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At its meeting Oct. 26 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Acting President Jim Chamberlin and the SFA Association Board of Directors elected three new at-large board members and welcomed a new South Central Chapter representative.

Elected to the three at-large positions were Liz Morris Otto, Betsy Wieland and Dale Woodbeck. The new South Central Chapter representative is Tom Ehrhardt.

The new board members bring a diverse mix of experience, influence and expertise.

“SFA has grown as an organization in recent years,” said SFA Executive Director John Mesko. “In its wisdom, the Board of Directors has realized the need for a broader set of connections and skills, and has added three new at-large positions. The people the board has filled these positions with are going to be great assets to our organization and to sustainable agriculture.”

Tom Ehrhardt and his brother Mac own and operate Albert Lea Seed. His focus is actively working with growers of native grass and forb seed for conservation projects along with marketing farm and field seeds throughout the Upper Midwest. Tom is in the process of restoring 10 acres to native habitat and is an active bee keeper.

Liz Morris Otto is currently Chief Garden Officer for Haberman, a Minneapolis-based integrated marketing agency that tells the stories of pioneers who make a difference in the world. As CGO, Liz oversees the management of Haberman’s employer-sponsored garden on her farm in Delano. By design, the garden promotes an appreciation for rural farmers and organic, locally produced food among Haberman’s 40 urban professionals. Liz’s role is an outgrowth of her tenure with Haberman. In myriad of positions—from account executive to partner—she’s told stories of brands that connect with her own passions, including Organic Valley, Lundberg Family Farms, Annie’s Homegrown, Volvo Cars of North America, and polar explorers Ann Bancroft and Liv Arnesen. She is passionate about supporting her local community, helping to lead a local 4-H club, the Crow River Connect the Dots group, and marketing/fundraising initiatives at her children’s school.

Betsy Wieland is Center Program Manager for University of Minnesota Extension’s Center for Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Sciences, providing resources and leadership to Extension faculty across the state. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in Animal Science at University of Wisconsin, and Master’s degree in Agronomy at the University of Minnesota. She was a county agriculture extension educator for nine years, working with farms of all types. At home in Stillwater she enjoys her vegetable garden, horses, quilting, spending time with her husband (Paul) and toddler son (Toby), and daydreaming of quitting her job to farm.

Dale Woodbeck is general manager of Lakewinds Co-op and is Board Chair at MISA. He is also a board member at the Organic Processing Institute and a lifetime SFA member.

**SFA Award Nominations Now Being Accepted**

SFA is accepting nominations for the 2014 Farmer Emeritus and Distinguished Service awards, to be honored at the Leaders Breakfast at the SFA Annual Conference on Sat., Feb. 8, 2014, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn.

The Farmer Emeritus award will be given to a farmer or farm family, currently farming or retired, that has dedicated many years to the advancement of sustainable farming in Minnesota.

The SFA Distinguished Service Award is for a farmer or non-farmer who has shown a high level of dedication, commitment, service and perseverance to supporting sustainable agriculture in Minnesota.
Email nominations to mary.hanks@state.mn.us or mail to Mary Hanks, 10500 295th St W, Northfield, MN 55057. The deadline for nominations is Jan. 17, 2014.

Past winners, the nomination form and more information is available on our SFA Awards page.

Executive Director’s Note

The following is an excerpt from a column by John Mesko. To read the entire column, click here.

Do we really believe sustainable agriculture, focused on building up its resources (soil, animals, people), is sustainable? Do we really believe industrial agriculture is not sustainable?

I do. And if you do, I would encourage you to behave as if you really believe it. By definition, we should be confident in our assessment of the future of agriculture. In so doing, I trust we will not be contributing to the kind of misunderstandings and “us-vs.-them” mentality that has led to the current perception in mainstream ag media and university extension about sustainable agriculture.

Case in point: I recently read a blog post entitled “Sustainable?” at MN Farm Guide which made a number of condescending and disparaging remarks about practitioners of sustainable agriculture.

The blog belongs to Dr. George Rehm, a former University of MN Extension Specialist and currently Director of Discovery Farms Minnesota. Conveniently, however, Dr. Rehm does not claim authorship of this particular blog post. In this case, he says’ he’s found a “guest blogger,” a “Mr. Lay Zee Jones,” to go negative on sustainable agriculture.

Despite attempts to reach Dr, Rehm, in hopes of getting some clarification of his, er, ”Mr. Jones” intent prior to writing this response, I’ve been unable to contact him.

