Another SFA Annual Conference and Midwest Soil Health Summit are in the books. Over 250 SFA members and supporters flooded the Gorecki Center at the College of Saint Benedict on Sat., Feb. 13, for a day of knowledge sharing, learning, and networking. Conference regulars and new faces alike enjoyed the warm camaraderie of the sustainable farming community and came away with new connections, ideas, and spirit.

Just a few days later, the third Midwest Soil Health Summit convened on Feb. 17-18 at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn. About 80 agriculture service professionals took advantage of the new “Soil Health Experts” programming, growing the total attendance between the two days to 175. Attendees, including Tom Barthel, Tom Ehrhardt and speaker Dr. Allen Williams (pictured above), enjoyed many opportunities in between sessions to directly engage
As a newcomer to both conferences, I was particularly impressed with the size of the SFA network – day to day, we may not come in contact with many others interested in discussing the Cottage Food Law, keyline design, farm incubation, forage, or cover cropping techniques. But events like these illuminate the progress and momentum of sustainable farming practices in Minnesota and nationwide.

The opportunity to connect with folks doing a variety of important work to me was inspiring – I’m sure I’m not the only one who went home with a renewed passion and hope for the future of sustainability in our food system.

Executive Director's Note

Memorial gifts to SFA are a nice way to honor the life and legacy of someone you care about who has contributed to our community.

David and Karen Baker, longtime SFA members from Isanti, recently made a donation to SFA in memory of Karen’s father, Wesley C. Thompson (pictured below right). Karen writes, “This donation is in memory of my father who passed away on Dec. 5, 2015. My dad was a farmer first, he was born on a farm, farmed with his parents until he entered World War II at the age of 19.

“He served his country and upon returning to civilian life, got married and bought his own farmland. He farmed for 20 years, having gone to school to further his education and improve his farmland. He was bought out in 1968 by the government, which was buying up 100 farms to create the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. The government had the sense to hire my dad as an employed worker to work the land and create this refuge we enjoy today.

"He was able to work 20 years on the land he knew and loved as a refuge worker, attaining his management position and becoming a Game Warden. He and Mom raised 7 children through those years and he lived to be 94 years old before his passing."

Thank you, Karen. What a great story! Thank you also for thinking of SFA as a way to remember your dad’s contribution and life.

Feel free to contact me at 844.922.5573 Ext. 713 if you’d like to make a donation in memoriam of someone special.

Deep Roots Short Course: Wintering Livestock
There are volumes of information on pasture rearing livestock. However, what do we do with these critters when winter comes to Minnesota?

SFA Deep Roots Farmer Development Program will address this issue during a new short course, "Wintering Livestock," from 1 to 4 p.m. March 5 at Seven Pines Farm, 18618 County Rd 23, Verndale, Minn.

Join SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist Kent Solberg as he leads a field tour covering cattle outwintering, windbreaks, hoop structures for chickens and hogs, and principles of low-cost livestock wintering on his farm. This class is limited to 10 people. Cost: $60. Click here to register.

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**Space Remains in Spring 2016 Farm Skills 101 Class**

Are you ready to learn Reality Farming?

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.

Spring 2016 classes will be held on April 15-16, 22-23 and 29-30 at farms near Alexandria, Minn.

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.

- **Introduction to Homestead Dairy Class Added for May 1, 2016:** Anyone wondering about adding a dairy component to their farm enterprise or who would like more information to guide their current dairy practices should consider this class. Registration options include two milking labs. Click here to register.

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**Farmer-Buyer Networking in Aitkin, St. Joe, Mankato**

Renewing the Countryside is hosting several upcoming Farmer-Buyer networking events that focus on farm-to-institution sales, including some co-hosted by SFA chapters. The aim is attract buyers and growers from across each region to community host sites for networking that advances partnerships between local farmers and community institutions.

- SFA Central Chapter is collaborating on the workshop set for March 7 in St. Joseph.
- SFA Greater Mille Lacs Chapter is hosting the northeast Minnesota event on March 29 in Aitkin.
- An additional event will be March 14 in Mankato.

Open to all, these networking events cost $15 and include lunch. For information and to register, or to learn about additional farm-to-institution mentorships, click here.

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**Southeast Chapter Annual Meeting is March 10**
SFA Southeast Chapter is hosting its annual meeting from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Thurs., March 10, in the St. Charles Community Room, 830 Whitewater Ave, St. Charles.

Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin of Main Street Project will be giving a keynote address, “Developing a poultry-centered regenerative agriculture system that can change how food is produced around the world.”

SFA board chair Jim Chamberlin will also attend and discuss the benefits of SFA membership.

This program is open to all and free for current SFA members. Nonmembers must pay a $10 registration at the door, or join SFA and attend free. Click here to register.

Also, an educational scholarship opportunity is available for those committed to sustainability in the fields of agriculture and forestry. Residents of Rice, Goodhue, Wabasha, Steele, Dodge, Olmstead, Winona, Freeborn, Mower, Fillmore, and Houston counties are eligible. For more information, visit the Southeast Chapter homepage.

Indigenous Farming Conference is March 3-6

The 13th Great Lakes Indigenous Farming Conference is set for March 3-6 at Maplelag Resort in Callaway, Minn.. Sponsored by the White Earth Land Recovery Project, the conference will include topics like community land revitalization, seed saving, tribal food and farm policy, and more.

Info: www.welrp.org or weseedlibrary@gmail.com.

Small Town Farm-to-Grocery Workshops Set

Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships is hosting a series of in-store demonstrations highlighting tips and tricks for handling, storing, and marketing fresh produce and/or locally grown fresh produce in a small town grocery setting. Fruit/Vegetable producers interested in selling farm-to-grocery may find valuable connections with rural grocers at these events.

The workshops:

- 1-3 p.m. March 2 – Bergen’s Prairie Market, 234 Main St, Milan
- 1-3 p.m. March 9 – Pierz Foods, 233 Main St N, Pierz
- 1-3 p.m. March 10 – TJ’s Country Corner, 2751 Market St, Mahtowa
- 12:30-2:30 p.m. March 14 – Kiester Market, 131 South Main, Kiester
- 1-3 p.m. March 23 – KC’s Market, 201 N Main St, Badger

Click here to RSVP. Funding to cover travel costs may be available. Info: Karen Lanthier, korsl001@umn.edu.

Check This Out

Alexandria Echo Press editor Al Edenloff attended John Mesko’s free “Soil Science Basics” course at last week’s Midwest Soil Health Summit and was impressed. See what he had to say.
Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2016 Annual Conference, held Feb. 13, 2016, 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.

Sustainable Farming Association (SFA)
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