Soil Health Summit. Check out www.soilrenaissance.org.

Voting Update: 2015 Annual Conference Topics

It's time to start thinking about topics for our next SFA Annual Conference, set for Feb. 14, 2015, again at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph.

We have opened voting for the 2015 Annual Conference session topics – click this link to begin voting. The more votes we tabulate, the more accurately we can tailor the session schedule around your wishes. One thing we hear a lot during an after the Conference is, “there were so many good sessions I had a hard time choosing.” If there was a session you missed in 2014 but still are interested in, be sure to input that topic into the website.

We're up to 61 topic ideas and nearly 3,500 votes! The top ten vote-getters as of Aug. 10, 2014:

- Salvaging, Repurposing, Upcycling, and Restoring farm equipment and buildings
- Deep Winter Solar Greenhouses
- Integrating Crops & Livestock
- Cover Crops & Soil Health
- Animal Husbandry Large Animals
- Multi-Species Grazing
- Direct Marketing Meat
- Value-Added Processing
- Root Cellaring
- Greenhouse Practices

Make your voice heard – submit your own ideas and vote early and often.

Also, photo galleries from both the 2014 Annual Conference and inaugural Midwest Soil Health Summit are available on each conference's homepage. Check them out!

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2014 Annual Conference, held Feb. 8, 2014, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. To learn more about Crystal, visit her website.

SUMMIT, Arrowwood Resort, Alexandria, Minn.

July 11, 2015: FESTIVAL OF FARMS

Aug. 8, 2015: MINNESOTA GARLIC FESTIVAL, McLeod County Fairgrounds, Hutchinson, Minn.

SFA WORK

Adjust 2015

Have you had to make changes to your farm plan since you started farming? Your experiences could help other farmers. Check out our survey.

Our ongoing GrazeFest series of grass-based livestock and cover cropping events is led by Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg. Visit our GrazeFest homepage and watch SFA Connect for updates on our upcoming on-farm events.

Keep Cattle in Minnesota

Keep Cattle in Minnesota will build on
Minnesota Elderberry Fest Upcoming at Natura Farms

The Minnesota Elderberry Festival, an event for serious growers who want to learn about the field selection, harvest, storage and sale of elderberries, is set for 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Aug. 22-23 at Natura Farms, 19060 Manning Trail N, Marine on St. Croix.

The festival will include education on elderberry cultivation and berry handling during harvest season, and field tours will be given both days. Hands-on participation, including harvesting and processing, will take place on Saturday.

Presentations planned include Natura Farm’s Paul Otten on soils, Chris Patton on marketing and health benefits, Dan Halsey on permaculture planting with elderberry, SFA member Michelle Menken on organic certification, SFA member David Birky on irrigation, and more.

For more information or registration, email naturalkickfarms@gmail.com or call Paul Otten at 651.308.3801.

Badgersett Farm Plans Annual Field Day on Aug. 16

Badgersett Farm is hosting its 23rd annual Badgersett Field Day, from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Aug. 16 at the farm in Canton, Minn. View the farm’s newest plantings, talk hazelnuts with other growers, and see fields established for over 25 years in an established permaculture forest farm.

This free event is family-friendly and includes arts and crafts for sale, farmers market products, and more. For more information, visit www.badgersett.com.

Organic Certification Cost Share is Back for 2014

Minnesota Department of Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson has signed an agreement with USDA to offer an organic certification cost share program again in 2014. This program offers important regulatory cost relief for organic farmers and handlers who are required by law to hire an accredited certifying agency to verify they are complying with National Organic Standards.

All certified organic operations in MN should receive application materials in the mail in a couple of weeks. The materials will also be available online after that time at
The program refunds up to 75 percent of certification costs for operations that are certified (or have continuing certification) by Sept. 30, 2014. Funding for the Organic Certification Cost Share program was included in the Farm Bill passed by Congress earlier this year. Minnesota’s allocation for 2014 is $541,500.

In Minnesota, applications will be due Oct. 31. Information about organic practices, certification requirements, and other related topics is available right now at www.mda.state.mn.us/organic.

If you are in transition right now and will not be certified before Sept. 30, 2014, you may qualify for our Minnesota Organic Transition Cost Share program instead. More info here.

2014 Minnesota Organic Dairy Day is Aug. 12

The University of Minnesota West Central Research and Outreach Center's Organic Dairy Day will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 12 at the Center, 46352 State Hwy 329, Morris. Educational programs will feature Hue Karreman, Organic Livestock Veterinarian from the Rodale Institute, on organic dairy health and supplementation strategies, outwintering, and grazing summer annuals with Brad Heins, U of MN Organic Dairy Specialist.

Beginning at 1 p.m., there will be field tour stops that will discuss cover crops and summer annuals for grazing, the new organic dairy fodder system, walk-thru fly traps and summer fly control, and animal health.

Field tours will be presented by Hue Karreman, Brad Heins, WCROC, James Paulson, UMN Extension, and Roger Moon, UMN.

The field day will include free lunch, with plenty of time to network with others.

The Organic Dairy Day is free and open to the public. If you plan to attend, or would like more information, contact WCROC at 320.589.1711 or by sending an email to: hein0106@umn.edu.

Farm to School Grant Program Still Accepting Apps

The Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture’s Farm to School Grant Program supports Minnesota school districts and child care centers in the processing of Minnesota agricultural products. Grants are intended to both create feasibility plan that identifies specific equipment, tools, training or policies needed by school districts and child care centers; and purchase equipment to allow schools and child care centers to purchase, prepare and serve more Minnesota grown and raised food.

Applications for this grant program in 2015 are still being accepted; proposals must be received no later than 4 p.m. Nov. 3, 2014.

Farm to School was established to create new markets for local growers to provide fresh products for the local school cafeteria. The program coordinates at least $10 million in local purchases annually. Although most purchases involve fruits and vegetables, schools are also purchasing fluid milk, meat or poultry, and grains.

Applications can be found on the MDA's website. For more information, email michael.crusan@state.mn.us.

Lauderdale Farmers Market Seeks Vendors

In an effort to encourage community growth, home gardening, and direct farm to table connections, the City of Lauderdale is hosting two more Farmers Markets in 2014: Aug. 21, and Sept. 18 from 4-7pm. The Sassy Spoon food truck will be serving dinner, and we are hopeful to find musicians to play during the markets as well. The Markets take place under shade of the old trees at the northwest corner of the city park located at 1885 Fulham St in Lauderdale, which is conveniently located right outside of both Minneapolis and St Paul.
We are seeking GMO-free, organic, transitional, and/or sustainable farmers, home bakers and crafters who wish to sell their wares. Vendors who participate this year will be given preference next year as the market expands to a bi-monthly schedule. There is no fee for vendors to attend.

Please email the market manager at LauderdaleFarmersMarket@gmail.com for more information and for applications or call Susie at 651.329.8401.
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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