SFA to Host New Conference: Midwest Soil Health Summit

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

Registration is now open for SFA’s new conference: The Midwest Soil Health Summit, to be held Feb. 19-20, 2014, at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria. The Summit will convene some of the most innovative farmers and researchers in the Upper Midwest for two days of networking, speakers, panel discussions and breakout sessions – all geared at improving the health of your soil.

The keynote speaker will be Gabe Brown of Brown’s Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D. Brown (right) is a pioneer in diverse cover cropping, having used no-till techniques for two decades. His family ranch encompasses 5,400 acres, all managed sustainably and with the goal of building ideal soil health conditions. His pesticide-free cover and companion crop system has allowed the Browns to reduce their use of commercial fertilizer by over 90 percent and the use of herbicides by over 75 percent as well as increase production and profitability.

Kent Solberg, SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator, will be leading a session on designing and customizing cover crops.

Wendy Taheri, Research Microbiologist with the North Central Agricultural Research Laboratory, will present on cover cropping and mycorrhizae in soils.

Additional speakers will be announced soon.

"Soil health is the basis of agriculture, and agriculture is the basis of a free civilization," Solberg said. "Planned grazing management, diverse crop rotations, no-till equipment, and complex cover crops are tools that can help us move toward soil health. The land has the ability to heal itself when we provide the chance."

The first day, Feb. 19, will be focused on networking and start at 6 p.m. with snacks and a cocktail hour as well as a casual presentation by Brown.

Feb. 20 is a full day of programming and will include Brown's keynote address, a producer panel, a series of breakout networking sessions, opportunities to interact one-on-one with producers and researchers, and more. There will be a slate of exhibitors as well.

"Broad application of these practices across the landscape would enhance individual farm
profitability, and environmental issues associated with intensive row crop production would disappear," Solberg said. "Most conservation practices require government incentives to be economically viable for the producer. Farms, such as Brown's Ranch in North Dakota, have demonstrated that economic potential of these techniques when applied as a whole to individual farms is so powerful that government incentives are not necessary."

Cost is $100 for current SFA members and $150 for non-members (Note: When registering, SFA members must choose the "discount" option and enter the code that was sent in a members-only email). If you wish to join SFA and receive the discount code for $50 off registration, click this link to visit our Join page. Once you join SFA, a discount code will be emailed to you. For questions on SFA membership, contact SFA Communications Coordinator Jason Walker at jason@sfa-mn.org.

Arrowwood Resort is a family-friendly location with an indoor water park, ice fishing, cross country ski trails, snowmobiling, ice skating, broomball, and more. For more information or to reserve a room, call the resort at 320.762.1124.

Information will come soon on how to be a vendor or exhibitor at this premier conference for farmers and producers across the spectrum - convention, sustainable, organic. If you would like more information or to reserve a spot in advance, please contact Jerry Ford, jerry@sfa-mn.org.

The Midwest Soil Health Summit is in addition to SFA's Annual Conference, which is scheduled for Feb. 8 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph (more below).

2014 SFA Annual Conference Registration Open; Members Get Discounted Price of $35 through Aug. 31

Registration is now open (click here) for the 2014 SFA Annual Conference, to be held Feb. 8 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn.

A founding concept of SFA is that there is wisdom in the community, so you'll help to determine and lead the sessions – which will include casual but focused networking conversations on topics that you choose. Using an online voting system, SFA members can choose session topics; we'll analyze the data and create the schedule around your wishes. We want your input; you can even add your own ideas. Bookmark this link and vote often as more ideas are added.

Family programming is returning, so that the ENTIRE farm family can come enjoy and learn from our Farmer-to-Farmer showcase. Admission for children ages 3-12 is just $10, while kids under 3 are free.

The $35 discounted price is valid through Aug. 31 for SFA members only. Current SFA members should have received an email with a discount code for registration. Non-members may register for $45 or, for the best value, simply join SFA today and we'll email your discount code. Starting Sept. 1, registration goes up to $45 for members and $55 for non-members.

Executive Director's Note

By John Mesko
What Makes Farmers Unique?

Wendell Berry, wrote in, *Bringing it to the Table: Writings on Farming and Food*: “I have an idea that a lot of farmers have gone to a lot of trouble merely to be self-employed to live at least a part of their lives without a boss.”

To some extent, this probably rings true for many farmers reading this. When I read this recently, I was reminded of iconic pictures of farmers displaying “rugged independence.” It got me thinking about what makes farming attractive to farmers.

If you are familiar with the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator (MBTI), you know it is a fairly detailed assessment of a person’s way of taking in and processing information, making decisions and re-energizing their batteries to continue on in life. By no means perfect, it does boast decades of successful use in business, academia and personal development.

