Annual Conference Schedule Announced; Nearly 8,000 Votes Cast by SFA Supporters on Session Topic Ideas

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

You spoke, and we listened – after tallying nearly 8,000 votes from SFA members and supporters, we have developed the schedule for our Annual Conference, set for Feb. 14, 2015, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph.
The schedule includes the top vote-getters from our survey as well as staff, board and grant-related recommendations. More details and added presenters for each session are still rolling in; for the most up-to-date version of the schedule, visit our Annual Conference schedule homepage.

With two months until the conference we’ve already registered 75 people for the Conference – clearly the buzz is building about our yearly farmer networking showcase. Without further ado, then, here are the sessions scheduled for the 2015 SFA Annual Conference. More presenters may be added to these sessions, and other changes are possible, but here is what we have so far:

- **Better than California: How to Grow Fabulous Greens During Deep Winter in Minnesota** – with Sue Wika and Tom Prieve of Paradox Farm and the SFA Sustainable Food Production Program
- **Deep Winter Greenhouse Networking Group Organizational Meeting** – with Carol Ford
- **Navigating the Pinball Game of Finance Options** – with Jan Joannides of Renewing the Countryside and Pam Bishop of the Southern MN Initiative Foundation
- **Disruptive Conservation** – with Tim Gieseke of Ag Resource Strategies and Jim Chamberlin, SFA Association Board President
- **Fencing Systems** – with Kent Solberg, SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist and owner of Seven Pines Farm and Fence
- **Food Hubs in Minnesota** – with Joe Domineer of MN Valley Action Council and Arlene Jones and Jessie Sprout of Brainerd
- **Resources for SFA Chapters** – with SFA Network Coordinator Jerry Ford
- **Adjust 2015: Stories From New Farms** – with John Mesko
- **Salvaging, Adapting, Repurposing Equipment & Buildings** – with Josh Reinitz and Daniel Zetah
- **Youth Conference Kickoff** – detailing our upcoming Youth Conference with John Mesko
- **Post Harvest Vegetable Handling: Quality Produce from the Field to the Box** – with Lisa Baker of Baker’s Acres Farm
- **Small Dairy Resources** – with Kent Solberg
- **Your Legal Questions: Asked and Answered** – with Jennifer Jambor-Delgado and Amanda Heyman of Jambor Heyman
- **Integrated Crop & Livestock Systems** – with Kent Solberg
- **Sheep Farming Basics** – with Wayne Martin from the University of Minnesota Extension

Our Culinary Session with Mary Jane Miller is also coming together, and as usual Mary Jane has a full day’s worth of food, drink and cooking demonstrations on tap. This schedule is still being finalized, but as of today the frontrunners are:

- **Cooking With and For Kids** – Bring new ideas to the family table and bring the farm to the high chair and lunch box.
- **Start with a Rotisserie Chicken** – Get the inside scoop on how to shop for a good roasted bird and taste creative ideas for dinner in a hurry.
- **Grassfed Beef: The Art of Braising** – Learn how to coax the best from grassfed beef with long, gentle cooking. Taste braised short ribs, slow cooker Italian beef ragout, and Argentinian pulled beef sandwiches.

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July 11, 2015: FESTIVAL OF FARMS

Aug. 15, 2015: MINNESOTA GARLIC FESTIVAL, McLeod County Fairgrounds, Hutchinson, Minn.
Stump the Sommelier – Mary Jane will cook dishes that are notoriously hard to pair wines with; Marcus Hanson will take a shot at choosing the perfect wine for each. Taste along and see if you agree!

Remember, for the most up-to-date schedule, always check out our "Annual Conference Schedule and Other Cool Stuff" page. And if you haven't registered, do so today as the price goes up after Dec. 31.

Executive Director's Note

The MN Organic Conference is right around the corner! January 9-10 is only 3 weeks away! I’d also like to remind you about the 2015 Winter Workshops that are being held in conjunction with the Organic Conference on Jan. 8, 2015. There are some really great longer-format workshops available and since they are just the day before the conference, you can make the most of your time!

Special for SFA members! If you are a paid SFA member, you can attend the "Reality Checking your Farm Plan workshop for free ($25 for non-members). This is one of the results of our Adjust 2015 project which we’ve been working on for the past 2 years.

In the workshop, we'll review the key difficulties experienced farmers told us they faced early in their farming careers. We’ll also give you tools to help you avoid the most common of those pitfalls, which will strengthen your plan and ultimately improve your chances of long-term success. Specifically, we'll be covering financial benchmarks you should be incorporating into your plan, considerations for business plan assumptions, dealing with and planning for changes in family structure and function as well as tools for building a team of experts to help you launch your business.

If you are thinking about farming, planning to farm, or have just started farming, this workshop will be of interest and benefit to you. If you have any questions about the program, call me at 763-260-0209, or to register, click here. See you there!

SFA Annual Conference Tidbits

- **Chapters**: Take part in our Opening Session Chapter Showcase by giving a one-minute introduction of your chapter, and share your happenings from 2014 and what you're planning for 2015. Or, foster conversation and promote chapter engagement throughout the conference by preparing a tri-fold display to show all your chapter's projects. SFA Communications Coordinator Jason Walker can provide chapters with display advice, graphics and fonts; email him at jason@sfa-mn.org. To reserve a spot for your showcase presentation and your display, contact Helen Schnoes, SFA Event Coordination Intern: helenaschnoes@gmail.com or 612.741.1591.

