Complete Annual Conference Schedule Published and Available for Download on SFA Homepage

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

The SFA Annual Conference is nearly here – 12 days away! – and nearly 150 people are already registered. We have had a terrific response to the "Back to Our Roots" themes of member-selected sessions as well as our farmer-led networking environment.

The sessions are likely to be popular with the folks who suggested them – you, our SFA members and supporters who will be attending the conference –so we are happy to unveil the official schedule early to make it easy to plan your conference day.

From member-chosen topics to Mary Jane Miller's culinary sessions to our Nick Neaton-led children's programming, there will be something for the whole family at the 2014 SFA Annual Conference. Also planned is a local wine, beer and cheese social hour, plenty of break time for networking, a seed swap, and lots more.

Click here to visit the Conference homepage and download the schedule. Registration begins at 7:15 a.m., with the conference opening at 8:30 a.m.

Remember the Friday night social from past SFA Conferences? This year, all conference attendees and their families are invited to our free Friday Evening Social & Musical Jam, "How Farmers Do Minnesota Winters," set for 7-10 p.m. Feb. 7 at Minnesota Street Market, 27 W Minnesota St, St. Joseph. Bring your instrument and voice – food will be available for purchase from the market. Then, feel free to continue the dialogue and explore downtown St. Joe after 10 p.m.

The SFA Leaders Breakfast, where we present our yearly awards and hear a special "State of SFA" address from Executive Director John Mesko, is returning the morning of the Conference. The breakfast, set for 7:30 a.m. Feb. 8 in the Gorecki Center at the College of Saint Benedict, costs just $12.50 for conference-goers to attend. To register or learn more, click here.

Also, please note that the SFA member discount for Annual Conference registration ends Jan. 31. After that and at the door, the price for everybody is $65. If you need a reminder of your discount code or have a question about your SFA membership status, just email jason@sfa-mn.org.

We'll see you at St. Ben's!
Announcing a Special Opportunity for SFA Networking:
Register Now for Limited-Ticket Event with Gabe Brown

The Sustainable Farming Association is hosting a special, limited-ticket event from 4 to 6 p.m. Fri., Feb. 19, before the Midwest Soil Health Summit – a chance to network one-on-one with soil health pioneer Gabe Brown of Brown's Ranch.

ONLY TEN tickets will be sold to this "Gab with Gabe" reception, so attendees will have ample opportunity to speak with Gabe as well as SFA Executive Director John Mesko, Livestock & Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg, and Network Development Coordinator Jerry Ford – all of whom have grass-based livestock operations.

The "Gab With Gabe" reception also will feature local cheese from SFA members Deborah and Scott Pikovsky's Star Thrower Farm as well as other light refreshments.

At 6 p.m., the MSHS begins with a cocktail reception including all conference attendees as well as a presentation by John and Gabe.

Click here to get your ticket for "Gab With Gabe" and take advantage of a chance to network with this world-renowned soil health pioneer. Registration ends at noon Feb. 17.

Of course, registration for the Midwest Soil Health Summit is ongoing, and for a first-year event we're pretty excited about the response we've received. Openings do remain, however, for both attendees and vendors, and remember that SFA members save $50 on registration for the main Summit. If you need a reminder of your discount code or have a question about your SFA membership status, just email jason@sfa-mn.org.

Executive Director's Note

Have you heard SFA's new podcast? Last week, I visited with Midwest Soil Health Summit Keynote Speaker Gabe Brown about his farm, soil health, and what makes a good conference.

You can hear/view the podcast here.

In case you missed it, here's the link to an earlier podcast I did with Kent Solberg on Outwintering.

Check these out! I'd love to hear your feedback on the podcasts. Do you listen to them? Are they informative? Are they too long? too short? just right?

Stay warm, and I hope to see you at the SFA Annual Conference Feb. 8, 2014 in St. Joseph, or the Midwest Soil Health Summit, Feb. 19-20, 2014 in Alexandria.
Up Next on KCIM Slate: Leader Lions Conference

SFA's Keep Cattle in Minnesota project, our series of workshops that provides producers with management options that have demonstrated the ability to reduce operational cost, provide additional income streams and improve soil health, has an upcoming workshop planned.

SFA is partnering with Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council (Leader Lions) to host a KCIM event from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Feb. 11 at Central Lakes College in Staples. The event features Josh Dukart and Ken Miller, district technicians from Burleigh County (N.D.) Soil Conservation District, who will focus on soil health and profitability as related to cattle production. Check-in for the event begins at 9 a.m. Cost is $15, which includes lunch. Click here to register.

Also, the KCIM event (above) recently held at Abe Mach's farm in Moose Lake was a success, drawing around 30 interested farmers. More photos and videos from these events are coming soon.

For more information on all of these events, and for announcements of future events, visit our Keep Cattle In Minnesota homepage.

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 experiences could help other farmers. Check out our survey.

Our ongoing GrazeFest series of grass-based livestock and cover cropping events is led by Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg. Visit our GrazeFest homepage and watch SFA Connect for updates on our upcoming on-farm events.

Keep Cattle in Minnesota

Keep Cattle in Minnesota will build on SFA's foundation to grow and sustain the beef and dairy industries in Minnesota while protecting our vast environmental resources.

Sustainable Food Production Program

Sustainable Food Production, formerly part of M State Fergus Falls, is a much-needed beginning-farmer curriculum that emphasizes all three tenets of sustainability, plus provides extensive skills training.

New Crops Project

SFA's New Crops Project aims to expand the availability of local foods in Minnesota and help farmers expand their markets.

Minnesota Dairy Initiative

For information about MDI and its ongoing projects, email SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg.
small ruminants, Wika and Prieve are experienced sustainable farming educators and lead SFA’s Sustainable Food Production Program.

To learn more and to register, click here.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer Crystal Liepa documented our SFA Annual Conference again in 2013 at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Watch for a new photo each issue of SFA Connect and learn more about Crystal at her website.

This is the last photo from 2013’s Conference to be featured – the next edition of SFA Connect will include this year’s event!

Lakewinds Organic Field Fund Deadline Nears

Lakewinds Natural Foods is now accepting applications for the 2014 Organic Field Fund, a grant program that provides funding for farmers who are working in organic agriculture, whether through research and development, organic certification, transitioning farms from conventional to organic production, or creating new farms. Lakewinds Organic Field Fund is open to new and established farmers working in our region, but preference will be given for farmers and farming organizations located in Minnesota, northern Iowa, and western Wisconsin. Applications are available now through Feb. 7, 2014. All applications are reviewed by a committee, and final grant recipients will be awarded funds in mid-March.

Application is available at www.lakewinds.coop/community/loff.
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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