SFA at This Weekend's Organic Conference

By Jason Walker • Communications Coordinator

Happy New Year from the Sustainable Farming Association. As the calendar turns and our Annual Conference nears, it's clear we're getting into the midst of winter conference season. It's a fun time knowing that I'll be seeing and chatting with many of you over the next couple months, especially at our two-day gathering Feb. 15-16 in Chaska.

This weekend is the Minnesota Organic Conference, organized by the Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture. SFA will be there all weekend, with me, John Mesko, Kent Solberg, and more – if you attend, be sure to say hello.

Our good friends from Renewing the Countryside, Jan Joannides and Brett Olson, will be helping us promote our joint Farm Transitions project, which helps farmers create a transition plan for their farm, estate and assets. If you are interested in Farm Transitions and will be at the conference, talk to us and be sure to attend Friday's session "Who's Next? Farm Succession and Transfer" led by Olson and attorney Brian Schoenborn of Leonard, Street and Deinard.

(By the way, if you can't make any of these sessions, don't fret – all will be presented again in some form at the SFA Annual Conference).

SFA's Jerry Ford will be leading a session Saturday, "Growing Great Garlic." Jerry is a veteran garlic producer at his Living Song Farm in Howard Lake and will present alongside Paul Schmidt of SunFresh Foods.

In addition, this Thursday there are several additional workshops planned, including one SFA is co-sponsoring: "Meat Sales: The Rules and The Processing," designed for livestock producers who currently sell meat or poultry and for those who want to start. SFA Executive Director John Mesko will be there representing our meat processing project. The workshop will be 9 a.m.-4 p.m. and cost $40; register here.

And speaking of our Annual Conference ... the schedule is being updated as we move forward. The sessions are going to be updated at this link on our homepage, and registration is currently under way here. Please check back often as I will be updating the schedule with session information and presenter biographies as they roll in.

Executive Director's Note

By John Mesko

Welcome to 2013. Its launching with some great conferences, including the MN Organic Conference and of course, the SFA Annual Conference. This is a very busy time for SFA, and a
very exciting one as well. Its an important time where our Farmer to Farmer Network can re-engage, and reconnect. I hope to see many of you at this winter's conferences and meetings.

One of the key components of "networking" as we like to call it, is the capacity and the opportunity to connect with others in the same walk of life to discuss, compare, contrast, and solve the issues faced in that particular walk of life. This is an important aspect of many of the conferences coming up in the next few months. At the SFA Conference, we've tried to make sure that there is ample opportunity for folks to do just that. Our farmer-oriented sessions are designed to allow for interaction among guests. Our schedule provides ample break time and time just to connect. Finally, our venues, and this year's in particular, are chosen with networking in mind.

The MN Landscape Arboretum has meeting facilities that are big enough to host a conference like ours, but small enough to provide a place for 2, 3 or 4 people to connect informally. And, even though its winter outside, there will be plenty of warm, inviting conversation inside.

If you've never been to an SFA Conference before, this one would be a great one to come to. There will be something for everyone. If you've been before, I'm certain you won't be disappointed. Check out the conference page for more information, and I hope to see you there.

Nominations Sought for SFA Distinguished Service Awards

SFA award season has begun: We're seeking nominations for the Farmer Emeritus and Distinguished Service awards, to be presented at the Leaders Breakfast during the 2013 SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 16 in Chaska.

Criteria are pretty simple: Farmer Emeritus nominees should have a distinguished career history of farming in Minnesota; Distinguished Service nominees must have a demonstrable strong connection to local food or sustainable agriculture.

If you know someone who fits either or both of these descriptions, please consider nominating them. Our SFA awards are special honors that reward the backbone members of our sustainable agriculture community, and we value a wide range of nominees. Last year's winners were Kent and Linda Solberg (Farmer Emeritus) and DeEtta Bilek and Mary Ellen Frame (Distinguished Service).

Please download the nomination form here, complete and send to: SFA, c/o Mary Hanks, 10500 295th Street W, Northfield, MN 55057, or email your nomination to Mary.Hanks@state.mn.us.

SFA EVENTS

Annual Conference
Sat., Feb. 16, 2013
Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, Chaska

SFA WORK

New Crops Project
SFA's New Crops Project aims to expand the availability of local foods in Minnesota and help farmers expand their markets. For information, visit Bobby Wenner's New Crops blog.

