Diverse Sessions, Family Programming, & Inclusive Farmer Networking: The SFA Annual Conference is Feb. 13

Presenting farmer networking at its finest, the Sustainable Farming Association’s Annual Conference, “Cultivating the Wisdom of the Community,” will be held Feb. 13, 2016, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn.

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER for $45 (members) or $55 (nonmembers) by Jan. 1 to receive the best rate!

Join the Upper Midwest’s sustainable farming community for a casual, full day of educational sessions, conversation, networking, food, drink and more. The SFA Conference is an inclusive event open to all who are interested in local food, farming, innovation, animal husbandry and community-building.

Sessions will be held on topics like Deep Winter Vegetable Production, Wintering Livestock, Minnesota’s Cottage Food Law, Beyond the Farmers Market, New and Unusual Perennial Fruit Crops, Animal Handling, Developing a Forage Chain, Restoration Ag and Keyline Design, Garlic Growing, and many more. A full schedule is available at www.sfa-mn.org/conference.

Also planned are a seed swap; the end-of-day social with local beer, wine and cheese; a film screening from Deb Wallwork; our yearly Leaders Breakfast, a “Meet Your Farmers” Friday night social and jam session.

Children’s programming from Budding Farmers is returning for ages 3-12; children 2 and under are welcome but will be the responsibility of their parents.

Information/registration: www.sfa-mn.org/conference.

Executive Director's Note
As 2015 comes to a close, SFA celebrates a 25-year run of education, demonstration and networking on behalf of sustainable farmers and sustainable farming professionals. The past 25 years have brought about a marked change in agriculture and SFA has had to adapt, change and grow to remain relevant to our audience and stay true to our mission and our members.

The next 25 years will see even greater levels of positive change in agriculture. Building on the accomplishments of our first 25 years, SFA is a leader in breaking down walls between different brands of agriculture. We want to see all farmers improve sustainability in production practices, as well as in the impact their farming operation has on the community. As a sustainability movement, we cannot only speak to those who like to hear our message – we need to speak to those who haven’t heard it, or who have dismissed us due to preconceived ideas about what SFA is all about.

While ringing in the New Year, here are five things to bear in mind about SFA – who we are, and are not.

1. SFA is not a political organization. Admittedly, there are problems in agriculture that need to be addressed in the public policy arena, and I’m thankful for the many organizations working on that level. SFA addresses problems in agriculture through networking, education, and demonstration.

2. SFA is no longer a “spinoff” of the Land Stewardship Project. Twenty five years ago, some very bright people who were involved in getting LSP started understood the need for a networking organization that could work on agriculture issues from a different angle than LSP, and SFA was born. We enjoy a good working relationship with many organizations, including LSP, but SFA operates separately from LSP and has for many, many years.

3. SFA is open to all farmers who are seeking to improve the sustainability of their operations, including commodity row crop producers. Incremental improvements on large-scale operations are going to be essential to our movement achieving its goals in the next 25 years.

4. SFA emphasizes two main programatic areas: Soil Health and Farmer Development. Everything we do in terms of programming is tied to these areas in one way or another. We work diligently to focus our efforts on the things we do well, and the things we were created to do.

5. SFA is working beyond the borders of Minnesota. We have members from all of the surrounding states, and some as far away as California, Colorado, and North Carolina. We will continue to be open to opportunities to serve agriculture wherever we can make a difference.

Thank you for your interest in our work, and for everything you do to make our world better. Here’s wishing you and yours a safe, happy and profitable 2016!

Special Event: 'Building Soil Health Experts' Training

SFA has added a special event for agriculture service professionals to complement the 2016 Midwest Soil Health Summit, and tickets are selling briskly.
“Building Soil Health Experts: Advanced Training for Professionals” is set for 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Feb. 17, 2016, at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn., and will provide expert soil health education for NRCS and SWCD soil specialists, Extension staff, crop consultants, agronomists, grazing and livestock specialists, and advisers who work directly with farmers and other ag advisers.

Training will encompass soil biology and measuring soil biology, integration of cover crops and livestock into cropping systems, and seeding methods for establishing cover crops. Presenters are Dr. Allen Williams (above), Dr. Rick Haney, Dr. Michael Lehman and Dr. Scott Wells.

This special event costs $100, is geared solely for ag service professionals and is separate from the Midwest Soil Health Summit. Registration for “Building Soil Health Experts” does not include MSHS registration. If you wish to attend the general Midwest Soil Health Summit as well you must register for that separately here. The MSHS schedule is now available on the Summit homepage.

Click here to learn more register for "Building Soil Health Experts."

For more information about the workshop or scholarships, contact Wayne Monsen, SFA Special Projects Coordinator, at wayne@sfa-mn.org or 1-844-922-5573 Ext. 712.

Chapters & Groups: Make the AC Work For You

By Jerry Ford • SFA Network Coordinator

The SFA Annual Conference provides our chapters with a wonderful chance to share the events, stories, and successes of their regional work, and chapters can take advantage of these two opportunities to do so:

Opening Session Chapter Showcase

Help us kick off the event by giving a one-minute introduction of your chapter or networking group! What excites your members? What guides your chapter? Share your happenings from 2015 and what you’re planning for 2016.

