With Help from SFA's Network, Young Farmer Families Living Their Dreams at Lakeside Prairie Farm near Barrett

Bryan and Jessie Simon came to the 2012 SFA Annual Conference hoping to learn a little, do some networking and make connections that would help them find some land to farm.

What happened exceeded their wildest expectations.

Bryan and Jessie attended a session on Farm Transitions moderated by SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg, who mentioned that he works to help beginning farmers find land. Zeroing in on Kent after the workshop, the Simons described their dream farm: ecologists by education, Bryan and his partner, Ryan Heinen, sought a native oak savanna where they could raise mainly grass-fed beef, pastured poultry and vegetables while returning the land to its natural prairie state.

Rewind a couple hours to when another SFA Annual Conference attendee, Sylvia Luetmer, approached Kent. Seems she had wanted to purchase some investment land and wanted to hook up with some beginning farmers who could rent it.

So Kent linked the Simons with Sylvia, and a year later Lakeside Prairie Farm is grazing cattle, growing oats, raising pastured poultry and eggs, and growing vegetables to sell at farmers markets with plans for a CSA next year. Bryan, Jessie and their newborn son, Charlie, live on the farm while Ryan commutes from nearby Barrett; they’re working to restore their land with prescribed burns and the removal of surplus trees and invasive species like buckthorn. Their land is also nearly surrounded by two lakes, so the farmers are working to restore the lakeshores to...
“I don’t think we can return it to its historic condition because too many things have changed, the climate is changing, too many human impacts,” Bryan said during a recent farm tour. “But we want to have as many species as possible – diversity in our crops and in our native plants.”

Both Bryan and Ryan come from an background in conservation; they’ve each worked for The Nature Conservancy as well as other jobs with the National Park Service (Bryan) and Koochiching County Soil and Water Conservation District and Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (Ryan). Now, they’re soaking up farming knowledge through their on-farm experience, farmer networking within SFA, voracious reading and attending conferences. Bryan also serves on the SFA Central Chapter board.

“Wendell Berry has a quote that I like to use to describe why we became farmers, ‘Why should a conservationist have a positive interest in... farming? There are lots of reasons, but the plainest is: Conservationists eat.’” Bryan said. “While we would like to see much of our current food system torn down, we would rather be builders of its replacement.

“We are out here to produce food without compromise. We are growing food that is healthy, flavorful, and nutrient-dense; food that doesn't deplete our soil, doesn't pollute our water and air, or alter the climate. And we're growing our food in a way supports a rich diversity of wildlife and a vibrant rural community. We aren't hoping to feed the world – we're seeking to feed our neighbors.”

To continue reading SFA’s profile of Lakeside Prairie Farm, click here.

Executive Director's Note
We know summer is such a busy time for everyone. That's why it's hard to put so much great information in a newsletter like this during the summer, knowing not everyone will get it in a timely manner. Jason's profile of Lakeside Prairie Farm is a great example of what Farmer-to-Farmer Networking is all about. Jerry Ford's new role, outlined below, will make a huge impact on SFAs work with chapters and other networks. We are very excited to see the Network Development work kick off. Thanks Jerry!

As some of you may know, the Sustainable Food Production (SFP) Program at M-State Fergus Falls has been defunded by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Several SFA member farmers are graduates of the program, and SFA member farms have been mentors for the program's students for several years. For some time, the future of the SFP program was in doubt, as program organizers pursued options for the future. One of those options was to offer the SFP program as an additional SFA program.

I'm very pleased to announce we've done just that! SFA is thrilled to support this award-winning beginning farmer educational program, Sustainable Food Production. SFP will now continue as a program under the umbrella of SFA. The much-needed beginning farmer curriculum emphasizes all three tenets of sustainability, plus provides extensive skills training. A unique aspect of SFP is its commitment to community development and mentoring, a perfect fit with SFA's farmer-to-farmer network emphasis.

Watch for more details soon. For now, we are open for business. Call us at 763-260-0209 or email: info@sfa-mn.org.

Finally, I hope you had a great weekend, and I hope part of that was attending the SFA Festival of Farms. I was at the Central Chapter event in Onamia, at the Farm Market Cafe. Central Chapter representatives were on hand, and the Festivities included a farm tour, high tunnel demonstration, and a presentation on the Farm Market Cafe business model. They had great food, cool T-shirts and a very informative and fun event. Great Job once again, Central Chapter.

Here's a picture of me with Jim Chamberlin of Central Chapter.

Jerry Ford Accepts New Expanded Role With SFA

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

As SFA Events Coordinator, Jerry Ford has worked to plan our Annual Conference for the past several years and knows how much thought, work and preparation it takes to bring any event to life, no matter the size.

