Festival of Farms Events Aplenty on July 12: Ramsey, Northfield, St. Cloud, Hutchinson Areas

As the official start of summer nears and the growing season is in full swing, SFA chapters are gearing up for Festival of Farms, set for July 12, 2014.

The following is a compendium of SFA chapters that are participating in Festival of Farms. For complete details and scheduling, please visit our Festival of Farms homepage. Please note that of the tours below, the Picnic Scientifique and the Central Chapter event require an RSVP.

Northwest Metro

SFA member Bruce Bacon is hosting a special Festival of Farms event, the “Picnic Scientifique” Soil Field Day. The event, from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat., July 12, 2014, will be held at Bacon’s Garden Farme 7363 175th Ave NW, Ramsey.

The event’s tour schedule:

- 11 a.m. Garden Walk with the Garden Farme Soil Committee
- 12:30 p.m. Bumblebee & Pollinators Walk with Sarah Foltz Jordan, Xerces Society
- 2 p.m. Garden Walk with the Garden Farme Soil Committee

To learn more, click here. To RSVP, click here.

St. Cloud Area

SFA Central Chapter is hosting tours of four farms:

- Bakers’ Acres, 36861 Co. Rd. 9, Avon, MN 56310
- Emmerich’s Produce, 34114 Peach Dr, Albany, MN 56307
- Dancing Bears, 12822 County Road 51, St. Joseph, MN 56374
- Common Ground Garden & Central MN Sustainability Project Market Garden, College of St. Benedict, 104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, Minnesota 56374
Northfield Area

In the Northfield area, the SFA Cannon River Chapter and Just Food Coop are sponsoring tours of two farms near Webster. The tour begins at 9:20 a.m. at Waxwing Farm; a free bus ride is available and leaves at 9 a.m. from Just Food Co-op in Northfield. The farms on the tour include:

- **Waxwing Farm**, Anna Racer & Peter Skold, 4800 Dent Ave, Webster, MN. Waxwing Farm is a 40-acre diversified farm located in Webster that raises a wide variety of vegetables, laying hens, and market hogs that are marketed through a 70-member CSA and the Fulton Farmers Market in Minneapolis.

- **Sweetland Orchard**, Mike & Gretchen Perbix, 26205 Fairlawn Ave, Webster, MN. In their five-acre orchard, the Perbixes grow 49 varieties of apples, many of them heirloom, not counting the cider apples. They also have a few pears and plums. They sell apples at the Kingfield market in Minneapolis, but most of their business is Pick-Your-Own on weekends in September and October.

For more information, click here.

Hutchinson Area

The Crow River Chapter will host two sets of farm tours at three different farms – tours are set for 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. July 12 at these farms:

- **The Farm of Minnesota**, Dan and Donna Moe, 24618 State Hwy 15, Hutchinson. The Farm of Minnesota offers CSA shares, fresh produce at farmers markets, service to local restaurants and co-ops – and you can get their fruits and vegetables right there at the farm.

- **New Story Farm**, Daniel Zetah & Stephanie Usery, 19778 235th St, Hutchinson. Farmer/operators Daniel Zetah and Stephanie Usery are actively working toward forming a “cooperative farming village,” a place where others with similar values and visions can work cooperatively on diverse endeavors.

- **Living Song Farm**, Jerry Ford & Mariénne Kreitlow, 7616 25th St. SW, Howard Lake. Living Song Farm operates on land that has been in the Kreitlow family since 1898. Of the family’s 288 acres, Jerry and Mariénne have 70 acres in transition to certified organic, where they are managing 40 acres of rotational grazing for cattle and pastured laying hens, and growing garlic, onions and potatoes for market.

Festival of Farms 2014 is sponsored by OCIA-MN #1.

Executive Director's Note

Over the weekend, I had an opportunity to chat with SFA member Sylvia Burgos Toftness, a grass-fed beef producer and radio host from Amery WI. Sylvia invited me to be on her radio show, and we had a wide-ranging conversation about sustainability, food and farming. We discussed the Adjust 2015 Project at length. You can listen to the podcast of the interview!

In other news, Festival of Farms is around the corner. I hope you’ll be taking advantage of this opportunity to reach out to neighbors and friends during this community building event! Have a great time.

What We’re Reading & Watching

A new SFA Connect feature, “What We’re Reading & Watching” is a section of links to articles and videos chosen by SFA staff that you might enjoy. Consider:
“Plowed Under: Across the northern plains, native grassland is being turned into farmland at a rate not seen since the 1920s. The environmental consequences could be disastrous.” The American Prospect

“Soil Carbon Cowboys”: Filmmaker Peter Byck profiles Allen Williams, Gabe Brown and Neil Dennis - heroes and innovators! These ranchers now know how to regenerate their soils while making their animals healthier and their operations more profitable. They are turning ON their soils, enabling rainwater to sink into the earth rather than run off. And these turned ON soils retain that water, so the ranches are much more resilient in drought. It's an amazing story that has just begun.

Voting Update: 2015 Annual Conference Topics

It's time to start thinking about topics for our next SFA Annual Conference, set for Feb. 14, 2015, again at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph.

We have opened voting for the 2015 Annual Conference session topics — click this link to begin voting. The more votes we tabulate, the more accurately we can tailor the session schedule around your wishes. One thing we hear a lot during an after the Conference is, "there were so many good sessions I had a hard time choosing." If there was a session you missed in 2014 but still are interested in, be sure to input that topic into the website.

