This Week We're Hosting Our Best Annual Conference Yet, and Here's Proof

By Jason Walker • Communications Coordinator

If you haven't made plans yet to attend this weekend's SFA Annual Conference, there is still plenty of time. Without overstating the obvious, we're really excited about this year's two-day event – especially keynote speakers Michael Ableman and Mark Seeley, and the new Advanced Grazing Workshop. The entire SFA Farmer-to-Farmer Network™ is going to benefit from two days of networking, education, food, drink and fun Feb. 15-16 at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chaska.

We're pretty happy about the venue, too. The Arboretum is a beautiful place and will provide cozy surroundings as well as plenty of nooks and crannies for coffee and conversation. The Arboretum is partnering with SFA to host the conference, and as a result there has been some confusion among SFA supporters regarding the online registration process and Arboretum correspondence using the title “Sustainable Agriculture Summit.” Please be assured that you are indeed registering for the SFA Annual Conference – registration is simply being processed under the Arboretum’s system. SFA is definitely benefiting from our relationship with the Arboretum, and we're eager for this and future collaboration.

Our two-day format this year allows for two keynote speakers. Friday's is Mark Seeley (right), a climatologist, author, and professor at the University of Minnesota. He will present on how weather/climate impacts to Minnesota agriculture, transportation, energy, tourism, and natural resources.

Saturday's keynote is Michael Ableman (right), a farmer, author, photographer and recognized practitioner of sustainable agriculture and proponent of regional food systems. He has written several books and numerous essays and articles, and lectures extensively on food, culture, and sustainability worldwide. Michael is currently farming at the Foxglove Farm on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia, home of The Center for Arts, Ecology & Agriculture.

About that Advanced Grazing Workshop: As part of the GrazeFest series, SFA's Kent Solberg will moderate this daylong workshop led by pastured livestock experts. Dr. Allen Williams of Grass Fed Beef, LLC, will discuss trends and opportunities in grass-finished beef production, as well as advanced...
pasture and forage management techniques. Speaking on considerations for finishing beef cattle on pasture and forages is Howard Moechnig, owner of Midwest Grasslands, former NRCS Grazing Specialist and author of the authoritative book, "Improving and Sustaining Forage Production in Pastures." Keith Kloubec, a District Conservationist with the Carver County NRCS office, will present a session entitled “Pasture Management and Soil Health.” And finally, Solberg will discuss profit opportunities for pasture-based livestock systems.

Mary Jane Miller, SFA's "Maven of Mmmm," is again holding her all-day Culinary Workshop with a host of guests: the Rutters of Badgersett Hazelnut Farms, Adrienne Logsdon of Kiss My Cabbage, Paula Foreman of Encore Farms, Larry Marquette of Chatham Preservation Farm, Mary Reynolds of Riverbend Organic Farm, and Kevin Doyle of Forest Mushrooms.

Other sessions include:

**Friday**
- The Meaning of Organic: All Your Questions Answered
- Sustainable Farming Essentials
- The Light at the End of the High (and Low) Tunnel
- Specialty Crops Business Management
- Urban Land Access: Update from the Front
- What's All the Buzz: Pollinators and Your Crop Future
- Aquaponics: Sink or Swim?
- Eat Your Veggies – Anti-Cancer Crops
- Sizing and Scaling the Farm Business for Success
- Rural and Urban Ag Connecting Through the Food System
- Getting the Word Out: How Farmers Can Harness Social Media for Marketing
- Are you Ready to Hop into Hops?

**Saturday**
- Seed Saving – The Basics and Way Beyond
- The State of Meat Processing in Minnesota
- Forum: Michael Ableman on the Role of a Twin Cities Ag Alliance
- Farmer-to-Farmer Networking Session: Creative Financing
- Adding Value With Integrity: Animal Welfare Approved Certification
- Who's Next? Farm Succession and Transfer
- Squash and Pumpkins: a Diverse Cash Crop for Minnesota Farmers?
- Minnesota Food Charter Input Session
- Farmer-to-Farmer Networking Session: Farmers Facing Challenges & Change
- Cold-Climate Grape Growing
- Edible Landscapes
- New Garlic Diseases: The Latest from the Experts

Also, a few volunteers are still needed for the Annual Conference. Sign up for a two-hour shift and get one of our snazzy new long-sleeved SFA T-shirts. To volunteer, contact Karen Couné at karen.coune@gmail.com or 612.202.7201.

