Mary Hanks Stepping Down From SFA State Board

By Jason Walker • Communications Coordinator

The longest-tenured member of SFA’s Board of Directors is stepping down. Mary Hanks, who joined SFA’s Cannon River Chapter in 1991 and our state board in the mid-90s, has decided to resign from her post. Mary, who is director of marketing and development at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, was the longtime board secretary and has been a dedicated leader for our organization – her intelligent, reasonable attitude will certainly be missed.

Hanks started at the Dept. of Ag in 1990, and soon after then-Cannon River coordinator Kirby Zicafoose invited her to an SFA meeting.

“I was so impressed with the farmers who were part of that initial group – sharing information and ideas, as well as their commitment,” she said. “Many of them were zealous about improving the sustainability of agriculture. It was inspiring and something that I felt like I wanted to be a part of, because I don’t come from a farming background and these were men and women I could learn from and be influenced by in my job. And they have influenced my job over the past 20 years.”

Hanks has seen much change regarding local food and sustainable ag during her time with the SFA board, and she’s optimistic about the future given the growing interest in local food.

“What’s changed is that more and more non-farm consumers are part of the conversation,” she said. “We’re being pulled rather than as pushing. The consumers want healthy food, they want water to be clean, they want connection with farmers.”

To read my complete interview with Hanks, SFA members should look for the annual CornerPost magazine in their mailboxes later this month. If you’re not a member, join this week to get on the CornerPost mailing list!

And many, many thanks to Mary for all her hard work on behalf of SFA and sustainable agriculture. To be clear, Mary will still be involved with SFA, just not on the state board. We’ll see her – and you, hopefully – at the Annual Conference Feb. 15-16 in Chaska.

Executive Director’s Note

By John Mesko

It’s hard to believe 2012 is nearly coming to a close, although this weekend’s snow was a great reminder that winter has definitely arrived. What’s also hard to believe is that it’s almost time for our Annual Conference at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum Feb. 15-16 in Chaska.
And now, registration for the 2013 SFA Annual Conference has begun. Visit this link and sign up at the earlybird rate. Choose to attend the Grazing Workshop on Friday or Mary Jane Miller's Culinary Workshops on Saturday, or pick the traditional route of our mix of educational sessions and networking sessions.

Whatever you choose, it's going to be a fun, practical weekend of education, conversation, food, drink and fun. We'd love to see you both days of the conference this year, as it's going to be packed with examples of the vitality and importance of our Farmer-to-Farmer Network™.

Please note that registration this year is being processed by the Arboretum's website, but you are registering for the SFA Annual Conference at this link. Or, if you prefer, call during arboretum business hours and pay by credit card or check at 952.443.1422. We can't wait to see you and all our members, supporters and friends. It's going to be a great time.

I look forward to seeing you in February!

**Nominations Sought for SFA Distinguished Service Awards**

SFA award season has begun: We're seeking nominations for the Farmer Emeritus and Distinguished Service awards, to be presented at the Leaders Breakfast during the 2013 SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 16 in Chaska.

Criteria are pretty simple: Farmer Emeritus nominees should have a distinguished career history of farming in Minnesota; Distinguished Service nominees must have a demonstrable strong connection to local food or sustainable agriculture.

If you know someone who fits either or both of these descriptions, please consider nominating them. Our SFA awards are special honors that reward the backbone members of our sustainable agriculture community, and we value a wide range of nominees. Last year's winners were Kent and Linda Solberg (Farmer Emeritus) and DeEtta Bilek and Mary Ellen Frame (Distinguished Service).

Please download the nomination form here, complete and send to: SFA, c/o Mary Hanks, 10500 295th Street W, Northfield, MN 55057, or email your nomination to Mary.Hanks@state.mn.us.

**MN Garlic Festival Seeks Vendor Coordinator**

Minnesota Garlic Festival is seeking a Vendor Coordinator to start in January, 2013. The Vendor Coordinator's duties include:

- Assist in updating the Vendor Application
- Manage online and mail-in vendor applications and work with the Festival Director to select vendors for the 2013 festival
- Maintain effective communications with vendors throughout the process
- Design the vendor layout map for the festival with the Festival Director
- Attend a coordinators meeting in Hutchinson in May
- Meet with the Festival Director as needed
- Supervise the marking of vendor booths at McLeod County Fairgrounds on Aug. 9, 2013 (the day before the festival)
- Supervise vendor set-up starting at 6 a.m. on Aug. 10, 2013, and manage vendor relations throughout the day
- Supervise vendor tear-down starting at 6 p.m. on festival day
- Submit a final report before Sept. 1, 2013
- Estimated hours needed: 80-100
Requirements: Excellent organizational skills, must own a computer, proficient with spreadsheet software, must own a car or have access to one, great people skills. Stipend: $1,000.00, plus mileage and supplies reimbursement. In 2012, there were 81 vendors at the festival and a total attendance of 3,700.