Turns out that MBTI has been applied to farmers, and there are some interesting outcomes. Farmers have a higher proportion of individuals with Sensing and Judging traits than the rest of society. According to the MBTI Website, the following are some common traits among farmers:

I solve problems by working through facts until I understand the problem.

I am pragmatic and look to the “bottom line.”

I start with facts and then form a big picture.

I trust experience first and trust words and symbols less.

Sometimes I pay so much attention to facts, either present or past, that I miss new possibilities.

I dwell on physical reality, what I see, hear, touch, taste, and smell.

I’m concerned with what is actual, present, current, and real.

I notice facts and I remember details that are important to me.

Experience speaks to me louder than words.

According to Bill Long, with workshopswithwow.com, farmers have a distinct way of taking in new ideas. When farmers consider making changes to their operations, or when our communities are asking farmers to make changes, many times farmers with have the following thought process:

I need to be convinced of the need to change.

I tend to define myself by my experience and I have a deeper investment in its value.

Unless there is a clear and desperate need to change, I prefer to stick to set procedures and established routines.

I’ll be talking more about what makes farmers unique and how we like to learn at the Grassfed Exchange Conference on August 20-22 in Bismarck, ND. Hope to see you there!

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Chapter Update: Lake Agassiz

By Marie Petry • Chapter Coordinator
The weather was perfect as 25 people toured GrassStain Farm in Wolverton during SFA’s Festival of Farms on July 13. Visitors got up-close and personal with a friendly Jersey cow as they heard about establishing paddocks, checked out the eggmobile, and learned the details of the pastured poultry operation. Kids picked eggs from the eggmobile and turned up their noses at the chicken processing demonstration.

Informal discussion around the potluck dinner was helpful. Among our guests were those looking for a rural place to buy, local resources for a new farm, and for a more family-friendly operation. Information and resources were shared among the group. Indeed, it was good farmer-to-farmer networking. A big thanks to Jason Walker of SFA for his encouragement and help in making this happen.

This event was held at the lower portion of Lake Agassiz Chapter. As we grow our membership, we’ll be looking for more events to happen farther north to encourage and support the sustainable farmers in that area of our Chapter. Please contact Marie Petry with your ideas at grass@wtc-mail.net.

Central Chapter Hosting Farming/Orchards Field Day

SFA, SFA Central Chapter and Orcharding in the North are hosting a special horticulture field day from 1 to 6 p.m. Aug. 23 at the CLC Ag and Energy Center in Staples, Minn. Four separate sessions of strong value to area growers are available; attend one or several. The schedule:

1:30-2:30 p.m. – Specialty Crops Demonstration Plot: This plot is a small, regional trial of 10 novel cereals and foodstuffs that may have a future in Minnesota such as spelt, teff, amaranth, and low-gluten corn. We will also tour the Center’s producing stands of specialty fruits; aronia and seaberry, in particular, are of increasing interest in the marketplace.

2:45-3:30 p.m. – Pest & Disease Management in your Home Orchard: Fruit scientist Thaddeus McCamant will conduct a walk-and-talk in the Center’s orchards on identification and treatment of fruit tree diseases and pest problems. A taste-testing will follow of mature fruits and apples. Bring samples of tree fruits and berries from your own orchards for the taste test. This session costs $10 and is capped at 25 participants. Please pre-register by emailing rscheer@charter.net.

2:45-3:30 p.m. – Local Fuels from A to Z: The “Distributed Energy” concept: A free session by Bob Schafer, an industry expert in bio-fuels generation and alternative fuels, this session will visit canola and camelina fields as well as an oil-seed press, a small tractor using canola oil, and growing, processing and utilizing oilseed crops on the farm.

4:45-5:45 p.m. – Viticulture for Northern Minnesota: Oenologist Dennis Emslie Drummond will present his remarkable wine grape trial, including an overview of varietal characteristics, training systems, and issues for viticulture in the north. This will be followed by a leisurely tasting of experimental wines with cheese and crackers. This session costs $10 to cover expenses and is capped at 25 participants. Please pre-register by emailing rscheer@charter.net.

This is a Sustainable Farming Association event sponsored by The CLC Ag and Energy Center, The Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, Happy Dancing Turtle, and the Green Island Orcharding in the North Project, with support from the Central SFA Chapter.

SFA Supporting Sustainable Food Production Program
SFA has stepped forward to support an award-winning beginning farmer educational program, Sustainable Food Production, which formerly was a part of M State Fergus Falls. The Sustainable Food Production program will continue as a program under the SFA umbrella.

Sustainable Food Production is a much-needed beginning-farmer curriculum that emphasizes all three tenets of sustainability, plus provides extensive skills training. A unique aspect of SFP is its commitment to community development and mentoring, a perfect fit with SFA’s Farmer-to-Farmer Network.