Jim VanDerPol Named to Governor's Task Force
Governor Mark Dayton on Dec. 20 named SFA member, certified organic farmer and sustainable agriculture leader Jim VanDerPol (above) to the Minnesota Food Safety and Defense Task Force. Per Minnesota Statute 28A.21, the duties of this task force are to:

- Coordinate educational efforts regarding food safety and defense
- Provide advice and coordination to state agencies as requested by the agencies
- Serve as a source of information and referral for the public, news media, and others concerned with food safety and defense; and
- Make recommendations to Congress, the legislative committees with jurisdiction over agriculture finance and policy, the legislature, and others about appropriate action to improve food safety and defense in the state.

VanDerPol's term was effective immediately and expires June 30, 2016. Congratulations, Jim!

**Annual Conference Photo Feature**

Thanks to [Heavy Table](http://www.heavytable.com) photographer Crystal Liepa, we have a stockpile of awesome photos from our 2012 Annual Conference, held Feb 18 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph. Look for a new photo in each SFA Connect, and read Heavy Table writer Tricia Cornell’s story about the conference [here](http://www.heavytable.com).

Just think, it's barely over a month until our next Annual Conference. Time flies, doesn't it?

**Take a Photo, Win a Free SFA T-Shirt? You Might.**

Who doesn't want to win a free T-shirt, let alone a cool SFA one? Here's your chance. Send communications coordinator Jason Walker your photos, and the best each month, chosen by a panel of distinguished judges, gets an SFA T-shirt. Send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org and we'll include the winner in SFA Connect. Check out our [Facebook page](http://www.facebook.com) for all the photo submissions.

**Our last winner:** Paul Stewart of Kingston, who sent this photo of loading grain at the Jungles Farm in Watkins.

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**Meat Processing**

The Northeast Regional Correctional Facility has a meat processing plan that is inspected for part of the year. [See a slideshow of the facility here](http://www.heavytable.com).
Women's Environmental Institute Has Two Job Openings

Want to work with a creative, fun, and fast-paced non-profit focusing on Environmental and Agricultural Justice? The Women's Environmental Institute is seeking two part-time administrative employees to work in the office at WEI's Growing Power Regional Outreach Training Center, located at the Amador Hill Farm and Orchard at WEI in North Branch. The positions (click for more info):

- Administrative Farm Coordinator position information
- WEI Events Coordinator position information

For the right person, these two part-time positions might be combined to create one full-time position. Application deadline is January 18, 2013. The positions will remain open until filled.

To apply, please send a detailed letter of inquiry, resumé, and three references with contact information to: wei@w-e-i.org or Director of Operations, Women's Environmental Institute, Box 128, North Branch, MN 55056. Deadline: postmarked or e-mailed by midnight Jan. 18, 2012.

Lakewinds Natural Foods Launching Field Fund

Lakewinds Natural Foods is proud to announce Lakewinds Organic Field Fund applications are now available.

Lakewinds Organic Field Fund was developed to have an impact on the lives of local organic farmers, farming associations and the local organic food industry. Supporting like-minded organizations is part of the mission at Lakewinds. We believe it will deepen our connections with farms and organizations that supply local and organic food to our member-owners and customers.

Lakewinds Organic Field Fund is available primarily to farms and farming associations located in Minnesota, northern Iowa, and western Wisconsin. It focusing on projects such as organic certification, research and development, farms transitioning from conventional to organic, new organic farms, land trusts for organic farms, and related training and education. Visit our homepage for eligibility information and an application, and to view our 2012 Lakewinds Organic Field Fund recipient video.

Lakewinds also recently announced that it has entered into a purchase agreement for the Lyndale Garden Center site in Richfield (Lyndale Ave between 64th and 65th streets) with plans
to open a new store. It is estimated that it may take 9 to 12 months to build the co-op. "The earliest possible opening date is November 2013, which is an ambitious date considering all the work that has to be done," said Dale Woodbeck, general manager of Lakewinds and a lifetime SFA member.

Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference Planned

Minority and immigrant farmers are invited to participate in the 8th Annual Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference. Hosted by the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota, Minnesota Food Association, USDA-Farm Service Agency and USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Services, the two-day conference provides education and resources to small farm operators and fosters relationships between farmers and community partners. The conference will be held Feb. 2-3 at the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters Event Hall, 710 Olive Street, St. Paul.

