Annual Conference: Ableman, Seeley, Spivak Lead the Pack

By Jason Walker • Communications Coordinator

Happy Holidays from the Sustainable Farming Association. We hope you're having fun however you choose to spend the season.

The schedule for the SFA Annual Conference is coming together nicely. The sessions are going to be updated at this link on our homepage, and registration is currently under way here. Please check back often as I will be updating the schedule with session information and presenter biographies as they roll in.

We know our two-day conference will be a great time, of course, but also it's confirmed that each day will have a keynote address: Mark Seeley will speak on Friday morning, and Michael Ableman will lead off Saturday's slate. Seeley is a climatologist, author, and professor at the University of Minnesota. His presentation will detail how weather and climate impacts to Minnesota agriculture, transportation, energy, tourism, and natural resources. Ableman is founder of the Center for Urban Agriculture at Fairview Gardens, and author of "On Good Land" and "Field of Plenty."

Oh, we've also confirmed Marla Spivak for a session on pollinators. Spivak, a researcher at the University of Minnesota, is a renowned expert on the health of honey and native bee pollinators. And Atina Diffley, organic consultant, author of "Turn Here Sweet Corn" and Gardens of Eagan founder, will be leading a session, too.

See, isn't this exciting stuff?

Also new this year is a separate all-day educational track each day, each of which will begin promptly after the keynote address. Friday is the Advanced Grazing Workshop, and Saturday is Mary Jane Miller's Culinary Workshop. You may register to attend either or simply register to attend the general sessions; we're just hoping to give folks some specialized options as part of the two-day extravaganza.

Keep reading SFA Connect for updates, and check the homepage, too.

Now for a plea: It's almost the end of 2012, and many of you are considering year-end charitable donations. Can you contribute $50 and support SFA and its mission? To make a tax-deductible donation to SFA, please click here. Support from you, the members of our Farmer-to-Farmer Network™, is what keeps our blood pumping.

Thanks for everything in 2012, and here's to 2013.

Executive Director's Note
By John Mesko

As 2012 winds down, I'd like to take an opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to a very successful year. Our board, our members and our staff have all pulled together and are building a strong Farmer to Farmer Network. We believe that farmers are best equipped to support and teach other farmers. To this end, we've begun to strengthen and enhance our Network. And as we roll into 2013, that's what you'll begin to see more of from SFA.

Starting with our Annual Conference in February, you'll see more networking, more support, and more real-world solutions to the issues and challenges sustainable farmers are facing.

Thanks again, for your interest and support of SFA, and ultimately, your support of Sustainable Agriculture. Here's wishing you and yours a Happy and Prosperous New Year!

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.

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.

Grant Funds Available for Sustainable Farming Innovations

MDA Has $1 Million for State's Livestock Farmers

SUPPORT SFA

Join SFA

Give to SFA

SFA EVENTS

Annual Conference
Sat., Feb. 16, 2013
Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, Chaska

SFA WORK

New Crops Project
SFA's New Crops Project aims to expand the availability of local foods in Minnesota and help farmers expand their markets. For information, visit Bobby Wenner's New Crops blog.

Minnesota Dairy Initiative
For information about MDI and its ongoing projects, contact Kent Solberg at mdi@sfa-mn.org.

Meat Processing
The Northeast Regional Correctional Facility has a meat processing plan that is inspected for part of the year. See a slideshow of
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.

BONUS NOTE: We haven't received any submissions for December. It's cold out there, sure, but that snow makes for mighty purty photos. Submit one before Jan. 1 and you have a great chance of winning.

November's winner: Paul Stewart of Kingston, who sent this photo of loading grain at the Jungles Farm in Watkins.
Lakewinds Natural Foods Launching Field Fund

Lakewinds Natural Foods is proud to announce Lakewinds Organic Field Fund applications are now available.

Lakewinds Organic Field Fund was developed to have an impact on the lives of local organic farmers, farming associations and the local organic food industry. Supporting like-minded organizations is part of the mission at Lakewinds. We believe it will deepen our connections with farms and organizations that supply local and organic food to our member-owners and customers.

Lakewinds Organic Field Fund is available primarily to farms and farming associations located in Minnesota, northern Iowa, and western Wisconsin. It focusing on projects such as organic certification, research and development, farms transitioning from conventional to organic, new organic farms, land trusts for organic farms, and related training and education. Visit our homepage for eligibility information and an application, and to view our 2012 Lakewinds Organic Field Fund recipient video.

Minnesota Farmers Eligible for GAP Certification Cost Share

Food safety has become a front-page issue all across the country, resulting in increased requirements being placed on farmers by many wholesale buyers such as distributors, restaurants, schools and grocers. To help Minnesota farmers become Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified, the MDA is using AGRI funding to reimburse Minnesota farmers for 75 percent of the cost of receiving GAP certification up to a maximum payment of $2,500. Cost share payments are available for farms who incurred GAP certification expenses between Jan. 1, 2012 and May 15, 2013.

Applications and details are available online or by calling Cassie Boadway at 651.201.6134.

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 Gearld 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 in 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.

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
- increase farmers’ processing and aggregating capacity to enter farm-to-school and other
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.

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.