As Retirement Nears, Dr. Val Farmer Excited to Appear at SFA Annual Conference

Getting excited? The SFA Annual Conference is less than two weeks away: Feb. 18 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph. It’s our annual gathering – a time to learn, eat, drink, chat and generally have fun.

It’s also an exciting time for our keynote speaker, Dr. Val Farmer: The Annual Conference will likely be his last farm-related speaking engagement. Dr. Farmer (right) spoke with SFA Communications Coordinator Jason Walker last week, and he said he hadn’t lost his zest for the job after decades in the field of farm psychology.

“I think I’ve learned something from working for 32 years with farm families about stress and stress management and how to communicate and how to work cooperatively with your spouse in terms of being a team,” he said. “I want to give people some hope and some thoughts as they go home and try to put things in perspective.”

Dr. Farmer has an intimate relationship with the Minnesota farm community. He lived in Fargo, ND for nine years and had clients from all around the Red River Valley. During that time, he also traveled to visit multiple farm families to help with their family business issues and estate planning, as well as speaking engagements around the state.

“I know that sustainable farmers have a certain land ethic and conservation ethic, and I think that these are wonderful people in terms of the way they farm,” he said. “They’re also probably a notch ahead in terms of how they live their lives, but still, everybody has their challenges. It’s a pleasure to be visiting with your group, and I’m glad that someone wanted me to come.”

Longtime columnists like Dr. Farmer often forge an intimate relationship with their readers, even those they’ve never met. For his friends and fans, the SFA Annual Conference will provide a classic opportunity: to meet someone whose thoughts they’ve read in farm newspapers for 28 years.

“When John (Mesko) invited me about nine months ago, (retirement) wasn’t on the horizon, but now it is and it may be my last farm group that I’m going to officially speak with,” he said. “For people who have known me through my writing, they’ll have a chance to meet me and interact. I think it’s just great that I can touch base with my readers one more time before I’m doing something else.”
Dr. Farmer will also be bringing two books to the conference. “To Have and To Hold" is a guide to having a great marriage that also makes a nice wedding gift; “Honey, I Shrunk the Farm," is a guide on dealing with farm stress. Originally priced at $14.95 and $16.95, the books will be on sale at the conference for $8 and $7.

Dr. Farmer’s column won't disappear entirely, however; it eventually will be taken over by Mike Rosmann, an Iowa psychologist who just published a book, "Excellent Joy: Fishing, Farming, Hunting and Psychology.”

Annual Conference News: Culinary Sessions, Food Details Announced

The culinary section of the Annual Conference are coming together, as Mary Jane Miller is creating a well-rounded group of cool sessions for the kitchen classroom. They include:

- **Making Pasta and Noodles at Home, with Mary Jane Miller and Martha Ziemer** – Use up extra eggs and stock your freezer or pantry with home made pastas. Learn the basics of creating a silky basic dough then explore how to add herbs, spices or vegetable purees to make vibrant colors and bright fresh flavors. Next we'll learn how to cut, shape fill and store our creations. Last but not least you'll get a chance to sample what we’ve learned.

- **Meet the Cheesemaker: Keith Adams of Alemar Cheese** – Alemar Cheese is founded on the premise that great ingredients coupled with patience, knowledge and passion can produce extraordinary results. In early 2008, I began sketching out a plan to make small batches of soft-ripened artisan cheese. After careful research, study, and counsel from some of the finest minds in the field, I started production in late April. Our first cheese, Bent River, is in the style of Camembert. Named for the sharp turn of the Minnesota River a few hundred yards from our production site, it has a creamy interior and loads of flavor. Mary Jane will be on hand to offer some ways to enjoy this luxurious cheese and of course, well be sampling. Check out Keith’s blog and all about how to find his cheese here: alemarcheese.blogspot.com.

- **Growing and Cooking Minnesota Mushrooms: Kevin Doyle, owner, Forest Mushrooms** – Established in 1985, Forest Mushrooms is a Minnesota company engaged in the research, cultivation and distribution of edible (cultivated fresh, harvested wild and dried) specialty mushrooms. We particularly specialize in the production of oyster mushrooms, and more recently, in growing shiitake mushrooms. Forest Mushroom production facilities are located in St. Joseph. Kevin will show how the mushrooms are grown and Mary Jane Miller will join him in cooking up some delights for you to try. We'll make simple sautéed mushrooms with cream and pan seared sirloin dusted with dry shiitake powder.

