Nearly 200 See Power of Soil Health on Display at MSHS
Last week’s Midwest Soil Health Summit was SFAs Farmer to Farmer Network at its best – nearly 200 farmers had the chance to talk one-on-one with some of the world’s leading experts on soil health.

Both informational and inspirational, the presentations from the likes of Dr. Allen Williams and Gabe Brown (shown above with SFA’s John Mesko), Jerry Doan, Wendy Taheri and Kent Solberg prove that soil health not only has the potential to transform agriculture in this country, it has both the potential to transform it soon and to provide immense benefit to farmers who use these methods.

The importance of a Farmer to Farmer Network like SFA was clear when examples were given that both Allen and Gabe – two incredibly innovative, successful farmers – have neighbors who still refuse to adopt soil building farm practices. When world-famous farmers like these still face skepticism, it’s no wonder SFA members see the value of networking with others in their area for camaraderie and wisdom.

Attendance at the 2015 MSHS was up nearly 50 percent, and the crowd was encouragingly diverse – as one attendee remarked, it was “nice to see a long line at the women's restroom.” SFA is an inclusive, family-like organization, and we are thrilled to see farmers and farm families of all types attending our events.

Thanks to all who came, and we are excited to begin planning the 2016 version. Look for an announcement of 2016 dates coming soon.

To download Dr. Allen Williams’ presentation and for other resources, visit our MSHS homepage.
SFA Annual Conference: Energy-Packed, Diverse, Innovative

It was a cold Valentine’s Day on Feb. 14, but the energy inside the College of Saint Benedict easily lifted the spirits of the over 250 attendees at the vibrant 2015 SFA Annual Conference.

Snapshots from the day illustrate just how diverse an organization SFA has become:

- Josh Reinitz and Daniel Zetah’s idea-packed session on salvaging and repurposing farm equipment and buildings was innovative, pointed and, at times, hilarious.

- John Mesko’s opening remarks about SFA’s 25-year anniversary prove not just how much SFA and its members have accomplished, but how optimistic we are for our future and our role in regenerating the land in the Upper Midwest and beyond.

- The Budding Farmers program, which drew nearly 20 children to the conference, went home with abundant art they had created as well as seeds from their visit to the seed swap.

- Mary Jane Miller’s braised beef was, in the words of Kelsey Wulf, “out-of-this-world.”

- Deep Winter Greenhouses drew a crowd to Paradox Farm on Feb. 13 for our sold-out “combo pack” session, which was followed by two DWG-related sessions on Feb. 14 at St. Ben’s that combined Minnesota Deep Winter experts like Carol Ford, Sue Wika and Ryan Pesch.

And, of course, we debuted our popular “Back End of a Cow” t-shirts, only a handful of which remain. That’s what makes SFA great – we combine the most innovative thinkers and sustainable ag experts, but we’re not above making a good manure reference on a t-shirt.

Look for an announcement about the 2016 SFA Annual Conference coming soon, as well as...
Executive Director’s Note

At the 2015 Midwest Soil Health Summit, our speakers had discussion tables during the breaks, where participants could sit down in a group and visit one on one with each other and with our speakers. Our keynote speaker, Gabe Brown, hosted a very popular discussion table, and we were able to record most of the discussion with everyone at the table.

Gabe fielded a number of questions ranging from practical cover crop issues, to building soil health without livestock, dealing with neighbors, getting started in farming, seed companies, watering cattle in winter.

This is the kind of Farmer to Farmer Networking SFA is promoting. As you’ll hear on this recording, farmers asking questions, feeding off of each other’s questions, and farmers asking each other questions.

You can listen to the recording at SFAs Farm Solutions Podcast Page. Check it out, and if you have questions you’d like to see addressed on the Farm Solutions Podcast, send them to questions@farmsolutions.community.

Also at the Summit, we held our first ever International Roundtable. About 20 people attended. The importance of this event is in looking at how we can take the soil health building production models developed here in the Midwest and find ways to adapt them for broad application worldwide. Notes from the International Roundtable are available online.

This really is the power of a network. Speakers like Gabe tell us our approach is unique and beneficial. This is a great example.

