Speaker Slate Coming Together for 2016 MSHS: Allen Williams, Jay Fuhrer, Wendy Taheri, and More

It's time to talk speakers for the 2016 SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit, set for Feb. 17-18 at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn. – and don’t forget that early bird registration is just $125 for SFA members until Nov. 1.
The following soil health experts are scheduled to appear at the 2016 MSHS. More are likely to be added, but this slate is already looking great:

- Dr. Allen Williams (shown at left above at the 2015 MSHS with co-speaker Gabe Brown), a champion of the grass-fed beef industry as well as a leader in cutting edge grazing methodology.

- Jay Fuhrer, District Conservationist with the National Resource Conservation Service in Bismarck and a leader of the innovative soil health techniques happening in and around Burleigh County, N.D.

- Todd McPeak, a producer from Burleigh County, N.D., a world-renowned region of soil health-focused farmers.

- Dr. Wendy Taheri, a microbiologist who specializes in the study of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (AMF).

- Dr. Shannon Osbourne, is a Research Agronomist who focuses on understanding how soil and crop management options influence the soil environment and how these practices can be developed into production systems.

- Kent Solberg, SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist, will detail the Five Principles of Soil Health and how each is a separate yet vital piece of the soil health puzzle.

- John Mesko, SFA Executive Director, will present “Soil Health Basics,” a popular introductory class geared solely to first-timers.

- Grant Breitkreutz, a producer in Redwood Falls, will discuss his operation and how he builds soil health.

Also at the 2016 event will be more of what we keep hearing makes MSHS “the best conference I’ve ever been to:” discussion tables with presenters; the first-evening social time with drinks, food and a casual discussion with MSHS speakers; two days of farmer networking at the beautiful Arrowwood Resort; and a soil health-focused trade show.

Click here to register and get the MSHS on your calendar!

**Executive Director's Note**

Last week, I attended the Central Lakes College (Staples, MN) **Northern Fruits Workshop**. It was an excellent example of farmer networking.

There were several tours of the CLC farm, as well as workshops on successful varieties of fruits for northern growers.

SFA is a Farmer-to-Farmer Network™ organization, and we exist thanks to the wisdom of our sustainable farming community here in the upper Midwest. In fact, some of the best opportunities around will be at our **Annual Conference** and **Midwest Soil Health Summit**, both set for February, 2016.
Did you know that SFA members can register now at the links above and save big on registration fees? Even if you're not a member, there are early bird discounts for both conferences. Check it out!

### SFA Field Day: Fencing Innovations for Soil Health

Fencing innovations have made the integration of livestock into cover cropping systems easier than ever, and the Sustainable Farming Association is hosting a free field day to show how these strategies can result in improved soil health and enhanced profitability.

Join Kent Solberg (right), SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Sept. 18 as he installs a semi-permanent fence on the Allen Deutz farm, 2866 Co. Rd. 35, Marshall. Solberg, who has 20 years personal and professional fence design and installation experience, will also lead a discussion of the cover crops planted and how Deutz intends to use them to build soil health and improve his farm profitability. Lunch is included; leather gloves, work boots and safety glasses are highly recommended.

The event is free, but an [RSVP is appreciated for planning purposes here.](#)

Information: [kent@sfa-mn.org](mailto:kent@sfa-mn.org) or 1.844.922.5573, Ext. 701.

### SFA Field Day: Cover Crops & Livestock Integration

Join SFA as we tour four central Minnesota farms and a look at the results of a three-year Minnesota Department of Agriculture Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant project on various applications of cover crops in livestock operations.

The event, set for 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, Sept. 25, begins at the farm of Kent and Linda Solberg, 18618 County Rd. 23, Verndale. Watch for the SFA signs.

The tour group will travel via a coach bus to the three other farms: Larry Heitkamp’s farm in Sebeka, Dan and Rosie Middendorf’s farm near Verndale, and Marcus Edin’s farm near Staples.

Cost is $10; lunch is provided. [Click here to register.](#)

Information: [kent@sfa-mn.org](mailto:kent@sfa-mn.org), or 1.844.922.5573, Ext. 701.

### Fosston Fiber Festival & SFA Sheep Networking Group

Celebrating the fiber heritage of northern Minnesota, the Fosston Fiber Festival will showcase local fiber producers and artists from Oct. 2-4 at Northern Woolen Mills, 803 11th St NW, Fosston. The Festival, which includes fiber workshops, shopping, crafts, Northern Woolen Mills tours and more, is free, family-friendly and open to the public.

Information: [www.fosstonfiberfestival.com](http://www.fosstonfiberfestival.com) or 218-657-2502. The Fosston Fiber Festival is sponsored by SFA, the Sustainable Sheep Community Project of Northern Minnesota, and Northern Woolen Mills.