Coming to the Leaders Breakfast, sponsored by Organic Valley? If not, you may want to sign up. Mary Jane’s menu includes a cheddar and egg bake featuring Organic Valley eggs, milk and cheese; home-fried potatoes; Organic Valley sausage or bacon; and pumpkin bread and blueberry muffins. Eat great food while connecting with SFA’s leaders and award winners in an intimate setting.

Know a Special SFA Member? Nominate Them for an SFA Award!

Nominations are still being accepted for the 2012 Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Awards. Based on qualifications of a high level of dedication, commitment, service, perseverance, achievement and contributions to the advancement of sustainable farming in Minnesota, the award honorees will be revealed at the Leaders Breakfast at the 2012 SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 18 in St. Joseph. The awards are:

- **Sustainable Farmer Emeritus Award (farmer or retired farmer only)** – This award will be given to a farmer or farm family, currently farming or retired, that has dedicated
many years to the advancement of sustainable farming in Minnesota.

- **SFA Distinguished Service Award (may be a non-farmer)** – This award is for a farmer or non-farmer who has shown a high level of dedication, commitment, service and perseverance to supporting sustainable agriculture in Minnesota.

Mail your nomination form (available for download [here](#)) to: SFA of MN, c/o Mary Hanks, 10500 295th Street W, Northfield, MN 55057, or email your nomination to Mary.Hanks@state.mn.us.

**Last Chance for Annual Conference Volunteers**

SAVE $15 on Conference registration and volunteer for an hour or two during the SFA Annual Conference. You’ll also get a coupon for 50 percent off of an SFA T-shirt! We need people to help with set up in the morning, direct parking, work the registration table, host a session, or help clean up at the end of the day (you won’t miss the wine & cheese reception!).

If you are interested, please contact Volunteer Coordinator Karen Couné ASAP at: 612.202.7201 or karen.coune@gmail.com.

**Farm Transitions Workshop Registration Now Open**

Do you have a farm succession or estate plan? If not, your family could be saddled with unnecessary taxes and endless red tape upon your passing, if you retire, or if you become too ill to farm.

Gary Hachfeld and David Bau, of the University of Minnesota Extension, are partnering with Renewing the Countryside and the Sustainable Farming Association to present their acclaimed workshop, “Farm Transition and Estate Planning: Create Your Farm Legacy,” from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Feb. 17, the day before the SFA Annual Conference, at Warner Lake Park Nature Center in Clearwater. This vital workshop includes issues and information that must be dealt with by every farmer and farm family.

Registration is now open! [Click here](#) to register. The workshop costs $25 for the first member of the family and just $10 for each additional family member. Lunch is included.

In the workshop, participants get a greater understanding of crucial issues like transfer strategies, tax issues related to the transfer process, discuss methods for treatment of heirs in the transfer process, as well as learn how to go about developing a written transfer plan.

The workshop includes a box lunch and a planning workbook with:

- Presentation handouts
- Goal worksheets
- Farm transfer strategies worksheet
- Estimate retirement expenses worksheet
- Estate planning strategies worksheet
- Website resources
- Transferring the farm series
- Estate planning series
- Financial management series

The fee includes lunch. This workshop is made possible through a grant from the USDA Risk Management Agency.
Executive Director's Note

This is an exciting time! Our members have indicated that the SFA Conference is our most important event of the year. We are happy to have another great event planned for you. If you haven’t registered, Now is the time. You can find lots of information on the conference in this newsletter.

Secondly, pay close attention to the Farm Transitions Workshop, the day BEFORE the conference, Feb 17. As I travel the state, the issues of estate planning, access to land for beginning farmers, and looking for ways to maintain sustainably managed acres are at the forefront. This is a great way to start learning about the possibilities now, even if you are planning to stay farming for a while.

There are some interesting results coming out of our Public Policy survey. Do you think SFA should carry your voice to St. Paul? Washington DC? Where would you recommend SFA engage? Here’s YOUR CHANCE to let us know what you think SFA can or should do (or not do) in this area.

Thanks for reading and we’ll see you in St. Joseph!

