Chapter Update: Lake Superior

By Jean Sramek • Chapter Coordinator

This time of year, it’s all about the Harvest Festival. It’s eating, it’s learning, it’s growing, it’s fun. It’s something for everyone, and it’s free. Why not make a day of it? The 19th Annual Lake Superior Harvest Festival is Sat., Sept. 8.

For nearly two decades, the Lake Superior Chapter of SFA has put on this premier event, connecting producers and consumers. Located in beautiful Bayfront Park in downtown Duluth, Harvest Festival features one of the best and largest farmers’ markets in the region, along with live music, delicious food, artisans' wares, family activities, educational and informational exhibits, and more. The best part is that it’s all locally focused, locally grown, and locally sourced. Admission is free.

Fly a kite, pet a goat, get to know the St. Louis River or Lake Superior. Dance around the maypole and treat yourself to handmade craft items. Eat something fresh and healthy (or maybe just a little bit indulgent). Learn about backyard composting or backyard chicken-raising. Listen to music, talk about sustainability. Most importantly, meet your neighbors—and meet the people who grow your food.

If you’re local, walk on over. If you’re from out of town, make a day of it or stay for the weekend. The 19th Annual Harvest Festival welcomes you!

Visit the Harvest Festival homepage or our Facebook event page to learn more.

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.
'Basil Snail' Dinner Planned at Bacon's Garden Farme

A casual farm gathering with food by Erik Sather of Bar La Grassa, Slow Food MN presents its "Basil Snail" dinner at 3 p.m Aug. 26 at SFA member Bruce Bacon's Garden Farme, 175th Ave NW, Ramsey. Bacon (right) is a longtime Slow Food member who supplies organic produce to Bar La Grassa and other top Twin Cities restaurants. Bruce has invited diners to his farm — at the height of basil season — to enjoy a delicious picnic dinner and learn more about basil, organic farming and farm-to-city issues.

Talks include a pesto-making demo with Sather, a salad walk with Bacon, and "Forging Direct Connections from Farmers to Consumers" with Ken Meter. Tickets are $35 for Slow Food MN members and $40 for non-members. Children 12 and under are free. Reservations and directions here.

Also slated is a harvest dinner and farm tours Sept. 23 at Big River Farms in Marine on St. Croix. Planned is an afternoon of fun, learning and great food in support of farmers who fled their countries to begin new lives as organic producers here. Dinner will be cooked by Lucia Watson of Lucia's Restaurant, Nick Rancone and Thomas Boemer of Corner Table, Joe Hatch-Surisook of Sen Yai Sen Lek and John Kraus of Patisserie 46. Tickets are $85 for members, $100 for non-members and $45 for children. Your purchase benefits Big River Farms (Minnesota Food Association’s incubator farm) and Slow Food MN and is partially tax deductible. Click here for more information and reservations.

New Crops Project Blog Just Launched

By Bobby Wenner • New Crops Project Manager

The New Crops blog is going to be a great way to keep everyone updated on the progress of the project. As our work continues to develop, we will be posting project news and other interesting information. Given the nature of the New Crops Project, a blog will be the perfect way to keep everyone up-to-date as the project is constantly developing and expanding.

In the near future we will begin incorporating more photos and videos of the project as we continue to connect with Minnesota farmers who are interested in getting involved.
New Contest: Send Photo for Chance to Win SFA T-shirt

Who doesn't want to win a free T-shirt, let alone a cool SFA one? Here's your chance. We're starting a new contest: Send communications coordinator Jason Walker your photos, and the best each month, chosen by Jason's eagle eye, gets an SFA T-shirt.

What kind of photos are we looking for? Simply anything related to sustainable agriculture. At an SFA event, on the farm, in the garden, at a meal, a funny-looking carrot, a beautiful sunset at your farm, your family loading hay, an antique tool ... anything other SFA folks might get a kick out of seeing.

Send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org, and I'll include the winner in SFA Connect. Note: We don't have unlimited quantities of T-shirts, so certain sizes may not always be available. But we'll try our best.

AWA Calls for 2012-2013 Good Husbandry Grant Proposals

Animal Welfare Approved, the only certification program and food label for pasture-raised meat, dairy and eggs, is announcing a call for proposals for its 2012-2013 Good Husbandry Grants. Now in its fifth year, the Good Husbandry Grants program has funded over one hundred projects across the country to improve farm animal welfare. Certified farmers and those who have submitted an application for AWA certification may apply for up to $5,000 towards projects such as mobile housing, breeding stock, and on-farm processing equipment. Slaughter plants working with or seeking to work with AWA farmers are also eligible for funding.