MN Garlic Festival is an educational outreach program produced by the Crow River Chapter, Sustainable Farming Association. Now in its eighth year, the festival strives to connect farmers and farm producers with each other and a wider base of customers, and to educate the public about advantages of sustainable farming practices, environmental stewardship and strong farming communities, all in an atmosphere of entertainment and festivity. The festival is "zero-waste event", and all coordinators work to achieve this goal.

Please contact: Jerry Ford, Festival Director, jerry@sfa-mn.org, 763-244-6659.

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.

Photo Contest Winner for November: Paul Stewart

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. Send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org, and we'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. And check out our Facebook page for all the photo submissions.

November's winner: Paul Stewart of Kingston, who sent this photo of loading grain at the Jungles Farm in Watkins.
Workshops Set on Wholesale Success with Produce

Join Atina Diffley, former co-owner of Gardens of Eagan and now official Wholesale Success trainer, for three daylong workshops devoted to learning about wholesale marketing and post-harvest handling of fruits and vegetables: cleaning, cooling, packing, storage, transport, sanitation, and more.

Diffley, who will also lead a session at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 15-16 at Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, draws on her decades of experience in large-scale vegetable production and marketing to provide operators of produce farms of any size with useful, practical, profit-making guidance on how to achieve the highest quality produce for sale. The workshops:

- Jan. 4, 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Beltrami Electric Co-op, Bemidji
- Jan. 26, 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Community Resource Bank, Northfield

Farmer-Buyer Networking will be part of the day’s events, coordinated by Renewing the Countryside. Farmers and potential wholesale buyers will have an opportunity to meet, learn about each other’s interests in locally grown produce, and exchange contact information. These sessions will take place during the last hour and a half at each location. Farmers and buyers who want to attend just the networking session may attend that session only for free. Workshop co-sponsors and collaborators include the SFA Crow River Chapter.

Cost is $15 and refreshments and lunch are provided. Register at www.misa.umn.edu, 800-909-6472, or email misamail@umn.edu.

For more information about each workshop, contact the local organizer:
- Bemidji: Linda Kingery, 218-281-8697 or kinge002@umn.edu
- Northfield: Kathy Zeman, (507) 664-9446 or kzeman@mfma.org

MDA Again Offering Winter Workshop Series

Help keep the winter doldrums at bay by attending a series of workshops sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) in January. Four workshops on a diverse array of farming topics will be offered Jan. 10, 2013, at the River’s Edge Convention Center in St. Cloud. Registration materials are available at www.mda.state.mn.us/amd or by calling the MDA at 651-201-6012 and asking for a "Winter Workshops" brochure. The workshops include:

- Building Better Bovines: Selection, Breeding, and Management for Top Returns, presented by Gerald Fry. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Fee: $50.
Meat Sales: The Rules and The Processing, a panel discussion hosted by MDA Meat Inspection Compliance Officer Levi Muhl. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Fee: $40.

Understanding Soil Health, presented by biological soil expert Gary Zimmer and his colleagues from Midwestern BioAg and Otter Creek Organic Farm. 1-5 p.m. Fee: $25.

Growing and Marketing Specialty Mushrooms: Oyster, Shiitake and Winecap, presented by Joe Krawczyk, Field & Forest Mushrooms. 1-4 p.m. Fee: $25.

Although they immediately precede the two-day Minnesota Organic Conference to be held Jan. 11-12, also in St. Cloud, these workshops are designed for all kinds of farmers – beginning and experienced, young and old, conventional and organic. More information about the Minnesota Organic Conference is at www.mda.state.mn.us/organic.

'Farming for Soil Health' Class this Winter in Glenwood

A two-part "Farming for Soil Health: Setting the Foundation for Success and Profitability" class will be offered this winter in Glenwood. The first part of the class will be held Jan. 15-17; the second part is Feb. 5-6. All sessions will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Central Square (105 2nd Ave. NE). The cost is $500 for the first person per farm, family or agency, and $250 for each additional person per unit. The registration deadline is Jan. 2.

This class is designed for farmers, landowners, natural resource professionals and anyone else who is interested in learning how to use the Holistic Management decision-making model to improve soil health in a manner that balances environmental protection, economic viability and quality of life.

The instructor will be Joshua Dukart, a Holistic Management certified educator who also works for the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District in North Dakota. Burleigh County is known nationally for the cutting-edge work farmers, conservationists and scientists there are doing to improve soil health utilizing a combination of cover cropping, managed grazing and conservation tillage.

