Annual Conference Draws 250 for Minnesota's Farmer Networking Showcase

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Did you attend the SFA Annual Conference on Saturday at St. Ben's?

If not, you missed the Minnesota farmer networking event of the year. Here are some highlights:
The Farmer Emeritus Award was given to Richard Handeen and Audrey Arner, nominated by Kent Solberg (at right). Richard and Audrey have been farming sustainably at their Moonstone Farm in Montevideo for four decades, and Richard sits on SFA's Board of Directors. Few farmers are more deserving of this award than Richard and Audrey, and we thank them for being sustainable farming role models to so many.

The Distinguished Service Award went to two extremely deserving recipients: Cree Bradley, nominated by Kelly Smith (center right); and the late Chuck Waibel, nominated by Jerry Ford. Waibel's wife, Carol Ford, accepted in his honor (bottom right) and was presented the award by Mary Hanks. Thanks to all for their ongoing support of sustainable farming in Minnesota and beyond.

The Friday night social event at Minnesota Street Market was a hit. An unofficial hootenanny count included two guitars, two mandolins and one banjo. If you missed it, be sure to put it on your calendar for next year and let's make it even more of a barn-burner.

The children's programming was back, and it will continue in future years. Parents, we are determined to make the SFA Annual Conference an event for the whole family. Next year, load up the kids and bring them along!

I saw a LOT of gray "Farmer To Farmer" t-shirts at this conference. Very cool. We're glad you're proud to be an SFA member. If you didn't get your shirt at the SFA Conference and regret not purchasing one, email me at jason@sfa-mn.org and we'll work out payment and shipping. New this year was a women's style T-shirt that was both organic and Made in the U.S.A.

And, as usual, the informational sessions were well-received, and a personal highlight was being inspired by John Fisher-Merrit in the Root Cellaring session. John's farm now gets 30 percent of its income from winter vegetable sales, all thanks to the innovative and practical root cellar he envisioned, wisely planned and finally built.

Now, on to the Midwest Soil Health Summit. Hope to see you in Alexandria on Feb. 19-20!

**Announcing a Special Opportunity for SFA Networking: Register Now for Limited-Ticket Event with Gabe Brown**

SFA is hosting a special, limited-ticket event from 4 to 6 p.m. Wed., Feb. 19, before the Midwest Soil Health Summit – a chance to network one-on-one with soil health pioneer Gabe Brown of Brown's Ranch.

ONLY A COUPLE tickets remain for this "Gab with Gabe" reception, so attendees will have ample opportunity to speak with Gabe as well as SFA Executive Director John Mesko, Livestock & Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg, and Network Development Coordinator Jerry Ford – all of whom have grass-based livestock operations.

The "Gab With Gabe" reception also will feature local cheese from SFA members Deborah and Scott Pikovsky's Star Thrower Farm as well as other light refreshments.
At 6 p.m., the MSHS begins with a cocktail reception including all conference attendees as well as a presentation by John and Gabe.

**Click here** to get your ticket for "Gab With Gabe" and take advantage of a chance to network with this world-renowned soil health pioneer. Registration ends at noon Feb. 17.

Of course, registration for the Midwest Soil Health Summit is ongoing, and remember that SFA members save $50 on registration for the main Summit. If you need a reminder of your discount code or have a question about your SFA membership status, just email jason@sfa-mn.org.

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**Executive Director's Note**

Let me just take a minute to thank everyone who contributed mightily to the a very, very successful SFA Annual Conference this past weekend in St. Joseph. In addition to a great lineup of farmer-speakers who really set the tone for the networking within the sessions, many thanks go to Jerry Ford, Jason Walker and their teams for putting the right environment around the day to make it easy to connect with each other. Also and most importantly thanks go to everyone who came, many for the first time, and gave of their expertise, asked great questions, and contributed to the overall learning for the day.

We like to talk a lot about Farmer-to-Farmer Networking at SFA, at the conference, we demonstrated it. You are the Network, and you did it! If you missed the conference, don't worry, we'll be back next year on the second Saturday in February, Valentine’s Day, Feb. 14, 2015.

I'm sure you won't want to miss this one!

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**Association Board Elects Executive Committee**

The SFA Board of Directors held a meeting on Feb. 7, 2014, at St. Ben's the day before the Annual Conference. That day, the board approved a new Executive Committee as well as welcomed new Cannon River Chapter representative Becca Carlson.

Newly elected to the Executive Committee as Vice-Chair was Eric Ament from Lake Superior Chapter. Eric owns and operates Anahata Herbals, led the conference session "Planting and Harvesting Calendars" and also planned the Friday night social event that this year was held at the Minnesota Street Market in St. Joseph.

