Midwest Soil Health Summit a Sellout; Gabe Brown, Richard Bieber and Co. Deliver Inspiration, Education

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Soil health is a red-hot topic for farmers, and our sold-out Midwest Soil Health Summit last week was brimming with excitement, knowledge, energy, and farmer networking.

Farmers came from Minnesota, Wisconsin, North and South Dakota, Iowa, Saskatchewan, and even Australia to learn from soil health pioneers Gabe Brown and Richard Bieber as well as soil research expert Wendy Taheri, SFA's own expert Kent Solberg, Burleigh County's Jay Fuhrer, and Ryan Stockwell of the National Wildlife Federation, as well as local producers Carmen Fernholz, Larry Heitkamp and Dan Middendorf.
The Summit kicked off Feb. 19 with the sold-out "Gab with Gabe" reception, where ten ticket-holders were treated to an intimate audience with Gabe Brown as well as SFA's John Mesko and some fine cheese from SFA member Deb Pikovsky's Star Thrower Farm.

The general sessions of the Summit began that evening with dinner and a casual conversation with John and Gabe. Rick Bieber was there, too, joining the conversation, and already it was evident that unique perspectives and cutting-edge soil health techniques were in abundance.

On snowy, icy Feb. 20, the Summit's full day, a capacity-busting crowd of 140 jammed Arrowwood Resort, and it was pretty cool the way Gabe, Richard, and the rest of the Summit slate were so willing to share their knowledge and experience – even offering their personal contact information to Summit-goers for future questions and advice.

Especially mesmerizing was the session Kent Solberg led on cover cropping. Gabe, Richard and Wendy were in the audience, as well as producer panel member Carmen Femholz, and each jumped in to Kent's presentation when relevant to offer advice and perspective. It was an inspirational session jam-packed with knowledge that no one in attendance will ever forget.

I heard lots of positive feedback regarding the Summit, but the thing I heard the most was "You should do this again." That's about the best thing to hear when putting on a first-ever event, isn't it?

Special thanks go out to SFA's Sustainability Conference interns Kelsey Wulf, Paul Stewart, Whitney Oxendahl and Matt Andrews for all their help during the Midwest Soil Health Summit and SFA's Annual Conference. We couldn't have done it without you guys.

**Executive Director's Note**

Soil Health is on the tip of a lot of tongues these days. The raging success of the 2014 Midwest Soil Health Summit just confirms its importance to today's farmers. The conference was a sold-out day and a half of programming. With a great blend of expert large-audience lecture, smaller breakout sessions and targeted one-on-one programming, attendees were well informed, educated and invigorated about the prospect of soil health.

Soil Health is what happens when the naturally regenerative processes in our soils are allowed to work, unhindered by unnecessary tillage, harmful pesticides and improper fertilization. When aided by the addition of cover crops, judicious use of grazing and creative management, soils can overcome years of abuse, and over time become additively productive. Sustainable agriculture means we are able to produce indefinitely. When we focus our efforts on soil health, not only are we able to produce indefinitely, we are able to increase production over time.

Add to this the reduction of input costs, the resiliency of cash crops against extreme weather events and the diversity that comes with marketing livestock, you have a recipe for taking the boom and bust out of farming that has traditionally trapped many in an unending cycle of overproducing the wrong product at the wrong time.

If you were at the Midwest Soil Health Summit last week, you heard a vision for this type of agriculture. If you weren't at the Summit, you need a vision for this type of agriculture. We can help with that. Stay tuned for more information about future Soil Health programming from SFA.

Finally, special thanks to SFA’s Event Coordinator Jerry Ford, who, along with SFA staffers Kent Solberg and Jason Walker made the second major conference for SFA in 10 days a HUGE
Chapter Update: Cannon River

By Kathy Zeman

Cannon River SFA's Budding Farmers Field Day (Youth Only!) is Sat., March 22nd, 1-3 p.m. Hosted by Lars Haslett-Marroquin and his family. A fun-filled afternoon for youth only, including a tour of the chicken area, presentation on care and management of chickens, interactive Q&A session with budding farmers learning booklet. Kids creative egg/chicken theme activities. Chicken whispering. Cannon River SFA will provide refreshments. RSVP to buddingfarmers@gmail.com.

Cannon River SFA's March Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange is Saturday, March 29, 1-3 p.m. Topic du jour: growing transplants. Anyone can come (you don't have to be an SFA member) and there's no set agenda -- just an opportunity for folks who are interested in growing transplants to get together and share information. Location: Gardens of Eagan greenhouse: 5680 290th St. W. Northfield, MN 55057. RSVP to linda@gardensofeagan.com.

Register Now for March 15 SFP Deep Winter Class

A class from the SFA Sustainable Food Production Program, “Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy,” will hold another session from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. March 15, 2014, in Ashby, Minn.

During the class, farm owners Sue Wika and Tom Priev will provide a detailed overview of the construction and operation of their deep-winter greenhouse, which utilizes passive solar energy with underground heat storage. The greenhouse provides greens for local consumers. In addition, the structure is utilized to produce fodder for the farm livestock. Students will be in the greenhouse to see how greens and fodder are planted and harvested.

Sue and Tom's greenhouse was recently profiled by Minnesota Public Radio. To read the MPR story, click here.

Cost is $100/person. Bring a sack lunch. Beverage and fresh winter salad (grown on site) provided.

The class will be held at Paradox Farm, 11643 State Hwy 78, Ashby, MN 56309 (Directions: 7 miles north of Ashby; 10 miles south of Battle Lake).

For more information and to register, click here.

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. Charlie will address whether changing the way we farm and eat can really change our environment and the way we interact as a community. 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.

**GMO Label Day at the Capitol is March 13**

Right to Know Minnesota is holding "GMO Label Day at the Capitol" from 1 to 5 p.m. March 13. Meet other labeling advocates and tell your legislator in person that you’d like to see GMOs labeled in Minnesota. Making direct contact with legislators has a powerful impact on how they will support a bill.

The event begins at Christ Lutheran Church (105 University Ave) across from the State Capitol in St. Paul. Enjoy GMO-free treats, meet other labeling advocates, and learn how to talk with your legislator about this issue. Then attendees will walk to the Capitol to meet with legislators. You’ll meet with your elected representative from both the Minnesota House and Senate.

RSVP by March 10 at [www.RightToKnowMN.org](http://www.RightToKnowMN.org) or contact Jody at 651-434-4302 or jodyhencier@yahoo.com.

**West Side Farmers Market Seeks Vendors**

The West Side (St. Paul) 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 [wsfm.vendor@gmail.com](mailto:wsfm.vendor@gmail.com).
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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