Intro to Small Ruminant Husbandry Class Set for May 16

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 our SFA Deep Roots class, Intro to Small Ruminant Husbandry, 1-5 p.m. Sat., May 16, 2015, 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.

Cost is $80 and space is limited. To register, click here.

Another Keep Cattle in Minnesota Webinar on March 6

"Strategies for Implementing Cover Crops," a SFA Keep Cattle in Minnesota webinar led by Livestock & Grazing Specialist Kent Solberg, is scheduled for 1-2:30 p.m. March 6. The webinar is free and open to all.

Cover crops are a powerful tool farmers can use to improve soil health. Cover crops can play a key role in implementing soil health
principles. Specifically, cover crops aid in keeping soil covered, adding diversity to the rotation, keep a living root in the soil, and serve as the "bridge" between cropping systems and integration of livestock.

In the webinar, Kent will review the principles of building soil health, integration of cover crops and real world examples of how adding cover crops to your farm can move you toward productivity and profitability.

This webinar is the second in a series of KCIM webinars SFA has planned. Others are slated for April 3 and Nov. 6; keep watching SFA Connect for details about all upcoming KCIM webinars and programming.

Click here to sign up. For more information, visit our Keep Cattle in Minnesota homepage.

SFA Deep Roots Program 'Nuts and Bolts' Workshop

"Nuts and Bolts," a workshop designed for those with a desire to farm but with little or no experience with common farm tools and equipment, is set for 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Sat., March 21 at Paradox Farm, 11643 State Hwy 78, Ashby, Minn. In this workshop, students will gain practical experience with farm tools and materials.

Click here to register.

Get prepared for the upcoming season of food production by participating in this Deep Roots Farmer Development Program workshop. You will increase your handiness while developing competence with farm tools and materials. Get the edge for summer farm internships by listing this course on your resume! This is also an appropriate preparatory course for Farm Skills 101.

Small class size guarantees that all students receive ample individual attention. Course instructors are seasoned farmers. Students should have gloves and safety glasses and wear closed-toe shoes and long pants.

COURSE OUTLINE

- Common hand tool identification and use on the farm
- Hands-on operation of common tools
- Ergonomics and body mechanics
- Common hardware identification & use: nails, nuts, bolts, staples, screws
- Building materials, such as lumber
- Small carpentry project completed during class

Directions: Paradox Farm is 7 miles north of Ashby; 10 miles south of Battle Lake. Bring a sack lunch. Cost: $99 early bird registration. No walk-in registration.

Questions? Email sue@sfa-mn.org or call 218.747.2202.
Check This Out

- On the heels of the Soil Health Summit, we noticed that writer Tom Watson had a piece on his blog, Prairie Notebook, called "The Menacing Millimeter," in which he answers this question: "Imagine how much topsoil would be scoured away, per acre, if just one millimeter of this fine, wind-blown dust was swept from the surface of a bare field?" The result is astonishing. Read the article here.

- SFA members Nick and Amelia Neaton and Peter and Anne Schwagerl were featured in a recent MinnPost article on young farmers. To read it, click here.

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.
Post-Harvest Handling Workshops Planned Around State

Renewing the Countryside and Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture will be hosting four post-harvest handling workshops from mid-February to early April in various locations in Minnesota. The half day workshops will be presented by farmers Lisa Baker of Bakers’ Acres and Laura Frerichs of Loon Organics and will cover a range of topics from on farm food safety to sorting and grading to transport.

The cost to attend is $20 for the first person and $10 for the second if coming from the same farm (fee includes lunch). Workshop attendees will also get a discounted rate for the Wholesale Success book.

Events include:
- March 3, St. Charles
- March 5, Fairmont
- March 20, Little Falls
- March 25, Cannon Falls

Contact Devon Ballinger at Renewing the Countryside for more information at 612.716.1706 or devon@rtcinfo.org.

Mill City Farmers Market Job Opening

The Mill City Farmers Market is looking to fill the position of Day Staff at the market. The job runs Saturdays from May to October and results in 9-12 hours a week of work. Day Staffers work Saturdays from 5:30 a.m. to about 3 p.m., with occasional weekend hours.

For more information or to apply, visit the market homepage.
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)
Box 192, Princeton, MN 55371
763-260-0209 • info@sfa-mn.org