Volunteers Still Needed for SFA Annual Conference and Other Assorted Details You Really Need to Know

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Volunteers are what make the SFA Annual Conference possible, and we are still seeking help for various shifts on Feb. 13 in St. Joseph. Volunteers are needed at various times all day to help with parking, registration, setup, tear-down, and serve as session monitors. All volunteers get a free SFA t-shirt. Plus, as most any SFA conference volunteer would tell you, it’s fun! Email Gretchen Boyum with your preference for time and job at boyumfarms@gmail.com.

Student scholarships are still available – the 50 percent discount is available for current students, and recipients must sign up for at least one volunteer shift. Info: jerry@sfa-mn.org.

Otter Risers Kiwanis, Fergus Falls, Minn., has offered scholarship funds for children 3-12 to attend the Budding Farmers program at the 2016 SFA Annual Conference, and nine $10 scholarships remain. To claim one of the scholarship registrations for your child, contact Jason Walker at jason@sfa-mn.org.

WOC Talks have been selected and include: Scott Haase, “Maximizing Our Impact on the Landscape;” Joe Borgerding, “Full Circle Farming in Just Forty Years;” Sam Raser, “Successful Oat Production in the Upper Midwest;” and Jim VanDerPol, “Farm Hacks from Pastures A Plenty.”

The Friday Night Social, an informal gathering and jam session, is 7-9 p.m. Feb. 12 at the Minnesota Street Market food co-op in St. Joseph, just across the street from the St. Ben’s campus. Bring your instrument or voice, or just come enjoy the fun. Info: Lisa at info@bakersacresfarm.com.

At 7:30 a.m. Feb. 13 is our yearly Leaders Breakfast and Director’s Awards – it’s just $15, but you must purchase the ticket to attend the breakfast. Register on the conference homepage.

The Seed Swap returns from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the lobby at the Gorecki Center – bring your seeds to trade and share your techniques with other growers from around the region.

If you haven’t registered, what are you waiting for? Register today and we’ll see you at St. Ben’s on Feb 13!

Options Aplenty at 2016 MSHS: What’s Right for You?

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Executive Director’s Note

Panelists Deliver ‘Reality Farming’ Insight at MN Organic

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Small-Scale Sustainable Sheep Event is Feb. 20 in Fosston

Few Spots Remain for Farm Skills 101, Deep Winter Short Course
The SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit is approaching on Feb. 17-18 at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, and this year there are more educational and networking opportunities than ever.

As registration heats up, I’d like to clearly explain the various programming to ensure you have the precise information you need to plan your schedule.

First, the main Midwest Soil Health Summit is $150 for members and $200 for nonmembers, and the first sessions begin at 2:30 p.m. on Feb. 17 with “Intro to Soil Biology” with Michael Lehman, followed by “Principles for Building Soil Health” with Kent Solberg at 4. Afterward, a social hour with hearty snacks, cash bar, exhibitors and networking will ensue, culminating in an interview of Jay Fuhrer and Allen Williams by SFA Executive Director John Mesko. You must register for the main MSHS to attend these sessions. Of course, all of the Feb. 18 sessions – Jay, Allen, Grant Breitkreutz, Todd McPeak, etc. – are included with MSHS registration.

Second, the special “Building Soil Health Experts” track will be held from 10:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Feb. 17 and is a separately ticketed event targeted solely to agriculture service professionals. Cost is $100; click here to register. You may register for both this and the MSHS, but those who only register for the “Experts” track may not attend the social hour or any of the Feb. 18 programming. CEU credits have been APPROVED for “Building Soil Health Experts” – contact wayne@sfa-mn.org for details.

Third, there are two completely free events that anyone is welcome to attend regardless of ticket purchase. At 1 p.m. Feb. 17, John Mesko will present “Soil Science Basics,” a very entry-level course that is intended for non-farmers, lay people and landowners. Then, at 2:30 p.m. Feb. 17, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy joins us for a special International Roundtable to discuss the launch of a new international initiative around soil carbon coming from the global climate agreement in Paris.

Click here to view the full two-day schedule.

Registration for all begins at 9 a.m. Feb. 17 at Arrowwood. To reserve a room, call the resort at 1.866.386.5263 and be sure to request the MSHS rate of $105.

The Midwest Soil Health Summit has become a real point of pride within SFA. We often hear that “it’s the best conference I’ve ever been to,” and it’s attracted a diverse new crowd to our brand of agriculture. I hope to see you Feb. 17-18 in Alexandria!

Executive Director’s Note

Welcome to winter! There are lots of great opportunities during the winter months in Minnesota for farmers and sustainable agriculture supporters to learn more and connect more around the important issues of soil health, climate change and local food. Many of our partner organizations have some excellent opportunities, and we would encourage you to check them out.

We have purposefully developed our program to support the rest of the offerings throughout the sustainable agriculture community. We also want to commend to you our Annual Conference, Feb. 13, 2016 in St. Joseph. SFA is a Farmer to Farmer Network. That means everything we do is designed at some level to facilitate a deeper connection among the diversity that makes up the agricultural community.

So, here are some tips to take advantage of the tremendous networking potential available to you at the SFA Annual Conference.

1. Register Early! If you are a member of SFA, you’ll save $10 if you register before Feb. 1.
2. Become a member. See #1.
3. Plan your day. Take a look at the schedule of offerings and think about which sessions you might want to attend. There’s so much to pick from you’ll want to think about it before you come.