Also, SFA is forming a Sustainable Sheep Networking Group. Keep watching SFA Connect for more information as it is available.
UPDATE: A Couple Spots Remain for Fall Farm Skills 101

Are you ready to learn what it’s really like to be a forage-based livestock farmer? Do you need boots-on-the-ground farm experience in a relaxed environment led by farmer educators? Are you ready to learn “reality farming?”

SFA's Deep Roots Farm Skills 101 fall semester provides the hands-on skills new farmers need to succeed once they’re on the land. Registration for our fall semester is now open, and only a couple spots remain for anyone looking to build competence while learning from experienced teachers in a student-focused environment.

The on-farm classes meet Oct 2-3, 9-10, and 17-18. The online learning community commences the last week of September. Tuition is just $1,250 and includes lodging and local foods suppers. Scholarships are available. To learn more about the curriculum, the teachers or to register, visit deeprootsfarmer.com or contact Dr. Sue Wika at sue@sfa-mn.org.

Registration Open For Deep Winter Production Class

SFA's Deep Roots Farmer Development program is offering a short course, “Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy,” set for Nov. 7, 2015, at Paradox Farm north of Ashby, Minn. During the class, Paradox Farm owners Sue Wika and Tom Prieve will provide a detailed overview of the construction and operation of their deep-winter greenhouse, which utilizes passive solar energy with underground heat storage. Cost is $100. Farm Skills 101 graduates may register for $30. Click here to register for "Deep Winter Production."

For more information, contact sue@sfa-mn.org.

Vote Now for 2016 Annual Conference Session Topics

A founding concept of SFA is that there is wisdom in the community, so YOU will 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 choose session topics; we will analyze the data and create the schedule around your wishes.

To enter your topic ideas and vote using our system, visit our Annual Conference homepage.

Here are the current leading vote-getters:

- Know Before You Buy: What to Look/Out for When Considering a Property for a New Farm Project
- Farm Power Primer: Machinery Options, Operation and Maintenance
- Growing Fruits Organically in a Northern Climate
- Beyond the Farmer's Market: Marketing Alternatives for the Small and Mid-Sized Producer
- The Art of Stacking: Add Revenue Without More Acres
Establishing farm enterprises for young farmers on old farmers land, how to structure so it is fair for both parties.

- Basics of Farm-Scale Permaculture
- Maintaining a Forage Chain - Full Season
- Design and Equipment for Better Animal Handling Systems
- Fruit Farming in Minnesota

**Organic Valley Hosting Dairy Farm Tour Event**

Organic Valley is offering a tour of two organic dairy farms in Stearns County from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Sept. 15. The event begins with transportation departing from the Stearns History Museum, 235 33rd Ave S, St. Cloud, and traveling to the Neal and Karen Klaphake farm in Melrose, then on to the Joe and Toni Borgerding farm in Belgrade.

The farmer-led tours will highlight organic crop rotations, manure management, pastures and erosion control. This event is free and lunch is included.

RSVP by Sept. 8 to adam.warthesen@organicvalley.coop or 1.888.809.9297.

**MOSES Field Day at Riverbend Farm**

MOSES is hosting a free workshop, Organic Vegetables & Soil Fertility, from 1 to 4 p.m. Tues., Sept. 15, at Riverbend Farm, 5405 Calder Ave SE, Delano. Meet farmers and SFA members Greg and Mary Reynolds, the 2015 MOSES Organic Farmers of the Year, and learn about fresh market organic vegetables, seed production and saving, farm efficiency, and soil health.

Register at mosesorganic.org/events or 715.778.5775.

**Study: Farmers Markets More Affordable Than Stores**

A study led by SFA Deep Roots instructor Ryan Pesch examining the prices of produce found that the average price for a market basket of commonly purchased vegetables during peak growing season costs less at farmers markets in west-central Minnesota than at regional grocery stores. The average price at farmers markets was $12.85 while the price at regional grocery stores was $14.33.

“We wanted to help clear up mixed messages the public gets with regard to the cost of local foods,” Pesch said. “Some believe these are expensive alternatives while others go looking for bargains.”

The average farmers market price for cucumbers, green peppers, onions, string beans, summer squash, and sweet corn was less than the average grocery store price per pound.

The full study can be found at http://z.umn.edu/farmersmarketpricing.

**Check This Out**

From the Tri-State Neighbor, the headline says it all: "Minnesota Farmers Call Cover Crops ‘Amazing’"

**Annual Conference Photo Feature**

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2015 Annual Conference, held Feb. 14, 2015, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. To learn more about Crystal, visit her website.
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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