But as it pertains to our work here at SFA, this post is a tangible reflection of the impact our movement is having. If sustainable agriculture weren’t viable, there’d be no need for anyone to waste the time to write a post like this. It’s also a wake-up call. The post reflects the impression the author, the publisher, some (not all) within the University of MN, and some within the conventional agriculture world in general have of sustainable agriculture, and those of us who identify as sustainable farmers. According to “Mr. Jones,” sustainable farmers:

- are lazy
- spend free time playing video games
- smoke marijuana
- are naïve
- aren’t “real” farmers

If this is what conventional agriculture thinks of sustainable farmers, we need to convince them otherwise.

Speaking specifically for Sustainable Farming Association, and generally for the whole of sustainable agriculture, we are not a club of like-minded folks who don’t have a prayer of making a difference in agriculture.

The premise of sustainable agriculture is founded on understanding the short and long-term effects of everything we do in the environment. It’s working with natural systems and processes to build up the resources at our disposal; not attempting to subdue nature with the latest technology. We know it works, and we believe industrial agriculture practices are unsustainable. We should be doing everything we can to be approachable, kind, considerate, respectful and welcoming to everyone who asks politely, or condescendingly, about whether or not our brand of agriculture is viable.
Chapter Update: Crow River

Crow River Chapter announces its annual meeting: “Local Food, the Next Step.”

Crow River is taking a different approach to their Annual Chapter Meeting this year, set for 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Jan. 4 at Gale Woods Farm in Minnetrista. It will be an intense and inspiring gathering as we seek to expand the breadth and depth of local food production. We’ve assembled quite a roster of movers, shakers and experts to lead the discussion:

- Danny Schwarzman, Common Roots Cafe
- Mike Phillips, Red Table
- Barb Mechura, Hopkins Schools
- Lucia Watson, Lucia’s Restaurant
- Doug Hilgendorf, Whole Grain Milling
- Carrie Nicklow, Driven Donkey
- Carl Blanz and Gina Coburn – Three Crows Cafe and Restaurant, Delano
- Valerie Gamble – State of Minnesota Food Inspection Supervisor
- Dale Woodbeck – Lakewinds Natural Foods
- Jenny Breen – Good Life Catering

Join this diverse of local farm and food thinkers to discuss how to move beyond CSA’s and summer farmers markets and broaden our local food production capabilities.

Lunch is a potluck with a main course by Mary Jane Miller, and a social time will follow the last session. Cost: $10 plus membership renewal. Registration: www.sfa-mn.org/crow-river, or request a printable form from Jerry Ford, jerry@sfa-mn.org.

Annual Conference: Survey-Driven Topics, Culinary Sessions, and More

We’ve been saying all along that our upcoming Annual Conference, “Going Back to Our Roots,” is all about the Minnesota sustainable farming community - and we mean it. We got lots of response to our survey on what sessions you all wanted, and we’ve designed the content of the conference primarily around that very thing. Then we took recommendations from association board directors and chapter leaders on what they thought was needed. And, finally, we are including sessions driven by our ongoing projects. This has resulted in an intense schedule of 20 sessions, most of which will be “discussion format” – led by a couple of experts, but focusing on the wisdom and needs of the community.

Also, SFA’s Network Coordinator, Jerry Ford, will roll out the Chapter Resources Program, which will help each of our chapters to become even more active and vibrant. Intended for chapter leaders and interested members, the session will introduce you to this new program, and Jerry will be looking for your input.

Plus the Friday night social events, kids programming and all those vendors and exhibitors.

For a complete detailed schedule and to register, visit our conference homepage.
Innovators to Convene at Midwest Soil Health Summit

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

The [Midwest Soil Health Summit](#) is set for Feb. 19-20, 2014, at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, convening 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.

**Note to SFA members:** Registration is available at a $50 discount for current SFA members. You should have been emailed a discount code; if you need help or a reminder about the code, email Jason Walker at [jason@sfa-mn.org](mailto:jason@sfa-mn.org).

As it develops, the Summit is becoming what we intended: the bridge between what SFA stands for and what soil health experts practice every single day.

The slate includes:

- **Gabe Brown** of Brown’s Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D.
- **Richard Bieber**, a producer from South Dakota, has been practicing no-till for 27 years and cover cropping for over a decade.
- **Wendy Taheri**, Research Microbiologist with the North Central Agricultural Research Laboratory.
- **Jay Fuhrer**, District Conservationist with the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in Bismarck, N.D.
- **Kent Solberg**, SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator

More information, registration and exhibitor/sponsor applications are all available at our [MSHS homepage](#).