- **Through Feb. 1, 2015**, we will be collecting SFA members’ most important questions for attorneys Jennifer Jambor-Delgado and Amanda Heyman to answer during a special session at the Annual Conference. At the conference, Jambor-Delgado and Heyman will provide information about how smart legal strategies can help grow and protect your business. Join us in making this great opportunity a success – send your questions to hello@jamborheyman.com.

- **Socialize with your farmer friends the night before** the SFA Annual Conference during a reception and jam session from 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 13 at Minnesota Street Market (the food co-op in downtown St. Joseph). Bring the whole family, your instruments, or just drop in to say hello. The event is free, but RSVP by Feb. 9 to lisa@bakersacresfarm.com if you would like to buy a simple soup meal served at the co-op.

- **Art and science projects, cooking lessons and more** – the Budding Farmers program is...
coming to the 2015 SFA Annual Conference. Children attending must be between 3 and 12 years old and potty trained; kids under 3 are welcome to attend the conference but are the responsibility of their parents. Click here to register.

- Volunteer registration is now open – all 2015 volunteers receive a newly designed SFA t-shirt. Volunteers are needed to be session monitors, help with parking and registration, setup/teardown, and more. To volunteer or to learn more, contact SFA Volunteer Coordinator Gretchen Boyum at 218.535.1567 or boyumfarms@gmail.com.

- Register through Dec. 30 at the Early Bird rate of $45-members and $55/nonmembers. SFA members should have received a separate email with discount registration instructions. Only SFA members will receive this separate email – new members will upon signup.

- Vendor/Exhibitor Registration is open as well. Visit our Annual Conference homepage to download the proper form.

- Scholarships to attend the SFA Annual Conference are available for current students and require a volunteer commitment; for more information, email Jerry Ford at jerry@sfa-mn.org.

MSHS Returns With Gabe Brown and Dr. Allen Williams

Tickets are moving fast for SFA's second annual Midwest Soil Health Summit, featuring Gabe Brown, set for Feb. 18-19, 2015, at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn.

The MSHS, newly expanded for 2015, also will feature Dr. Allen Williams, a champion of the grass-fed beef industry.

Brown, the keynote speaker, owns Brown's Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D., and is a pioneer in diverse cover cropping who has used no-till techniques for two decades. At the 2015 MSHS, Gabe will discuss soil health programming for beginners as well as lead a separate program for advanced farmers – if you attended the previous MSHS, rest assured this year's version will include plenty of fresh information from Gabe.

The exact schedule will be online soon; note that the event begins at 1 p.m. Feb. 18 with "Soil Science Basics" led by John Mesko.

Last year's MSHS was a sellout; register now to guarantee your spot. Walk-up registration will be dependent on pre-registration numbers, and SFA members receive a $50 registration discount. Click here to register.

Also scheduled to appear:

- Jerry Doan, farmer from Black Leg Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D., a multi-generational family farm that emphasizes soil health.
- Dr. Michael Lehman, a research microbiologist whose studies include evaluating soil microbiological responses to agricultural management practices.
- Dr. Wendy Taheri, a research microbiologist who specializes in the study of arbuscular mycorrhilzal fungi (AMF).
- Kent Solberg, SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist, will discuss Designing Complex Cover Crop Blends
- John Mesko, SFA Executive Director, will lead a bonus program on Soil Science Basics
- Ian Cunningham, a cow-calf producer and veteran cover cropper from Pipestone County, Minn.

Also returning this year is our exclusive "Gab With Gabe" networking session from 4 to 6 p.m. Feb. 18, 2015, with Gabe Brown. ONLY A HANDFUL OF TICKETS REMAIN at $50 each for this chance to network one-on-one with a soil health pioneer. You must register for the MSHS separately – this ticket will ONLY get you into "Gab With Gabe." Click here to register for "Gab With Gabe."

Need a room? Arrowwood Resort is a family friendly location with ice fishing, cross country ski
trails, snowmobiling, ice skating, broomball, and more. For more information or to reserve a room at the special MSHS rate of $99, call the resort at 320.762.1124.

Check this Out

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

- Our recent Keep Cattle in Minnesota Soil Health Webinar, featuring Midwest Soil Health Summit presenters Drs. Wendy Taheri and Michael Lehman, is permanently archived on our KCIM homepage. Click here and scroll down a bit to find the webinar.

- From Practical Farmers of Iowa: "New research by a multi-state team of agronomists working with the Midwest Cover Crops Council (MCCC) suggests that up to 19 million acres of corn and soybean ground in the upper Mississippi River Basin has the potential to incorporate cover crops, which would decrease nitrogen entering the Gulf of Mexico by up to 400 million pounds." Read it here.

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.

![Annual Conference Photo Feature](image)

Minnesota Organic Conference Registration Now Open

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has opened registration for the 2015 Minnesota Organic Conference. This farmer-focused event and associated trade show is being held Jan. 9-10 in St. Cloud. Organizers expect 500-600 people to attend and are offering an early bird discount rate until Dec. 26.

Free for SFA members is a pre-Organic Conference workshop, "Reality Checking Your Farm Plan," presented by SFA’s John Mesko. This workshop is a product of our recent three-year Adust 2015 project, which interviewed hundreds of farmers. To learn more about this workshop, click here.

Program information, registration forms, and a growing list of trade show vendors are available
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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