This class is sponsored by the Chippewa 10% Project, a collaboration of the Land Stewardship Project and the Chippewa River Watershed Project. To register and for more information, contact Julia Ahlers Ness at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

Class Set for Farmers' Use of Social Media for Marketing

Ryan Pesch from the U of M Extension will lead an informational session on using social media to promote your ag production operation/local producer/grower network from 11 a.m.-2:30 pm. Dec. 15 in Lamberton. Pesch will teach attendees strategies for reaching out to customers and details about using Facebook and a variety of other marketing tools in the presentation, "Does online marketing have a place in your farm business?"

The event is at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center, 23669 130th St, Lamberton. Pre-registration is required; register here.

Farmers, Ag Businesses Target of New Grant Program

Minnesota agricultural producers and processors can now apply for grants to implement value added projects to their operations. A total of $700,000 in funding was made available through the Agricultural Growth, Research and Innovation Program (AGRI), established by the legislature to advance Minnesota’s agricultural and renewable energy industries. Specifically, these grants are intended to:

- initiate or expand livestock product processing;
- create feasibility, business, marketing and succession plans for existing and new businesses;
- purchase equipment to initiate, upgrade, or modernize value added businesses;
- increase on-farm food safety, such as implementation of a food safety plan
Proposals that have a meat processing, farm-to-school (or other institution) component, or are addressing Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) or similar type of food safety plan will receive priority, but all value-added proposals are encouraged to apply. Small to medium sized operations will also receive special consideration.

Apply here. For more information, contact David Weinand, MDA grants administrator, at 651-201-6646 or david.weinand@state.mn.us.

Back to Basics Sustainable Living Fair Set for Jan. 26

Happy Dancing Turtle will be hosting its annual Back to Basics sustainable living event from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Jan. 26, 2013, at Pine River-Backus school in Pine River. This year's theme will be "Steps Toward Sustainability: The Solution Is YOU!" Chuck Marohn, President of the Community Growth Institute, will be the keynote speaker.

Happy Dancing Turtle is looking for sponsors, exciting new ideas and knowledgeable presenters for workshops as well as quality vendors and exhibitors, providing quality products and information to help participants lead more sustainable lives.

Join the workshop for a fun filled day of learning, networking, and inspiration. For more details please visit the Happy Dancing Turtle website http://www.happydancingturtle.org/.

Grant Funds for Sustainable Farming Innovations

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program will award up to $100,000 in 2013 for on-farm sustainable agriculture research or demonstration projects. The MDA is now accepting applications for the grant program which promotes environmental stewardship and conservation of resources and strives to improve profitability and quality of life on farms and in rural areas.

Grant applications are available on the MDA website at http://go.usa.gov/YBSj or by contacting the Agricultural Marketing and Development Division at 651-201-6012. Completed applications must be received by MDA no later than Jan. 11, 2013.

Minneapolis Schools Seeks Farmer-Student Links

Many Minneapolis Public Schools students are more familiar with processed food from bags and boxes than farm-fresh fruits and veggies. Most have never met a farmer before. Therefore, MPS is looking for growers who'd like to make a difference in our students' lives, and get them excited about fresh, locally-grown fruits & veggies.

Get involved by visiting visit a school this winter and talking to students about what you do, why it's important, and how the food choices students make impact neighboring farmers. MPS can offer a small stipend for your time.

Or, become a pen pal to a class of elementary school students and write a letter to them once or twice a month. Share pictures, how the fall went, plans for the upcoming season, or what farmers do in their rare spare time.

MPS will help connect you with a school and coordinate all of the logistics. Contact Andrea at 612-568-2424 or farm2school@mpls.k12.mn.us for more information.

Opinions Sought in Farmer Internship Survey

A four-question, informal survey is being conducted by researchers at the University of Minnesota to gather preliminary data for a SARE grant proposal. Our goal is to better understand farmers’ thoughts and concerns about internships. We welcome a diversity of farm
Scholarship Created for Sustainable Food Program

Fergus Area College Foundation has established a scholarship to provide financial assistance to a second-semester student in the Sustainable Food Production program at M-State Fergus Falls. Program faculty will recommend eligible candidates, and the final determination of the scholarship recipient will be made each December.

Those interested in helping students pursue study in the sustainable agriculture field may make a tax-deductible donation to the Sustainable Food Production program scholarship fund. Checks should be sent to Fergus Area College Foundation, 1414 College Way, Fergus Falls, MN 56537. Or donate online at www.minnesota.edu/facf; click on "Making Donations" and write "Sustainable Food Production" in the comments section.

For more information, contact Carolyn Glesne at 218.736.1514 or facf@minnesota.edu.

MDA Has $1 Million in Funds for State 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.

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.

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.

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