Up Next on KCIM Slate: Redwood Falls, Moose Lake Events

SFA’s [Keep Cattle in Minnesota](#) project, our series of workshops that provides producers with management options that have demonstrated the ability to reduce operational cost, provide additional income streams and improve soil health, has two upcoming workshops planned.

The next KCIM event is set for Dec. 17 at the Grant and Dawn Breitkreutz farm, 38270 Kenwood Ave, Redwood Falls. No registration is required for this free event, which will include a discussion on winter cattle-feeding techniques and a farm tour.

Also planned is a KCIM program Jan. 17 at Moose Lake Library, 313 Elm Ave, Moose Lake, that includes a presentation and caravan to tour Abe Mach’s farm in Sturgeon Lake. This event is also free and no registration is required.

Further, SFA is partnering with Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council (Leader Lions) to host a KCIM event from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Feb. 11 at Central Lakes College in Staples. The event features Josh Dukart and Ken Miller, district technicians from Burleigh County (N.D.) Soil Conservation District, who will focus on soil health and profitability as related to cattle production. Check-in for the event begins at 9 a.m. Cost is $15, which includes lunch. [Click here to register](#).

For more information on all of these events, visit our [Keep Cattle In Minnesota homepage](#).
Local Foods College to Focus on Production, Safety, Marketing

The 2014 Local Foods College, a series of eight sessions designed for gardeners and farmers that are part of the growing community-based food system to learn better production, food safety and marketing skills, begins Jan. 21 and will continue on Tuesday evenings through mid-March.

The series will be available via webinar at several locations throughout northern and central Minnesota, and may also be viewed at a home computer. Registration is FREE with print-your-own materials. If you prefer to purchase printed materials, they are available, $30 for printed materials for the entire series mailed to you, and $25 for the Beginner Growers Manual.

Session topics include: Soil Quality and Fertility; Specialty Products: Asparagus, Garlic, Wild Foods, Harvester Handbook; Tree Fruit and Berries in High Tunnel; Post Harvest Handling and Storage, Peddling your Pickles Safely, Food safety for Farmers Markets; Marketing Local Foods: and Commercial Kitchens for Processing Local Food.

The Local Foods College is supported by University of Minnesota Extension, the Statewide Health Improvement Program and North Country Community Transformation Grant. For more detailed information and registration, visit: http://localfoods.umn.edu/college or call 888-241-0781.

IATP Hosting 'Farmers to Health Care Markets' Webinar

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy is hosting a free webinar, "Connecting Sustainable Farmers to Emerging Health Care Markets – A Farmer-Focused Presentation," from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Dec. 17. The webinar will discuss the key findings and lessons learned from IATP’s Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) project.

Hospitals and hospital systems represent a sizable potential market for sustainable farmers, and interest in increasing purchases of local, sustainably produced food among hospitals and hospital systems is growing. However, limited hospital resources and the complexity of food purchase contracts and agreements at many hospitals have prevented farmers from accessing this market in any significant way to date. To assess the current and potential health care food markets for North Central region sustainable farmers, IATP compiled and analyzed purchasing data from three participating health system collaborators for all food and beverage purchases, including those that meet sustainability criteria outlined in the Green Guide for Health Care. Using surveys and phone interviews of key hospital personnel and sustainable farmers; and input gathered from an advisory committee, IATP gathered data to provide insights into opportunities for and roadblocks to hospital sourcing of more local, sustainably produced food.

Click here to register. For more information, email Catherine Reagan at creagan@iatp.org.

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.
Submit Cool Photo, Win SFA T-shirt

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.

Sustainable Food Production Program Deep Winter Class

A new class from the SFA Sustainable Food Production Program, "Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy," will be held from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Jan. 25, 2014, in Ashby, Minn.

During the class, 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. The greenhouse provides greens for local consumers. In addition, the structure is utilized to produce fodder for the farm livestock. Students will be in the greenhouse to see how greens and fodder are planted and harvested.

Cost is $100/person. Bring a sack lunch. Beverage and fresh winter salad (grown on site) provided.

The class will be held at Paradox Farm, 11643 State Hwy 78, Ashby, MN 56309 (Directions: 7 miles north of Ashby; 10 miles south of Battle Lake).

For more information and to register, click here.
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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