A Great Conference at a Great Resort: Attend the Midwest Soil Health Summit and Network With Soil Health Experts

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Driving on treacherously snowy, windswept roads to visit relatives in Iowa last week for Christmas, the vast, vegetation-free fields that stretched to the horizon seemed particularly irresponsible. If the surrounding farms utilized cover cropping and better soil management techniques, I kept thinking, then maybe the snow wouldn't blow like the dickens and create slick roads that were turning a simple drive into a white-knuckle exercise for me and my family.

Experiences like that magnify the need for a comprehensive educational event like our Midwest Soil Health Summit, set for Feb. 19-20 at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn. With an elite roster of expert speakers like Gabe Brown, Richard Bieber, Wendy Taheri, Jay Fuhrer, Ryan Stockwell and our own Kent Solberg, the Summit is going to be two days of crucial farmer education and networking that can make a real difference in the health of any farm's soil.

No matter what you produce or what farming methods you use, attending the Midwest Soil Health Summit can give farmers in the Upper Midwest a leg up on vital soil bacteria and fungi, extreme weather resistance, enhanced profitability and more.

Our roster of presenters alone speaks volumes – folks on the cutting edge of sustainable agriculture all in one package. We’re awfully excited about the networking opportunities that are going to be created at this new conference, too, as we attract longtime SFA members as well as farmers new to the idea of sustainablity.

It's starting to become more and more clear: The issue of soil health has the potential to be a tipping point in the mainstream growth of sustainable farming. And no matter if you're Gabe Brown, a conventional corn-and-soybean farmer or anybody in between, the need to keep building the health of your soil always remains.

Besides the conference theme, the other exciting thing about the Midwest Soil Health Summit is its tranquil location: Arrowwood Resort is a beautiful setting with activities like skating, a spa, horse-drawn sleigh rides, ice fishing, snowmobile rentals and an indoor water park. A break at the Summit may be just what your family needs in the middle of winter.
Registration for the Midwest Soil Health Summit is $150 per person for the general public and just $100 for SFA members. Click here to register. And booking your room at Arrowwood is easy at 320.762.1124.

Even a simple drive this time of year proves the importance of soil health. Register today and get the Midwest Soil Health Summit on your calendar. You won't be disappointed.

Also, watch for a complete MSHS schedule to be published soon.

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

As each year wraps up, its common to reflect on the past and vision about the future. Well, 2013 was a great year for SFA. If you are a paid member of SFA, you should have received our annual Cornerpost paper newsletter in the past month. In it you will find a full report on the progress SFA has made on our mission and our work within the sustainable agriculture movement in 2013. (incidentally, if you are not a paid member, its not to late to become one. Join in 2013, and we'll mail you a Cornerpost!)

Additionally we saw steady growth in memberships and chapter activities in 2013, and for 2014, there’s even more planned as the Network Development Project rolls on. You can see and learn more about SFAs Farmer-to-Farmer Network at the 2014 Annual Conference.

Response to the Op Ed piece I recently submitted to the MN Farm Guide has been overwhelming. Many of you have contacted me about the column I wrote, and many more of you have apparently contacted MN Farm Guide. This morning, I spent about 30-45 min. on the phone with Andrea Johnson, Asst. Editor. She was calling to assure me that despite appearances, industrial agriculture does not have a “gag order” on my column at MFG. The website recently pulled it down inadvertently, but now it is back up online for all to see. I was grateful for the call from Ms. Johnson, as it gave me a chance to continue what we’ve started here at the end of 2013 and that’s reaching out to all agricultural producers of all stripes.

Sustainable agriculture is for everyone. By definition, its the only brand of agriculture we are going to have in the future, so we need everyone on board. In 2014, SFA will continue our important programming on the specifics of sustainable agriculture practices, and we will reach out to other farm organizations in an attempt to tear down the walls that separate us and to foster new relationships and growth.

How often do you get asked to support a cause that is inviting others to the table, rather than hunkering down around a prescribed set of beliefs? Won’t you support SFA with a year-end tax deductible contribution? Your donation of $25, $50, or $100 will be multiplied many times by the effort of our Farmer-to-Farmer Network.
Thank you for a great 2013, and here’s wishing you and yours a blessed, prosperous and very Happy New Year!

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.

Up Next on KCIM Slate: Moose Lake, Staples 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.

First 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.

Burleigh County SCD Hosting Soil Health Workshop

The Burleigh County (N.D.) Soil Conservation District is hosting its annual Soil Health Workshop, “Finding Your Path,” from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 23, 2014, at the Ramkota Hotel, 800 S 3rd St, Bismarck, N.D.

Speakers include Ray Archuleta, Soil Health Specialist/Agronomist at USDA-NRCS, Greensboro, N.C.; Dr. Rick Haney, ARS Soil Scientist at Grassland, Soil & Water Research Lab, Temple, Texas; and Jay Fuhrer, Burleigh County NRCS.

The event is free but registration is required if you wish to eat lunch. Register by Jan. 17 by calling 701-250-4518 Ext. 3 or online at www.bcsrd.com.
Lakewinds Announces 2014 Organic Field Fund

Lakewinds Natural Foods is now accepting applications for the 2014 Organic Field Fund, a grant program that provides funding for farmers who are working in organic agriculture, whether through research and development, organic certification, transitioning farms from conventional to organic production, or creating new farms. Lakewinds Organic Field Fund is open to new and established farmers working in our region, but preference will be given for farmers and farming organizations located in Minnesota, northern Iowa, and western Wisconsin. Applications are available now through Feb. 7, 2014. All applications are reviewed by a committee, and final grant recipients will be awarded funds in mid-March.

Application is available at [www.lakewinds.coop/community/loff](http://www.lakewinds.coop/community/loff).

Producer Participants Wanted For Free CSA Fair

Area farmers are invited to participate in a Community-Supported Agriculture fair and panel, hosted by the Willmar Community-Owned Grocery in Willmar. The free event, open to the public, will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Feb. 25 at the Bethel Lutheran Church in downtown Willmar.

Free tabling space at the event is available to regional farmers and gardeners with CSA programs and interest in offering information about CSA products and memberships to the general public. A panel discussion and light lunch will be held during the event from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Interested farmers should contact the COG at 320.905.4703 by email to [info@willmarcog.com](mailto:info@willmarcog.com).

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.

Sustainable Farming Association (SFA)
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