The entire schedule is pretty much complete at this link on our homepage, and here's the link for registration.

It's Conference time, y'all. Register now and I'll see you there.
Executive Director's Note

By John Mesko

This past week, I was reminded of how very short our lives really are. Let's face it, in the grand scheme of things, each individual person is only here on earth for a very short period of time. That's all the more reason to make the absolute most of our time here. To offer up our talents, our dreams, our labor for the highest calling possible.

There are lots of high callings in life to be sure. Those of us who are offering our best in the search for a truly sustainable, healthy, food production system are, in my opinion pursuing one of those callings. To be able to make a lasting impact on the future of food production, the environment, and the health and well-being of our fellow man is indeed a high calling.

If you are reading this newsletter, you are likely engaged in this high calling. You, and me and thousands of others across Minnesota, the Upper Midwest, even globally, are engaged in a dream that will be worth our best effort. I'm encouraged by you. I'm encouraged to strive for the high calling, to make lasting change, and to not settle for second best.

I'm right around halfway through my days here on earth. I'm not going to let up. In fact, I want to turn up the pace. Who'll join me? I'll see you this weekend at the SFA Conference.

Attend Special Farm Transitions Workshop with John Baker

SFA and Renewing the Countryside are excited to present a special four-day Farm Succession and Estate Planning workshop with internationally known farm transition expert John Baker. The workshop, to be held March 4-5 and Marcy 25-26 at Villa Maria in Frontenac, will include expert guidance and legal assistance to help ensure that you have a sound plan in place for the eventual transfer of your farm to your family or non-family successor.

Thanks to the generous support of USDA-Risk Management Agency, we are able to Baker to Minnesota to conduct this multi-day workshop. Baker's 30 years of experience working with families on planning for the future has made him the “go-to” guy on farm transitions. Baker has conducted workshops in Iowa, Alaska, Nebraska and North Dakota, and is now coming to Minnesota. Don't miss this rare opportunity to get extensive assistance and hands-on help with developing your farm succession plan.

The two-part, four-day workshop will assist farm families to plan for the eventual transition of their farm. The workshops are planned as a multi-generational event for current farm owners and for their heirs or non-family members to whom they hope to transfer the farm. We are capping attendance at 60 people to ensure that everyone has access to individualized assistance.

Cost is $95 for first person and $75 for each additional person; all meals are included in the price. Accommodations are available at the Villa Maria or in nearby Lake City or Red Wing. To register, click here. For more information, email info@rtcinfo.org or call 612.910.7601.

Chapter Update: Cannon River

Project is in conjunction with Renewing the Countryside.

Public Policy
Are you interested in state and federal ag policy? Offer your feedback by taking our Public Policy Survey. It will take about 10 minutes, and will really help us determine the interest of our members and your thoughts about the future of SFA.
On Feb. 9, the Cannon River chapter of SFA held their annual meeting in Northfield. The focus of the meeting was a panel concerning the possible formation of a Local Food Hub here, in order to aggregate products from small producers and sell them to institutions and restaurants in the quantities required. On the panel were people who had gone last fall to Viroqua, Wis., and toured the Fifth Season Co-op there.

Also, Carleton students reported on their research into the concept of a local food hub. A Mayo Clinic dietician talked about the value of local food to institutions, and a representative from Gardens of Eagan gave us an idea about what it would take for that farm to be the location for aggregation of products. This was followed by a discussion among farmers present to gauge interest in organizing such a hub. A local foods lunch was catered by Just Food Co-op.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Just think, next time you read SFA Connect there will be a photo from this year's conference. How time flies.

To celebrate the upcoming conference, we'd like to again share a photo from last year's conference. This image, taken by Heavy Table photographer Crystal Liepa, succinctly illustrates what the SFA Annual Conference is all about: connecting our Farmer-to-Farmer Network™. And look for Crystal at this year's conference, as she'll be documenting it for us.

And in case you need yet another reason to come to the conference, consider that as an attendee you may appear in this space sometime in 2013!

Take a Photo, Win a Free SFA T-Shirt Winner: Dayle Reinke

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. Check out our Facebook page for all the photo submissions.

January's winner: Dayle Reinke of Wadena
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.

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