Now, we're extremely proud to announce that he's accepted a new position at SFA. In addition to event planning, Jerry (right) has accepted the SFA position of Network Development Coordinator and will work to hone and enhance our farmer-to-farmer networks statewide and beyond.
Jerry also has been the Crow River Chapter Coordinator for some time and has worked extensively as a founder of Minnesota Garlic Festival. His experience will mesh well with SFA’s chapter structure, as we look for ways to help our chapters develop, thrive and grow.

In essence, chapters will have a new point person with SFA, and Jerry plans to work with each one in various ways to help develop the resources needed, from printed materials to online information to event production to member management and more. Since SFA has a wide variety of chapter sizes, interests and projects, Jerry will be working hand-in-hand with each chapter to give them the tools to meet their specific needs.

If you have any questions or comments, please email jerry@sfa-mn.org.

**Mesko to Speak at Grassfed Exchange Conference**

SFA Executive Director John Mesko is slated among the presenters at the 2013 Grassfed Exchange Conference, "Grassfed Rising: Building the Soil-Grass Connection," which will be Aug. 20-22 in Bismarck, N.D. Mesko will speak from 1:15-1:40 on Aug. 22 about the importance of farmer-to-farmer networking and how SFA achieves its networking goals.

The conference, at the Ramkota Inn Best Western in Bismarck, is $175 for the two conference days Aug. 21-22 and includes a banquet; pasture walk tours Aug. 20 of Gabe Brown and Ken Miller's ranches are available for an additional fee.

Other speakers at the conference include Dr. Fred Kirschenmann; Dr. Allen Williams, who spoke during the Advanced Grazing Workshop at the 2013 SFA Annual Conference; and Warren King, manager of The Pasture Project who has worked with SFA to support our GrazeFest series of grass-based livestock events.

To learn more, visit the conference homepage here.

**Don't Forget – SFA Annual Conference Registration Open**

Registration is now open (click here) for the 2014 SFA Annual Conference, to be held Feb. 8 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn.

A founding concept of SFA is that there is wisdom in the community, so you’ll help to determine and lead the sessions – which will include casual but focused networking conversations on topics that you choose. Using an online voting system, SFA members can choose session topics; we’ll analyze the data and create the schedule around your wishes. We want your input; you can even add your own ideas. Bookmark this link and vote often as more ideas are added.

Family programming is returning, so that the ENTIRE farm family can come enjoy and learn from our Farmer-to-Farmer showcase. Admission for children ages 3-12 is just $10, while kids under 3 are free.

The $35 discounted price is valid through Aug. 31 for SFA members only. Current SFA members should have received an email with a discount code for registration as well as a follow-up email last week. Non-members may register for $45 or, for the best value, simply join SFA today and we’ll email your discount code. Starting Sept. 1, registration goes up to $45 for members and $55 for non-members.

Or volunteer at the 2014 Annual Conference – it’s not too early to sign up. Contact Volunteer Coordinator Karen Couné at karen.coune@gmail.com or 612.202.7201.

**Cover Crop Fact Sheet Now Available for Download**

With our unpredictable weather, soil health is more important than ever for sustainable farmers.
At SFA, we are ramping up our commitment to soil health education – it's the bedrock of not only sustainable food production but also environmental stewardship.

Alongside our ongoing GrazeFest series of pasture-based events, SFA's Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg has prepared a Cover Crop Fact Sheet, a one-page guide to the basic tenets of cover cropping, the four main groups of cover crop varieties, and additional resources graziers and farmers should utilize.

The downloadable fact sheet is available on our GrazeFest page. Please feel free to spread the Fact Sheet with friends and neighbors.

SFA GrazeFest Series Pasture Walk Event Set for Aug. 10

Attention dairy and beef producers: A pasture walk and farm tour will be held at 9:30 a.m. Sat., Aug. 10, 2013, at Joe Gans' Wellspring Farms north of Aitkin as part of SFA's GrazeFest series of grass-based livestock events. We will be looking at Joe's energized fence and watering systems, grazing management, and soil health in relation to pasture management.

Gans is currently custom-grazing 25 angus cow/calf pairs at this farm under a planned grazing program. They are installing a "frost-free nose pump" this summer - there aren't many of these in Minnesota. The pumps are developed in Alberta, Canada, and designed to deliver water to cattle year-around without electricity.

"An opportunity to see one of these frost-free pumps is worth the trip," SFA Livestock and Grazing Specialist Kent Solberg said.

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.

SFA Photo Contest Winner: Dale and Sharon Nummi
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.

What kind of photos are we seeking? Simply anything from your farm, family, garden or kitchen – anything that's related somehow to sustainable agriculture that you'd like to share with SFA members.

Send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org, and we'll include the winner in SFA Connect. Check out our Facebook page for all the photo submissions.

**June's winner:** Dale and Sharon Nummi of South Range, Wis., sent this shot of daughter Katie and grandson Liam saying hello to their sow, "Bandit."