Registration is available by calling MFA at 651-433-3676, or Panukoochi Yang at the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota at 952-388-3275. The conference is free to farmers. Language interpretation is available. The cost for other interested parties is $50 per day.

Permaculture Research Institute Hosting Event Series

The Permaculture Research Institute is hosting three workshops in the next two weeks that may be beneficial to SFA members:

- **Intro to Permaculture**, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Jan. 12, Location TBD, $50 (discount for PRI members). Whether you are completely new to the idea of sustainability or already living green, this interactive beginner’s workshop will give you a fresh and inspiring perspective. To register, [click here](#).

- **Intro to Twin Cities Urban Farming and Local Foods Policy**, 6-8 p.m. Jan. 15, 2822 Lyndale Ave. S, Minneapolis, $25 (discount for PRI members). What is Urban Farming? Is urban farming the idea of growing food to feed my family or my community, or both? What are the policies that are currently in place in the Twin Cities? Where is policy headed? How do I get started? What are the best resources to start with? What are the different methodologies to pursue? I want to grow food where do I start? To register, [click here](#).

- **Personal Permaculture**, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Jan. 19, Location TBD, $50 (discount for PRI members). Make your life easier by discovering how to practice permaculture every day. As we explore and try out tools and frameworks for moving forward, we'll look through the permaculture lens at issues and choices that we face on a daily basis. To register, [click here](#).

For questions or more information, email Emily Duma at emily@pricoldclimate.org.

Minnesota Farmers Eligible for GAP Certification Cost Share

Food safety has become a front-page issue all across the country, resulting in increased requirements being placed on farmers by many wholesale buyers such as distributors, restaurants, schools and grocers. To help Minnesota farmers become Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified, the MDA is using AGRI funding to reimburse Minnesota farmers for 75 percent of the cost of receiving GAP certification up to a maximum payment of $2,500. Cost share payments are available for farms who incurred GAP certification expenses between Jan. 1, 2012 and May 15, 2013.

Applications and details are [available online](#) or by calling Cassie Boadway at 651.201.6134.

Workshops Set on Wholesale Success with Produce

Join Atina Diffley, former co-owner of Gardens of Eagan and now official Wholesale Success trainer, for a daylong workshop devoted to learning about wholesale marketing and post-harvest
Diffley, who will also lead a session at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 15-16 at Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, draws on her decades of experience in large-scale vegetable production and marketing to provide operators of produce farms of any size with useful, practical, profit-making guidance on how to achieve the highest quality produce for sale. The workshop is set for 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Jan. 26 at Community Resource Bank, Northfield.

Farmer-Buyer Networking will be part of the day's events, coordinated by Renewing the Countryside. Farmers and potential wholesale buyers will have an opportunity to meet, learn about each other's interests in locally grown produce, and exchange contact information. These sessions will take place during the last hour and a half at each location. Farmers and buyers who want to attend just the networking session may attend that session only for free. Workshop co-sponsors and collaborators include the SFA Crow River Chapter.

Cost is $15 and refreshments and lunch are provided. Register at www.misa.umn.edu, 800-909-6472, or email misamail@umn.edu.

For more information, contact Kathy Zeman, (507) 664-9446 or kzeman@mfma.org.

MDA Again Offering Winter Workshop Series

Help keep the winter doldrums at bay by attending a series of workshops sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) in January. Four workshops on a diverse array of farming topics will be offered Jan. 10, 2013, at the River's Edge Convention Center in St. Cloud. Registration materials are available at www.mda.state.mn.us/amd or by calling the MDA at 651-201-6012 and asking for a "Winter Workshops" brochure. The workshops include:

- Building Better Bovines: Selection, Breeding, and Management for Top Returns, presented by Gearld Fry. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Fee: $50.
- Meat Sales: The Rules and The Processing, a panel discussion hosted by MDA Meat Inspection Compliance Officer Levi Muhl. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Fee: $40.
- Understanding Soil Health, presented by biological soil expert Gary Zimmer and his colleagues from Midwestern BioAg and Otter Creek Organic Farm. 1-5 p.m. Fee: $25.
- Growing and Marketing Specialty Mushrooms: Oyster, Shiitake and Winecap, presented by Joe Krawczyk, Field & Forest Mushrooms. 1-4 p.m. Fee: $25.