4. Bring a friend, have them attend a couple of different sessions than you and compare notes.

5. Come with a question in mind. Got a specific need on your farm? Bring it, and look for someone who can help.

6. Come looking for a connection to be made. Is there someone specific you’d like to meet, to pick their brain, or learn what they are doing? Check out the list of folks who have registered, and send them a note suggesting a meeting.

7. Commit to meeting 3 new people at the conference. Just make a commitment to yourself to do it. Meet someone, get a name, email address and send them a note afterwords. You’ll be glad you did.

8. Bring your phone, tweet and post before during and after the conference with #sfamn16. It’s a great way to connect!

See you on Feb. 13.

Panelists Deliver 'Reality Farming' Insight at MN Organic

Several SFA members, most of them products of the Deep Roots program, presided on a lively “Reality Farming” panel discussion on Jan. 8 at the Minnesota Organic Conference in St. Cloud.

The farmers related personal stories and insight about the successes, failures, and unexpected obstacles they had experienced early in their careers, and explained why they had chosen a sustainable farming education.

Panelists Karla Chandler, Kaylee Arlt, Josh Grundyson, Andy Hayer and Bryan Simon are pictured above with Deep Roots instructor Dr. Sue Wika.

Southeast Chapter 'Life of the Soil' Event is March 5

SFA Southeast Chapter is hosting an educational seminar on soil health from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sat., March 5, at the Lewiston Community Center, 75 Rice St, Lewiston. Learn about the connection between soil, animal and human health.

Speakers include Dr. Don Huber, soil health professor emeritus at Purdue University; large animal veterinarian Dr. Art Dunham; and Dr. Michael McNeil of Ag Advisory.

Cost is $15/SFA members and $20/nonmembers and includes Organic Valley snacks and beverages. RSVP by Feb. 25 to Arlene at anelson69@centurylink.net or 507.796.6233 or Erik at erijharr@gmail.com or 507.796.0152.
Annual Meetings Upcoming: Crow River, Central

Crow River Chapter Annual Meeting is 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Jan. 30 at Delano Senior Center, 234 2nd St N, Delano. Discussion includes creating mini-grant programs, supporting local processing initiatives, branding the Crow River region as a local food destination, and more. Free for Crow River members. Potluck lunch. Register online here or print this form and mail to the address shown. Info: jerry@sfa-mn.org or 1.844.922.5573 Ext. 705.

Central Chapter Annual Meeting is 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Feb. 6 at the Initiative Foundation, 405 1st St SE, Little Falls. Agenda includes marketing panel, potluck meal and board meeting, and afternoon of strategic planning led by Jan Joannides from Renewing the Countryside. Cost is $10 members and $30/nonmembers; vendors welcome for $50. Register online here.

Deep Winter Greenhouse Tour Series Announced

SFA is producing a series of tours at deep winter greenhouses across the region culminating in a wrap-up session at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 13. These free tours, presented by SFA's Deep Winter Producers Networking Group, in collaboration with U of M Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, are occurring all across Minnesota over four weekends, with locations including:

- St. John's University, Collegeville, and College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph
- Garden Goddess, Milan
- Way Cool Farm, Deer River
- Barry's Cherries, Wadena
- Lida Farm, Pelican Rapids, and Paradox Farm, Ashby
- Whitewater Gardens Farm, Altura
- Thiel Gardens, Minneapolis

Information: http://www.sfa-mn.org/deep-winter-tour-2016/

Small Scale Sustainable Sheep Event Feb. 20 in Fosston

The second annual Small Scale Sustainable Sheep Farming Event will be Feb. 20, 2016, beginning at 10 a.m. at the Fosston Civic Center, 215 E First St, Fosston. This event is open to the public and focuses on the benefits of sheep as part of a sustainable farming system where meat and wool are viable value-added products.

Cost is $20 for adults, under 10 are free; pay at the door. Lunch and snacks provided. Please RSVP to Alethea Kenney at 218-657-2502 or sustainablesheep@sfa-mn.org. Trade show booths are also still available.

Information: SFA's Sustainable Sheep homepage.

Few Spots Remain for Farm Skills 101, Deep Winter Class

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.
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.

**Deep Winter Greenhouse Short Course:** Also, a few spots remain for our Feb. 21 Deep Roots short course, “Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy.” Click here to register.

**Findings for Corn Belt Farmers Workshop on Feb. 11**

The Heron Lake Watershed District and Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area will be hosting a “Findings and Recommendations for Corn Belt Farmers” workshop from 1 to 3 p.m. Feb. 11 at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center, 23669 130th Street, Lamberton, Minn. The event will highlight findings and recommendations from the Sustainable Corn project.

The event will also be streamed by live webinar at [www.sustainablecorn.org](http://www.sustainablecorn.org).

Speakers and topics include Eileen Klavidko, Purdue University, cover crops; Rick Cruse, Iowa State University, tillage management; Jeff Strock, University of Minnesota, drainage water management; Joe Lauer, University of Wisconsin, extended crop rotations; and J. Arbuckle, ISU, farmer adaptation and conservation practice adoption. Info: jan.voit@mysmbs.com.

**Check This Out**

From the Minnesota Corn Growers Association, this video, "Cover Crops in Southern Minnesota," interviews farmer Jerry Ackermann of Lakefield who's been "blown away" by the results he's had from covers.

From the Washington Post, this column, "No Food is Healthy, Not Even Kale" makes some really interesting points about health, nutrition, and most Americans' lack of thought when it comes to the food they eat.

**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.
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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