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**Take Part in Quick Survey for SFA; T-shirt Up for Grabs**

Thanks to all who participated in the recent SFA Stress Survey, a simple, two-question survey. We will use this data to assess the need for stress-related programming at future SFA Farmer-to-Farmer Network events.

We're collecting data with another super-quick survey on the new topic of SFA members' use of mobile technology and how it pertains to SFA. The survey is now available at this link, so please take a few minutes to respond. A random survey-taker will receive an SFA T-shirt. Thanks!

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**Farm to School Field Trips with Renewing the Countryside**

Interested in learning more about selling to local schools? Join Renewing the Countryside for an upcoming Farm to School field trip! These field trips bring farmers and food service professionals together to gain a first-hand understanding of others' operations, and how schools and farmers are working together to provide school children with farm fresh food! Learn how other farmers have navigated direct marketing relationships with local schools, and the on-farm procedures needed to make those relationships work. Learn about the challenges facing school food service professionals in locating and buying from local producers, and how they are working around them to provide safe, healthy local food to their students.

**Upcoming field trip dates:**

- July 26th - Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Public Schools, farm site TBD. [More information here.](#)
- August 1st - St. Paul Public Schools, Ferndale Market, and Laughing Loon Farm. [More information here.](#)

Are you a producer who sells to schools or institutions in Southwest, Southeast, or West Central Minnesota? Want to share your experience with others? Contact Molly (molly@rtcinfo.org) at Renewing the Countryside to set up a field trip in your region!

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**Feedback Sought From Organic Certificate Holders**

The next series of webinars for everyone involved in organic food, fiber, and farming to have a voice in the critical discussion about a potential Organic Research and Promotion Program will be held at 3 p.m. today and 1 p.m. Aug. 1. After collecting input from over 500 individuals at 26 webinars and town hall meetings over the past 18 months, OTA has consolidated the feedback into a framework of options for a potential program, and is encouraging all certified operations to weigh in with detailed feedback and preference. There are many different ideas and experiences regarding a potential cooperative research and marketing program, and we want to make sure
you add your voice to the mix. To participate in this important conversation about the future of organic and reserve your spot at either of these webinars, RSVP to Kelly McLaughlin at kmclaughlin@ota.com.

Members needed for Minnesota Organic Advisory Task Force

The Minnesota Legislature reauthorized the Minnesota Organic Advisory Task Force (OATF) during the 2013 legislative session, so all 15 positions are once again open for appointment. The OATF advises the Commissioner of Agriculture and the University of Minnesota about policies and programs that will improve organic agriculture in the state. The task force meets two to four times per year, and members serve three year terms.

Members from the following categories are sought: three organic farmers; one wholesaler or distributor of organic products; one representative of organic certification agencies; two organic processors; one representative from University of Minnesota Extension; one University of Minnesota faculty member; one representative from a nonprofit organization representing producers; two public members; one representative from the United States Department of Agriculture; one retailer of organic products; and one organic consumer representative.

The OATF vacancies will be filled through the state’s Open Appointments process. The application form is available online at www.sos.state.mn.us (click the Open Commissions/Appointments icon) or by calling the Secretary of State’s office at 877-551-6767. Applicants must specify the category/sector they represent and are strongly encouraged to submit a cover letter describing their interest and qualifications. Applications submitted by July 23, 2013 are assured of full consideration.

LSP Farm Beginnings Accepting 2013-14 Applications

The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) is now accepting applications for its 2013-2014 Farm Beginnings course. Farm Beginnings class sessions will begin this fall and LSP is providing participants two options for getting involved in one of the most successful beginning farmer training initiatives in the country. Classes will be offered in the Minnesota communities of Winona and Saint Cloud.

The application deadline for the 2013-2014 Farm Beginnings course is Aug. 1. For application materials or for more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org or contact Karen Benson at 507-523-3366; lspse@landstewardshipproject.org.

In 2013, LSP’s Farm Beginnings program is marking its 16th year of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is tailor-made for people of all ages just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers looking to make changes in their operations. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial planning, enterprise planning, marketing and innovative production techniques.

New 'Job Wire' Connects Farmers With Veteran Job-Seekers

Introducing the Growing Veterans' Job Wire, a new resource for you! Growing Veterans has created a new tool for sustainable farmers to increase their labor pool by connecting them with military veterans. With a wave of veterans returning to civilian life, many have already began farming, others who want to just need a way to get connected - that's where the Job Wire fits in. Use the Job Wire to gain access to hardworking, team driven, detail oriented, military veterans near you! They served our country overseas, now let them serve back home with you.

How's it work? Simple, visit www.growingveterans.org/jobwire and submit the details of your opportunity. Growing Veterans will review your submission and post it, utilizing their growing online presence to help get the word out to vets near you. Not a farmer but work in support of sustainable agriculture? Post job opportunities on the Job Wire as well! Growing Veterans exists to empower veterans to help strengthen the sustainable agriculture movement across the land, visit their website to learn more: www.growingveterans.org.
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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