Re-elected to their positions on the Executive Committee were Chair Jim Chamberlin, Secretary Libby Wyrum and Treasurer Josh Reinitz.

Congratulations to all for their election, and look for a profile of Becca in an upcoming edition of SFA Connect.

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**Southeast Chapter Hosting Annual Meeting**

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SFA Southeast Chapter will hold its annual meeting from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sat., Feb. 15, at the Community Center at City Hall in St. Charles, Minn. – 830 Whitewater Ave. Registration begins at 9:45 a.m., and the program agenda will begin with a roundtable discussion on Marketing from 10-noon. The discussion will include market places, needs, processing areas, and other interests of the group. This should be of interest to beginners and experienced producers of crops, livestock, and gardens.

We will hold our annual meeting after lunch at 1 p.m. Your input at this meeting will be greatly appreciated. Erin Meier, University of MN Extension Service, will present “The Food Environment of Minnesota” at 1:30 p.m. Erin holds an MS in Sustainable Agriculture from Iowa State University. She directs the U of M SE Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and will be presenting on food and farming projects.

There will be a non-member charge of $10/session or $15 for both sessions for non-members. Members will only be charged for the meal. There will be a $5 meal charge; feel free to bring your own lunch.

For more information, call Edgar Hansgen at 507-932-4219 or email ejhansgen@hotmail.com.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2014 Annual Conference, held Feb. 8, 2014, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. To learn more about Crystal, visit her website.

SFP Course: Introduction to Small Ruminant Husbandry
 Anyone considering adding goats or sheep to their sustainable food production system or those who want to manage their small ruminants more holistically should attend a SFA Sustainable Food Production workshop, Introduction to Small Ruminant Husbandry, from 1 to 5 p.m. Sat., April 26, at Paradox Farm, 11643 State Highway 78, Ashby, Minn. (ten miles south of Battle Lake; seven miles north of Ashby).

This course provides students opportunity for hands-on work with sheep and goats. In a working-farm setting, students can learn how small ruminants can fit into a natural systems farm. Course topics include: holistic management, ruminant nutrition, animal handling, fencing, grazing strategies, holistic veterinary care, shelters, weight and age estimation. Wear clothing appropriate for working with animals: closed-toe shoes, gloves, long pants.

Paradox Farm owners Sue Wika and Tom Prieve will share their perspectives on how small ruminants can fit in holistically managed food production systems. Small ruminants have been an integral element of Paradox Farm for ten years. In addition to enjoying and appreciating small ruminants, Wika and Prieve are experienced sustainable farming educators and lead SFA's Sustainable Food Production Program, which is also gearing up for its Fall 2014 semester.

To learn more and to register, [click here](#).

**SFA's Charlie Danielson Presenting on 'Food Sovereignty'**

Lake Superior Chapter board member Charlie Danielson is leading a presentation, "Food Sovereignty: Rebuilding Our Food System with Climate and Social Justice," from 4 to 5:15 p.m. April 17 at room 1012 Swenson at the University of Wisconsin-Superior.

Charlie is a local farmer, permaculturist, business owner and lifelong Duluthian who interacts with many other organizations that work on our local food and equality issues. After many years of researching, working in the food industry and building their personal oasis just north of town, he and his wife are teaming up with like minded individuals, businesses, schools and organizations to help build a sustainable food system in the Western Lake Superior Bio-region.

Charlie will address whether changing the way we farm and eat can really change our environment and the way we interact as a community. According to Charlie, food is one of the most important relationships we have with the earth. It controls all of the species population density and how that population interacts with one another within a given area of finite resources. Learn what we can do to protect and build the soil we borrow from our future and become an active participant in food justice for everyone. Transportation and logistics issues related to Food Sovereignty will be discussed.

For more information, contact Brenda Dalpiaz at 715.394.8032 or [bdalpiaz@uwsuper.edu](mailto:bdalpiaz@uwsuper.edu).

**West Side Farmers Market Seeks Vendors**

The West Side Farmers Market is currently looking for vendors for the 2014 season. Our neighborhood strongly supports locally grown chemically free food products, and the market is a fast growing venue for local families. The market is open from the end of May until the middle of October and is held Saturday mornings from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the ICY CUP parking lot. This year we are accepting EBT and WIC as well! If you are either a micro farmer or a more established farmer, we hope you will consider our market. Our vendor fees are low and we have an enthusiastic customer base! If you are interested, please contact Damon or Barb at
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.