The funding priorities for this year's cycle include improved genetics, increased outdoor access, welfare improvements in the slaughter process and non-lethal predator control. As pasture- and range-based management is a fundamental requirement of AWA certification, a primary goal of this grant program is to facilitate the growth and success of high-welfare, pasture-based systems.

Farmers and slaughter plants interested in applying should click here for Guidelines, FAQ and an application. Contact Grants Coordinator Emily Lancaster at Emily@AnimalWelfareApproved.org or (202) 618-4497 with any questions.

MDA Has $1 Million in Funds for State’s Livestock Farmers

Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson has announced that $1 million in grant funding is being made available to livestock producers in the state for on-farm improvements. The Livestock Investment Grant Program was first funded by the Minnesota legislature in 2008. Since then, 89 grant recipients have invested an estimated $31 million in improvements to their operations.

Qualifying producers would be reimbursed ten percent of the first $500,000 of investment, with a minimum investment of $4,000. Qualifying expenditures include the purchase, construction, or improvement of buildings or facilities for the production of livestock, and the purchase of fencing as well as feeding and waste management equipment. Producers who suffered a loss due to a natural disaster or unintended consequence may also apply. The grant will not pay for livestock or land purchases or for the cost of debt refinancing.

The deadline to apply for the grant program is January 14, 2013. More information on the Minnesota Livestock Investment Program can be found on the MDA website.
Survey to Gauge Potential of Grass-Based Livestock

A new survey in the Chippewa River watershed will gauge the role grass-based livestock production could play in the region's future. The survey can be completed online here or accessed through the Chippewa 10% Project's website. If you prefer to complete a paper copy of the survey, contact Nate Klucus at 320-333-3793 or nklucas@hotmail.com.

The survey will be open through August 31, and producers in the following counties who currently raise livestock – or who are interested in adding livestock to their farms – are encouraged to complete the survey: Big Stone, Chippewa, Douglas, Grant, Kandiyohi, Lac Qui Parle, Ottertail, Renville, Pope, Stearns, Stevens, Swift, Todd, Traverse and Yellow Medicine. Anyone who includes their name and telephone number on their completed survey is eligible to win a $100 gift card to the farm store of their choice.

LSP Farm Beginnings Program Hosting Dreams Workshop

Are you trying to figure out if a farming career is right for you? The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program is offering a Farm Dreams workshop from 1 to 5 p.m. Sept. 9 at the Eastside Co-op in Northeast Minneapolis, 2551 Central Avenue NE. The registration fee is $20 for LSP members and $40 for non-members.

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.

Pre-registration is required. For more details or to register, contact Nick Olson at 320-269-2105 or nicko@landstewardshipproject.org.

Rural Advantage to Hire Local Foods Program Manager

Rural Advantage, a Fairmont-based nonprofit formed in 2003 to promote the connections between agriculture, the environment and rural communities in order to improve ecological health, economic viability and rural vitality, seeks to hire a full-time Local Foods Program Manager.

The primary role will be to help us grow our local foods programming activities in rural south central Minnesota and develop local food systems that include growers through to cafeterias, marketing and enterprise development. This position will manage multiple projects, funded through grants, and coordinate with staff and project partners to meet project goals and Rural Advantage’s nonprofit mission.

Please email cover letter, resume and three references to Linda Meschke, President of Rural Advantage at linda@ruraladvantage.org or send a hard copy in the mail to Linda Meschke, Rural Advantage, 1243 Lake Avenue, Suite 222, Fairmont, MN 56031. Position is open until filled.

Gardening Matters Has Opening for Executive Director

Gardening Matters is seeking an Executive Director who will help grow the success and sustainability of community gardens by supporting the gardeners that make them happen. The mission of Gardening Matters is to connect gardeners with resources, training, and networking opportunities; provide public education; advocate for supportive community garden policies; and build community and regional collaboration for the Good Food movement.

The Executive Director is responsible for the overall administration and management of Gardening Matters, including program oversight, fundraising, and general operations. The hiring range is $22-$24 per hour and includes PTO, life insurance, and disability insurance. To apply, send a cover letter, resume, and 3 references to gmedsearch@gmail.com by 5 p.m., August 31. No phone inquiries please.
Energized Fence Strategies for Grazers Seminar Set

Attend a fencing seminar Oct. 13 in Fergus Falls led by SFA's Kent Solberg, owner of Seven Pines Farm and Fence of Verndale and an instructor in the Sustainable Food Production program at M-State in Fergus Falls. Kent has 18 years of professional experience designing and installing energized fence systems for livestock. The seminar will run from noon to 3 p.m. Oct. 13 at the M-State campus in Fergus Falls. Cost is $15 per person and includes a local foods lunch. Please register by Oct. 9 by contacting Marci King at 218.736.1625 or marci.king@minnesota.edu.