Instructors are all farmer-educators: Dr. Sue Wika, Tom Prieve, and Kent Solberg. Each possesses both real-world experience and the educational background to provide comprehensive sustainable food production education.

If you are interested in this program, visit our Sustainable Food Production homepage, fill out the form and an instructor will contact you.

Living Song Farm Hosting SFA Pasture Walk

NRCS of Wright County and SFA are co-sponsoring a free Pasture Walk field day from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Aug. 21 at Living Song Farm, 7616 25th St SW, Howard Lake. The farm of SFA Network Coordinator Jerry Ford, Living Song is a diversified operation that features developing dairy heifers on pasture, annual and perennial crops, pastured poultry products, and a variety of vegetables. This is a part of SFAs Grazefest series of events.

Topics to be covered include grazing management, fencing and watering systems, perennial and annual forages, “The Ovomobo” eggmobile, rainfall simulator demonstrations, and a discussion on soil health. The event will be held rain or shine.

For more information, contact the NRCS Wright County Field Office at 763.682.1933, ext. 3.

Volunteer Coordinator Sought for SFA Annual Conference

Here’s an opportunity to work with the premier grassroots sustainable farming conference in the Upper Midwest. SFA is looking for an individual with great organizational skills who loves working with dedicated people who are on a mission to support the sustainable agriculture community in Minnesota. If you are interested, contact Jerry Ford, SFA Network Coordinator, at jerry@sfa-mn.org or 763-244-6659.

Save the Date: SFA Cover Crop Field Day Sept. 7

SFA Central Chapter is working on a GrazeFest Series cover crop field day to be held Sept. 7 in Wadena County. The event will be a tour of cover crop demonstration plots on four sustainable farms.

Watch SFA Connect, our GrazeFest homepage and our Facebook and Twitter pages for more details as they are finalized.

LSSFA Presents On-Farm Educational Opportunities
Ready to learn new farm approaches and enterprises, gather infrastructure ideas, and develop critical farm production management skills? Join the Lake Superior Sustainable Farming Association and Land Stewardship Project for a number of summer and fall farm tours scheduled throughout the northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin region. Cost is free to Lake Superior Farm Beginnings graduates, $30 for LSSFA members, and $35 for non-members (individual field sessions may vary in price; some are free). Please visit www.lakesuperiorfarming.org for information or contact Cree at 218.834.0846 or cree@lakesuperiorfarming.org with questions. RSVPs are not necessary but are helpful. The tours:

**Aug. 24, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at Chelsea Morning Farm, Two Harbors, Minn.** – Farm Details: Diversified Vegetables, Laying Hens, Community Supported Agriculture. Focus: Biological and Crop Monitoring to Improve Land Health and Resiliency. Directions: Follow Hwy 61 NE of Duluth to and through Two Harbors, MN. Continue on 61 another approximately 2-3 miles to Hwy 3 (located just beyond Betty’s Pies). Turn north (left) on Hwy 3. Travel north on Hwy 3 approximately 8-9 miles to address 2955 Highway 3. Pull into the driveway and park around the garages and homestead house.

**Sept. 21, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at Northern Harvest Farm, Wrenshall Minn.** – Farm Details: Diversified Vegetables, Flowers. Focus: Developing and Implementing a Soil Fertility Program that Helps to Establish and Maintain Healthy, Living, Productive and Resilient Soil. Directions: From Carlton MN, follow CR-1. Drive through and past the town of Wrenshall to CR-4. Turn right on CR-4. Drive about 1 mile to CR-102. Turn left on CR-102 to the farm at 2572 CR-102.

**Oct. 5, 1:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. at Elsewhere Farm, Herbster, Wis.** – Focus: Permaculture, Four-Season Production (Winter Greenhouse), and Orchard Development. Directions: From Superior WI, follow US 2 / Hwy 53 towards Ashland WI. Take ramp and turn left towards WI 13 (also known as County Z) towards Port Wing / Bayfield (this highway hugs the Lake Superior shoreline). Follow WI 13 through Port Wing and Herbster. Turn left onto Nicoletti Road. The address is 16550 Nicoletti Road (located on the right side of Nicoletti), Herbster WI 54844.

**Mesko to Speak at Grassfed Exchange Conference**

SFA Executive Director John Mesko is slated among the presenters at the 2013 Grassfed Exchange Conference, "Grassfed Rising: Building the Soil-Grass Connection," which will be Aug. 20-22 in Bismarck, N.D. Mesko will speak from 1:15-1:40 on Aug. 22 about the importance of farmer-to-farmer networking and how SFA achieves its networking goals.

The conference, at the Ramkota Inn Best Western in Bismarck, is $175 for the two conference days Aug. 21-22 and includes a banquet; pasture walk tours Aug. 20 of Gabe Brown and Ken Miller’s ranches are available for an additional fee.