Chapter Update: Cannon River

By Mary Ellen Frame

We held our annual meeting On January 21 in the Community Room of Just Food Co-op in Northfield. John Mesko talked to us about what's going on at the State level. He projected a pie chart showing where the money for the State SFA comes from, which was quite illuminating. He told us about projects that are going forward. There were lots of comments and questions from the members.

Ben Doherty, our president, started a discussion about what our chapter should be doing over the next year – what do members want? One request was for guidance on living sustainably/self-sufficiently. There are lots of people who have skills; we can teach each other. Angel Dobrow said that Transition Northfield is developing an overall community resilience plan and would like to work with SFA, since locally grown food is key.

We talked a little about next summer’s Festival of Farms; there were several volunteers for hosting farm tours. Ben suggested that we collaborate with Just Food again on having a bus.

Kathy Zeman talked about a plan for food stamp recipients to use their SNAP cards for CSA memberships; this will be possible with the collaboration of the Riverwalk Farmers Market. Also Kathy is now on the board of Rice County SHIP (Statewide Health Initiative Program) so she welcomes ideas to take to that organization.
Possibilities for workshops are: training on the use of our refractometer (to get a Brix reading), welding, and packing shed options.

We then had election of board members and officers. Josh Reinitz will continue as State representative. Also continuing are Angel Dobrow as secretary and Becky Wagner as treasurer. The offices of president and vice president remain open.

Our next board meeting will be Wednesday, February 29 at the Just Food Community Room.

**U of M Extension Offers Workshop for Small-Farm and Acreage Owners**

Do you dream of owning acreage in the country? Do you have an existing acreage that is need of a plan and strategies for the best possible results? The Living on the Land Workshop Series, offered by University of Minnesota Extension, will equip you with the education and resources to be successful. The eight-week course is designed to arm landowners with agricultural information to enable them to be good stewards of their land.

The series will be taught by Extension educators and natural resource professionals at two locations – from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday evenings from March 8-April 26 in Hutchinson at the McLeod County Fairgrounds 4-H Café and in Mankato at the Historic Courthouse in the Conference Room. Early registration is $175 until Friday, March 2 and all registrations received afterwards will be $200.

Contact Nathan Winter for a hard copy of the brochure and other questions regarding the Hutchinson Location at 320-484-4303 or by e-mail at wint0146@umn.edu. Contact Diane DeWitte at 507-304-4325 or by e-mail at stouf002@umn.edu for more information on the Mankato location and registration questions.

**Specialty Crop Growers: Apply for Business-Boosting Grants**

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has received $700,000 in federal funding to help promote and enhance the specialty crop industry. Fruit, vegetable and other specialty crop farmers can apply for Specialty Crop Block Grants to help them compete in today’s marketplace. Grant projects may include outreach to increase consumers’ nutritional knowledge about specialty crops, assistance in the development of good agricultural practices, investment into specialty crop research, development of new and improved seed varieties, and pest and disease control.

MDA Marketing and Development Director Mary Hanks says growers of fruits, vegetables, culinary herbs and spices, medicinal plants, tree nuts, flowers, and nursery plants are eligible to apply. MDA will accept grant applications through April 20, 2012. A list of eligible and ineligible commodities can be found at [www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp](http://www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp). A grant manual is available on the MDA website at [www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx).

Questions regarding the grant program or the application process can be directed to David Weinand at 651-201-6646 or email David.Weinand@state.mn.us.

**Farmers' Feedback Sought on Farm to School Program**

Farmers, ranchers, honey producers, wild ricers and other local food producers: Farm to School, the effort by K-12 schools to purchase locally grown foods, is growing rapidly, with districts that serve 60 percent of Minnesota’s K-12 students now participating to some degree. To help make sure that Farm to School works as well as possible for farmers, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) conducts a survey each year to gather producers’ feedback about Farm to School.
Whether you currently sell to K-12 schools or not, we’d like to know what you think about Farm to School in Minnesota. Please click surveymonkey.com/s/5JXBY9X to take the survey, which should take less than 10 minutes and is mostly multiple choice. Make sure to hit “DONE” at the end so that your response is recorded. Please respond by Feb. 15. Three respondents will be chosen at random to receive a Farm to School apron.