Although they immediately precede the two-day Minnesota Organic Conference to be held Jan. 11-12, also in St. Cloud, these workshops are designed for all kinds of farmers – beginning and experienced, young and old, conventional and organic. More information about the Minnesota Organic Conference is at www.mda.state.mn.us/organic.

'Farming for Soil Health' Class this Winter in Glenwood

A two-part "Farming for Soil Health: Setting the Foundation for Success and Profitability" class will be offered this winter in Glenwood. The first part of the class will be held Jan. 15-17; the second part is Feb. 5-6. All sessions will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Central Square (105 2nd Ave. NE). The cost is $500 for the first person per farm, family or agency, and $250 for each additional person per unit. The registration deadline in Jan. 10.

This class is designed for farmers, landowners, natural resource professionals and anyone else who is interested in learning how to use the Holistic Management decision-making model to improve soil health in a manner that balances environmental protection, economic viability and quality of life.

The instructor will be Joshua Dukart, a Holistic Management certified educator who also works for the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District in North Dakota. Burleigh County is known nationally for the cutting-edge work farmers, conservationists and scientists there are doing to improve soil health utilizing a combination of cover cropping, managed grazing and conservation tillage.
Farmers, Ag Businesses Target of New Grant Program

Minnesota agricultural producers and processors can now apply for grants to implement value added projects to their operations. A total of $700,000 in funding was made available through the Agricultural Growth, Research and Innovation Program (AGRI), established by the legislature to advance Minnesota’s agricultural and renewable energy industries. Specifically, these grants are intended to:

- initiate or expand livestock product processing;
- create feasibility, business, marketing and succession plans for existing and new businesses;
- purchase equipment to initiate, upgrade, or modernize value added businesses;
- increase on-farm food safety, such as implementation of a food safety plan
- increase farmers’ processing and aggregating capacity to enter farm-to-school and other markets

Proposals that have a meat processing, farm-to-school (or other institution) component, or are addressing Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) or similar type of food safety plan will receive priority, but all value-added proposals are encouraged to apply. Small to medium sized operations will also receive special consideration.

[Apply here](#) For more information, contact David Weinand, MDA grants administrator, at 651-201-6646 or david.weinand@state.mn.us.

Back to Basics Sustainable Living Fair Set for Jan. 26

Happy Dancing Turtle will be hosting its annual Back to Basics sustainable living event from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Jan. 26, 2013, at Pine River-Backus school in Pine River. This year’s theme will be "Steps Toward Sustainability: The Solution Is YOU!" Chuck Marohn, President of the Community Growth Institute, will be the keynote speaker.

Happy Dancing Turtle is looking for sponsors, exciting new ideas and knowledgeable presenters for workshops as well as quality vendors and exhibitors, providing quality products and information to help participants lead more sustainable lives.

Join the workshop for a fun filled day of learning, networking, and inspiration. For more details please visit the Happy Dancing Turtle website [http://www.happydancingturtle.org/](http://www.happydancingturtle.org/).

Grant Funds for Sustainable Farming Innovations

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program will award up to $100,000 in 2013 for on-farm sustainable agriculture research or demonstration projects. The MDA is now accepting applications for the grant program which promotes environmental stewardship and conservation of resources and strives to improve profitability and quality of life on farms and in rural areas.

Grant applications are available on the MDA website at [http://go.usa.gov/YBSj](http://go.usa.gov/YBSj) or by contacting the Agricultural Marketing and Development Division at 651-201-6012. Completed applications must be received by MDA no later than Jan. 11, 2013.

MDA Has $1 Million in Funds for State Livestock Farmers

Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson has announced that $1 million in grant funding is being made available to livestock producers in the state for on-farm improvements.
The Livestock Investment Grant Program was first funded by the Minnesota legislature in 2008. Since then, 89 grant recipients have invested an estimated $31 million in improvements to their operations.

The deadline to apply for the grant program is January 14, 2013. More information on the Minnesota Livestock Investment Program can be found on the MDA website.

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**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)**
Box 192, Princeton, MN 55371
763-260-0209 • info@sfa-mn.org

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