Other speakers at the conference include Dr. Fred Kirschenmann; Dr. Allen Williams, who spoke during the Advanced Grazing Workshop at the 2013 SFA Annual Conference; and Warren King, manager of The Pasture Project who has worked with SFA to support our GrazeFest series of grass-based livestock events.

To learn more, visit the conference homepage here.

**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 Winner: Dale and Sharon Nummi

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.

June's winner: Dale and Sharon Nummi of South Range, Wis., sent this shot of daughter Katie and grandson Liam saying hello to their sow, "Bandit."

Take Part in Quick Survey for SFA; T-shirt Up for Grabs

Thanks to all who participated in the recent SFA Stress Survey, a simple, two-question survey. We will use this data to assess the need for stress-related programming at future SFA Farmer-to-Farmer Network events.

We're collecting data with another super-quick survey on the new topic of SFA members' use of mobile technology and how it pertains to SFA. The survey is now available at this link, so please take a few minutes to respond. A random survey-taker will receive an SFA T-shirt. Thanks!

Beginning Hop Grower Workshop Sept. 7 in Waseca
Join the Minnesota Hop Growers Association (MHGA), University of Minnesota, and Rural Advantage for a day jam-packed with information for the beginning hop grower. The workshop, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., will be held at the University's Southern Research and Outreach Center (SROC) where hop research has been conducted for the last few years. Attendees will learn about the history of hop production and brewing, how to establish and operate a successful hop yard, harvesting and processing, economics, and marketing. There will also be time for discussion and networking. The experienced presenters will include hop growers, researchers, processors, and brewers.

The workshop will happen rain or shine. Please dress according to the weather for the 1.5 hour tour.

Speakers include John Brach (MHGA president), Charlie Rohwer (U of M hop researcher), Rich Joseph (Wisconsin Hop Exchange), Jeremy Munson (MHGA VP), Joshua Havill and Ian Bottorff (U of M Students), Bobby Blasey (Mankato Brewery).

Registration Fee (includes materials, refreshments, and lunch): $25 for members, $50 for non-members, $75 for registration and one year membership to MHGA. Registration/information: www.mhga.org.

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**St. Paul, Minneapolis Schools Looking for Local Produce**

As members of the School Food FOCUS initiative, the St. Paul and Minneapolis Public School Districts are working to increase their procurement of fruits and vegetables that are regionally grown and processed. Both districts are looking for suppliers of fresh (mostly pre-cut) produce that is grown and processed within 200 miles of Mpls and St. Paul.

For more information, contact Kymm Mutch at kmutch@schoolfoodfocus.org.

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**2013 Minnesota Organic Dairy Day Slated for Aug. 13**

The University of Minnesota West Central Research and Outreach Center's Organic Dairy Day will be from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 13 at the West Central Research Center, 46352 State Hwy 329, Morris, Minn.

Educational programs will feature speaker Jon Bansen, Oregon Organic Dairy producer; and "Amending Soils in Organic Dairy Pastures" by Dr. Cindy Daley, California State University-Chico Organic Dairy. A Organic Dairy research update will also be provided.

Beginning at 1 p.m., there will be field tour stops that will focus on grazing summer annuals (BMR sorghum-sudangrass and teff), walk-thru fly traps (Cow Vac and Bruce Fly traps), and heat detection systems for organic dairy cows. Field tours will be presented by Brad Heins, WCROC, James Paulson, UMN Extension, Roger Moon, UMN and Lucas Sjostrom, WCROC. The field day will include free lunch by Wurstmachers, 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 email to hein0106@umn.edu.

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**'Job Wire' Connects Farmers With Veteran Job-Seekers**

Introducing the Growing Veterans' Job Wire, a new resource for you! Growing Veterans has created a new tool for sustainable farmers to increase their labor pool by connecting them with military veterans. With a wave of veterans returning to civilian life, many have already begun farming, others who want to just need a way to get connected - that's where the Job Wire fits in. Use the Job Wire to gain access to hardworking, team driven, detail oriented, military veterans near you! They served our country overseas, now let them serve back home with you.

How's it work? Simple, visit www.growingveterans.org/jobwire and submit the details of your opportunity. Growing Veterans will review your submission and post it, utilizing their growing online presence to help get the word out to vets near you. Not a farmer but work in support of sustainable agriculture? Post job opportunities on the Job Wire as well! Growing Veterans exists
to empower veterans to help strengthen the sustainable agriculture movement across the land, visit their website to learn more: [www.growingveterans.org](http://www.growingveterans.org).

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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](mailto:info@sfa-mn.org).

**Sustainable Farming Association (SFA)**  
Box 192, Princeton, MN 55371  
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