The workshop is sponsored by SFA, Sustainable Food Production and the Minnesota Dairy Initiative.

Volunteers Sought for Crazy Ruckus in State Fair Parade

If you have ever wanted to get in the State Fair for free, Renewing the Countryside has a fun opportunity for you. RTC is representing local healthy foods in the State Fair Parade on Aug. 23-24 and Sept. 2-3. Ten to 15 volunteers are needed each day to walk in the State Fair parade in exchange for a free entry ticket.

Volunteers will wear fruit and vegetable costumes and accessories, while smiling and waving at the masses and generally making a scene (see RTC’s Sarah Wolbert at right dressed as a purple kohlrabi), all to promote healthy, local foods. One ticket per volunteer is provided; children ages 6 and up are eligible if accompanied by an adult volunteer. Time commitment is 1:15-3 p.m.; the parade runs from 2-2:30 p.m.

Contact sarah@rtcinfo.org to sign up. Include the quantity of people in your group, your name, email, a phone number, and mailing address. We will respond with more information on details for the day.

MISA Seeks Nominations for Board of Directors

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture Nominations Committee seeks help in identifying individuals willing to serve on the Board of Directors. The purpose of MISA is to bring together the diverse interests of the agricultural community with interests from across the University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. A term on the MISA Board is three years. Nominate yourself or someone else to serve on the Board.

Beginning in October 2012, the following vacancies on the Board will be filled: One (1) sustainable agriculture practitioner (e.g. farmers and ranchers); and, Two (2) representatives of the university community with a demonstrated interest in sustainable agriculture (e.g. faculty, staff, students, Extension, Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships).

Visit www.misa.umn.edu for detailed information about MISA, an application/nomination form, roles and responsibilities of Board members, and desired characteristics of Board members.

Fall Harvest Event for Women in Sustainable Agriculture

Come share ideas, conversation and laughter while enjoying the beauty and relaxation of the Root River and surrounding bluff country of the Cedar Valley Resort during the annual Fall Harvest Gathering for Women in Sustainable Agriculture Nov. 9-11 in Whalan.

The weekend will include a presentation and demonstration on proper chainsaw use and safety, virtual farm tours, engaging women farmer speakers, small and large group discussions, songs, and plenty of time to relax and unwind.
U. of M. Study Seeks Organic Dairy Farmers

Dr. Lisa Wolff, a veterinarian conducting a Master of Science project at the College of Veterinary Medicine at University of Minnesota, needs help for a study about management practices and disease on organic dairy farms in Minnesota.

The project involves one visit to your herd, where Wolff’s team will complete a survey about management practices, herd health concerns and commonly used treatment options. There are no right or wrong answers and all answers will be handled in a confidential way. The researchers are simply trying to find out which management practices or treatments work on organic farms and which might not. In addition to the survey, we will score the adult cow herd for lameness, hygiene and hock lesions and we will collect samples for free laboratory testing.

Information: Lisa Wolff, wolf0370@umn.edu or 612.625.6906.

Big River Farms Hosting Local Food Harvest Dinner

Attend an afternoon of fun, learning and great food with a harvest dinner event starting at 2 p.m. Sept. 23 at Big River Farms in Marine on St. Croix. The event, to benefit immigrant organic farmers, includes farm tours, a silent auction, and interviews with immigrant farmers.

Dinner will be cooked by Lucia Watson of Lucia’s Restaurant, Nick Rancone and Thomas Boemer of Corner Table, Joe Hatch-Surisook of Sen Yai Sen Lek and John Kraus of Patisserie 46. Your purchase benefits Big River Farms and Slow Food MN and is partially tax deductible.

Information/reservations: www.slowfoodmn.org/events.html.

Cover Crop Cost-Share Dollars Available

Rural Advantage is seeking farmers willing to establish cover crops. Funding is available for up to $20 per acre for up to 20 acres ($400 maximum per farm). Participating farmers may plant the cover crop(s) of their desire. A demonstration aspect and simple reporting will be required. Funding for the project runs from Fall 2009 to Fall 2012, and farmers from all areas of Minnesota are welcome to participate. Cost-share dollars are available. This project is funded by NCR-SARE.

Information: Jill Sackett at 507.238.5449 or sacke032@umn.edu.

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.

Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA)
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