Gardens of Eagan Seeks Program Director

The Organic Field School at Gardens of Eagan is seeking an individual to serve as program director. The successful applicant will have a commitment to organic agriculture and must have strong interpersonal and communication skills, proven grant writing skills, as well as a well-developed sense of self-direction. Individuals with experience working in agriculture are encouraged to apply.

This position represents the sole staff member of OFS, is part-time, and funded for approximately six months. The successful applicant will be expected to immediately begin fundraising to cover a portion of wage and program funds for continuation of the position beyond six months. The Program Director will be expected to work from her/his home and provide her/his own computer and car. The successful applicant will live within a 100 mile radius of the Twin Cities.

To apply please send a resume and cover letter to Atina Diffley, OFS Secretary, 25498 Highview Ave. Farmington, MN 55024 on or before Feb. 10. For more information, contact Linda Halley at linda@gardensofeagan.com or visit the OFS website at www.organicfieldschool.org.

Minnesota High Tunnel Conference Set for Feb 8-9

Attend the Minnesota Statewide High Tunnel Conference Feb. 8-9 for two days of the latest research, demonstration reports and grower discussions on high tunnels and season extension in Minnesota. This statewide conference will include University of Minnesota faculty and staff presenters along with feature presentations from university guest speakers: Mary Gardiner of Ohio State University, "Identifying & Enhancing Beneficial Insects;" Russ Groves, University of Wisconsin, "Managing & Controlling Whiteflies, Aphids & Other Serious High Tunnel Insects;" and Cary Rivard, Kansas State University, "The Art of Grafting High Tunnel Plants."

Great speakers from public and private organizations and several growers will also share their expertise and new ideas for managing high tunnels. The evening "bull session" will be a great opportunity to meet other growers, discuss issues and develop suggestions for future research. For those just getting started, there will be a Beginning High Tunnel Grower Workshop from 8:30 a.m. to noon Wed., Feb. 8.

Events take place at The Lodge at Brainerd Lakes, 6967 Lake Forest Road, Baxter. Cost is $100 per person. For information, email Sue Schuler (schul925@umn.edu) or Terry Nennich (nenni001@umn.edu) or call 888-241-0885.

Advanced Orchard Health for Sustainable Fruit Seminar

Join orchard health expert Michael Phillips for a day of in-depth orchard care geared towards fruit producers looking for sustainable and nature-based production techniques. The seminar is from 9:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Thurs., Feb. 23 at the Radisson Hotel in La Crosse, Wis. Cost: $150 per person, which includes lunch, snacks and an information packet. There is a $30 discount toward registration for OTFA members and a $20 late registration fee will apply after Feb. 3.

For more information and to register: contact OTFA at 507-643-6329 or email jackie@hochorchard.com. This event is sponsored by the Organic Tree Fruit Association (OTFA) with support from MOSES.
In Memoriam: George P. Lentner of Foley

George P. Lentner, age 90, of Foley, died peacefully Jan. 17 at the farm that he loved, surrounded by his wife, children and grandchildren.

Lentner was born Nov. 5, 1921, in Graham Twp., Benton Co., MN to John and Theresa (Thueringer) Lentner. He married Celestine 'Sally' Warzecha Sept. 18, 1951, at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic Church, Opole. He had lived and farmed his whole life in Graham Township. He was also a carpenter and had worked for Lyle Huston Construction. George enjoyed the land, animals and fishing. He was a life long member of SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Church and was a member of the Gilman Knights of Columbus, Immaculate Conception Council.

He is survived by his wife, Celestine 'Sally', Foley, MN; sons and daughters, Mary (Earl) Lust, Pierz, MN; Joan Lentner, Mpls., MN; Bill, Rice, MN; Sister Ruth, Little Falls, MN; Fred (Teresa), Foley, MN; Shirley (Gary) Scapanski, Sauk Rapids, MN; Dave (Monica), Rice, MN; Gloria (Chris) Brown, Lino Lakes, MN; Tom (Mary), Foley, MN; brothers and sister, Ralph, Hillman, MN; Jim, Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Everett, St. Cloud, MN; and Dorothy Tomporowski, Houston, TX; 25 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren.

Memorials are preferred to Sustainable Farming Association, Box 192, Princeton, MN 55371, or Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls.

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.

Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA)
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