Applications Now Being Accepted for 2016-17 SFA Winter Sustainability Conference Internships

SFA is offering internship positions in conjunction with our two winter sustainability events: The SFA Annual Conference and Midwest Soil Health Summit. All internships involve at-home, non-residency work collaborating with one of the event coordinators, plus on-site work at both conferences.

Interns learn the finer details of nonprofit sustainability event production, can attend conference sessions on a wide variety of topics, and meet leaders in the sustainable agriculture movement.

The non-residency portion of these internships begins in Nov. 2016. On-site portions are Feb. 10-11 in St. Joseph, Minn.; and Feb. 15-16 in Fergus Falls, Minn.

Application deadline is Sept. 20, 2016. For more information and to apply, visit our internships homepage. Questions? Email jerry@sfa-mn.org.

Save the Date: 'Dirt Rich: Becoming a Soil Health Expert'

SFA is hosting an event in our ongoing soil health series, "Dirt Rich: Becoming a Soil Health Expert," on Aug. 16 in Redwood Falls and Aug. 17 in Marshall. Each day’s events will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and include both classroom education and a farm tour. Lunch will be included.

Speakers will include Dr. Allen Williams; farms to be toured are Grant and Dawn Breitkreutz’s Stoney Creek Farm and the Allen Deutz farm.

More information about registration and available scholarships will be announced at the SFA homepage and in SFA Connect as soon as possible. This event is sponsored by The Pasture Project and NCR-SARE.

Executive Director's Note: What is Sustainability?

I wish I had a nickel for every time I was asked, often in a challenging manner, “what do you mean by sustainable?”

SFA certainly doesn’t shy away from the word sustainable, but we often have to deal with fallout from having such a polarizing word in our name. I think one of the best definitions is the one adopted by USDA in the 1990 Farm Bill:

The term sustainable agriculture means an integrated system of plant and animal production...
practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- Satisfy human food and fiber needs;
- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends;
- Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole."

(Public Law 101-624, Title XVI, Subtitle A, Section 1603)

That’s a pretty good definition, but the word has been used and abused to the point where it’s nearly impossible to pin someone down on their interpretation of its meaning. Most large industries and agriculture companies seem to use a definition along the lines of, “Sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

With that as a definition, there are few areas in life where the capacity exists to be truly sustainable. Every carload of coal mined out of the ground and used for fuel today is “compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” for coal. Production of iPhones using Rare Earth Elements (REE) is rapidly compromising future generations’ ability to meet their own iPhone needs. If our definition of sustainability includes future access to currently utilized resources, then everything we do is unsustainable.

This distorted view focuses on a scarcity mentality, meaning whatever we use today is unavailable for tomorrow. For many industries, there is a finite, fixed amount of resources available; if we deplete a resource, we are preventing future generations from accessing it and force them to be unsustainable.

In agriculture, we have the capacity to turn that paradigm on its ear. The world is not a fixed set of resources, and the earth is nowhere near full. Unlike mining coal or rare earth minerals for iPhones, we can regenerate our farming systems to create more resources for all.

Want to hear more? Catch the rest of the story at the National Bison Association conference on June 20 in Elk River. I’ll be the keynote speaker, and I’m honored to be joined by some leading innovators in our movement, including Gabe Brown. The program includes a trip to Snake River Farm, and a beef/bison side-by-side carcass evaluation. You can learn more about the conference, including the full agenda, at the National Bison Association website.

2017 Annual Conference Voting, Registration Now Open

Once again, we are using this online voting system to select programming for the SFA Annual Conference, which is set for Feb. 11, 2017, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. Vote on the topics YOU want addressed at the 2017 SFA Annual Conference and enter your topic ideas!

Click here to vote and enter your ideas.

Annual Conference registration is also OPEN and members can register for just $35 through Nov. 30. Sign up now, get it on your calendar and make sure you get the best rate!

The current Top Ten session topics:

- Time to Call the Butcher: What to Expect, Terminology, and How to Help Customers Navigate July 9, 2016: Garlic Growers Field Day, Howard Lake & Clearwater
- July 14, 2016: Forage Council Summer Tour, Cloverleaf Grass Farm, Wadena
- July 2016: Festival of Farms Aug. 13, 2016: Minnesota Garlic Festival, McLeod County Fairgrounds, Hutchinson
- Feb. 11, 2017: SFA Annual Conference, College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph
- Feb. 15-16, 2017: Midwest Soil Health Summit, Bigwood Event Center, Fergus Falls
Soil Health is Hot Topic at Network Event in Clinton

Sixty people attended Big Stone SWCD’s SFA Soil Health Network event on June 1 in Clinton that focused on soil health and Minnesota’s upcoming buffer law.

Blayne Johnson, of the NRCS in Ortonville, organized the meeting and said he was very happy with the high attendance.

“Several producers took the time to sit and visit with us reviewing their properties as it pertains to the new buffer map,” he said. “We discussed their farming operation goals and what options the SWCD can provide including CRP, haying and grazing, etc. They were very interested to know their options and what they can and can’t do in order to comply with the new law.”

In the photo above, Dave Weirens from the MN Board of Water & Soil Resources discussed the buffer law and its requirements.

For a complete event listing, resources and much more, visit SFA’s Soil Health Portal.

'Grazing in the Woods' Tour is June 22 in Brainerd

A farm tour highlighting woodland grazing and silvopasture is planned for 5-8 p.m. June 22 at Sunup Ranch, 12316 County 18 SW, Brainerd. This farm is one of three sites taking part in a 3-year U. of M. Extension silvopasture study.

Silvopasture is a sustainable agroforestry practice where trees and forage crops are grown together on the same piece of land, and grazing animals eat the forages. Farmers Greg Booth and Vickie Kettlewell as well as project collaborators Jeff Duchene and Jim Chamberlin will share their perspectives on silvopasture as an approach to improving and enhancing the benefits of woodland grazing.
MOSES Seeks New Executive Director

Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES) has launched a national search for its next Executive Director. MOSES is seeking a dynamic, seasoned leader who is an effective communicator, skilled manager, and successful fund raiser to guide the organization further along our path of success and respected standing in the organic community. Ideally, the incoming director will have a personal or professional connection to organic/sustainable farming in order to understand the concerns of our constituents and credibly represent the organization.

Click here for the full job announcement. You can also contact our Transition Consultant, Margaret Donohoe, at margaret@leadershipintransition.org or 408-979-0572 for a confidential conversation.

Check This Out

Did you know that our Soil Health Portal has all kinds of useful videos, linked articles, and other resources? Check it out here. Other things we’re reading:

- Farm and Ranch Guide writes about a National Audobon Society program that promotes grass-fed beef to benefit prairie birds, and the article prominently mentions two-time MSHS speaker Gabe Brown and son Paul. Read it here.

- Speaking of Gabe, he recently gave a Ted Talk! It’s embedded on our Soil Health Resources page.

- From Farm Futures magazine, “Soil Health Just Needs One First Step.” Sample quote: “We can turn this around and start rebuilding soils with no-till, rotation and cover crops. With the equipment, technology and know-how we have today – not to mention economic incentives, knowing how these practices improve yield and lower costs – there’s no excuse not to.”

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2016 Annual Conference, held Feb. 13, 2016, 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.