Chapter Displays

Foster conversation and promote chapter/networking group engagement throughout the conference by preparing a tri-fold display to show all your group’s up to. Displays can include the following:

• Your mission and activities
• Needs for volunteers/ members/activities/etc.
• Vision for how your chapter will impact sustainable agriculture to rally future activity
• Products, farming practices and history highlights, as well as landscape features that make your chapter’s region unique
• Your Chapter’s official SFA logo

SFA Communications Coordinator, Jason Walker, can provide chapters with display resources. Email him at jason@sfa-mn.org.

Take advantage of the Mini-Presentations and Chapter Showcase to inform your current members, draw in new members, and help your chapter/networking group grow in 2016!

To reserve a spot for your showcase presentation and your display, contact Sarah Lindblom, SFA Event Coordination Intern: sarah.a.lindblom@gmail.com.
Deep Winter Greenhouse Tour Series Announced

SFA is producing a series of tours at deep winter greenhouses across the region, with the kickoff at the Minnesota Organic Conference's "Passive Solar Deep Winter Greenhouses Workshop" and culminating in a wrap-up session at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 13. These free tours, presented by SFA's Deep Winter Producers Networking Group, in collaboration with U of M Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, are occurring all across Minnesota over four weekends, with locations including:

- St. John's University, Collegeville, and College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph
- Garden Goddess, Milan
- Way Cool Farm, Deer River
- Barry's Cherries, Wadena
- Lida Farm, Pelican Rapids, and Paradox Farm, Ashby
- Whitewater Gardens Farm, Altura
- Thiel Gardens, Minneapolis


Lake Agassiz Annual Meeting is Jan. 9 in Bemidji

The SFA Lake Agassiz Chapter will host its annual meeting from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Jan. 9, 2016, at Rail River Folk School, 303 Railroad St SW, Bemidji. The program includes Lake Agassiz board members giving short presentations about their products and future farm plans, a potluck lunch, business meeting and farmer networking time. This event is free and open to the public but preregistration is required. [Click here to register.]


Meeting is Jan. 20 for New East Central Chapter

A new SFA chapter is forming in the region just north and east of the Twin Cities, and an organizational meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Jan. 20, 2016 in Isanti, MN at the Community Center, 208 1/2 First Ave NW.

At the meeting, Jerry Ford, SFA's Network Coordinator, will describe what SFA chapters do as well as how to set up the chapter leadership board.

If you'd like to attend and get in on the ground level of this new East Central chapter, or just want to be added to the East Central mailing list, please RSVP to Sharon Johnson at [sharon@minnesotafreshfarm.com](mailto:sharon@minnesotafreshfarm.com) or call 612-735-5459.

Small Scale Sustainable Sheep Event is Feb. 20 in Fosston

The second annual Small Scale Sustainable Sheep Farming Event will be Feb. 20, 2016, beginning at 10 a.m. at the Fosston Civic Center, 215 E First St, Fosston. This event is open to the public and focuses on the benefits of sheep as part of a sustainable farming system where meat and wool are viable value-added products.

Cost is $20 for adults, under 10 are free; pay at the door. Lunch and snacks provided. Please RSVP to Alethea Kenney at 218-657-2502 or [sustainablesheep@sfa-mn.org](mailto:sustainablesheep@sfa-mn.org). Trade show booths are also still available.

Information: [SFA's Sustainable Sheep homepage](http://www.sfa-mn.org/sustainable-sheep/).
A few spots remain for the Spring 2016 semester of our Deep Roots Farmer Development Program’s Farm Skills 101, which consists of around 50 hours of on-farm education in three weekends of fun and fulfilling learning. This hands-on training consists of days in the field, not field days – participants will need pants, closed-toe shoes, gloves and safety glasses.

A recent alum said FS 101 was a “jawdroppingly fabulous program in Minnesota where we learned all sorts of things that we didn’t know we didn’t know.”

Don't wait too long – this class will sell out. [Click here to register.]

**Deep Winter Greenhouse Short Course:** Also, a few spots remain for our Feb. 21 Deep Roots short course, “Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy.”  [Click here to register.]

**'Practical Homeopathy' Workshop is Jan. 7 in St. Cloud**

A hands-on workshop by veterinarian Susan Beal geared toward all types of livestock producers, “Practical Homeopathy: Interactive Work in Prescribing and Case Assessment” will be held from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Jan. 7, 2016, at River’s Edge Convention Center in St. Cloud.

For sustainable, conventional and organic producers of all livestock types (cattle, swine, goat, sheep, bird, etc.), “Practical Homeopathy” will detail the dynamics of disease, obstacles that impact vital health and the response to treatment, and the pattern of responses to treatment.

This is a hands-on workshop and you must have a repertory; people from the same farm can share materials. Cost: $50 for the first person, $35 for others in the group. Register online at www.mda.state.mn.us/cabinfever or pay at the door.

**Check This Out**

The Sustainable Food Trust presents on this page a tribute to farmer, businessman and ecologist Doug Tompkins that includes a link to a beautiful video with a strong message for the future of agriculture.

**Annual Conference Photo Feature**

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2015 Annual Conference, held Feb. 14, 2015, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. To learn more about Crystal, visit her website.
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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