The top ten vote-getters as of June 15, 2014:

- Salvaging, repurposing, upcycling, and restoring farm equipment and buildings
- Deep winter solar greenhouses
- LLC, LC3 and 501c(3) which one is right for me? A conversation about limiting liability and your business.
- Integrating crops and livestock
- Cover Crops & Soil Health
- Direct-marketing meat
- Multi-species grazing
- Fencing
- Value-added processing
- Soil Science Basics

Make your voice heard – submit your own ideas and vote early and often.

Also, photo galleries from both the 2014 Annual Conference and inaugural Midwest Soil Health Summit are available on each conference's homepage. Check them out!

Student-Teacher Ratio Makes Farm Skills 101 A Great Value

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Getting a good bang for your buck is rarely guaranteed in the world of sky-high college tuition.
But not for students in SFA's Sustainable Food Production Program, which teaches various real-world sustainable farming skills in an on-farm environment. Not only does Farm Skills 101 teach students the hands-on skills needed to become successful sustainable farmers, it's a great value, too – SFP also boasts a low student-teacher ratio that leads to a fairly intense, in-depth experience.

Farm Skills 101 consists of around 50 hours of on-farm education in three weekends of fun and fulfilling learning. As instructor Dr. Sue Wika is fond of saying, “These are days in the field, not field days.” Students must dress properly: pants, closed-toe shoes, gloves and safety glasses are required. Topics include Fencing Strategies for Forage-based Livestock Systems, Compassionate Animal Husbandry and Handling, Pasture Management and Grazing Basics, and Farm Equipment and Tools.

Wika said the Farm Skills 101 was developed for both students with some farm knowledge as well as for those who didn’t grow up on a farm.

“It’s a way to experience and learn some of those skills ‘farm kids’ acquired through daily interaction with farm processes,” she said. “The course is designed with a low student-teacher ratio, so the experience will be empowering.”

And then there’s the bang-for-your-buck factor. Tuition for the Fall 2014 semester of Farm Skills 101 is just $1,025, and scholarships are available. For the sheer amount of useful knowledge packed into this course – students learn in practice, not in theory – Farm Skills 101 tuition is a smart investment in the future of anyone considering a sustainable farming career.

Fall 2014 classes are Oct. 3-4, 10-11 and 17-18 at farms near Alexandria, Minn. All students receive a free one-year SFA membership.

To enroll, visit this link and view payment information. To learn more or view a more detailed curriculum, visit the SFP Program homepage or contact Dr. Sue Wika at paradoxhomestead@gmail.com.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2014 Annual Conference, held Feb. 8, 2014, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. To learn more about Crystal, visit her website.
For Rent: 80 Acres Near Princeton

SFA was contacted by a landowner looking to rent up to 80 acres of land near Princeton to a sustainable farmer. The landowner, Myron Angstman, lives in Alaska but spends a few months a year on the farm, dubbed Long Pond Elk Farm; a caretaker, Dave Price, looks after it while they are gone.

The land, located two miles east of U.S. 169 off County Road 9, is currently rented for corn, beans and alfalfa. To learn more or set up a showing, contact Myron (on Alaska time, three hours earlier than Central Time) at 800.478.5315, or caretaker Dave at 763.389.2742.

Growers: Aid RTC’s Farm to School Project in Survey

Child care settings are uniquely positioned to educate kids to the joys of healthy eating. At the same time, these enterprises may offer new markets for farmers interested in expanding and/or diversifying their income streams. Efforts to connect local food producers with preschools, child care centers, and family day care homes is a natural progression from the original Farm to School movement.

Renewing the Countryside would greatly appreciate assistance in helping us understand the possibilities and barriers. Whether or not you currently sell to child care settings, we’d like to know what farmers, ranchers and others who produce locally grown foods think about doing so in Minnesota. What have you explored? What would help you benefit more from this market? What barriers prevent you from selling to this market? We invite you to share your perspective, based on experience in the past or hopes for the future.

Please click here to take the survey. The survey should take less than 5 minutes and is mostly multiple choice. Make sure to hit “DONE” at the end so that your response is recorded.

Please respond by Monday, June 23. After you complete the survey, you will be entered to win a copy of The Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook. Thanks for taking the time and best wishes for the season as it continues to ramp up!

Fall Harvest Gathering for Women Slated for Nov. 7-9

Save the date – attend the 15th Fall Harvest Gathering for Women in Sustainable Agriculture on
Nov 7-9, 2014, in Whalen, Minn.

Get to know other women who care passionately about farming and the earth. Some attendees farm and some want to farm, but all enjoy sharing and learning from each other at the annual Fall Harvest Gathering at Cedar Valley Resort in Whalen. Costs are reasonable and scholarships are available. All women are welcome.

Highlights will include:

- Three virtual farm tours
- Lively discussion on soil health, what to look for, and how to keep it
- Panel discussion on passing on the farm
- Excellent potluck lunch Saturday (and great food throughout the weekend)
- Music, campfire, silent auction
- Time to walk (or bike) the Root River trail
- Time to talk casually with women who share your passion

More information: staceyleighbrown@gmail.com.

Farmers Trip to Nicaragua Planned in September

A food- and agriculture-focused trip to Nicaragua in September is being planned for interested folks in the Minnesota ag community.

Against the backdrop of Jalapa, Nicaragua's annual Corn Festival, this trip will focus on making connections between Nicaragua's and Minnesota's agricultural communities in the contexts of climate change and other global market impacts (e.g. Jalapa's shift toward tobacco and coffee exports away from basic food production.) The trip will foster exchanges of ideas and perhaps material or technical aid.

The trip, Harvest Time in a Changing World, is set for Sept. 14-26, 2014. Farmers and ag producers, animal husbandry experts (vets), agronomists, co-op leaders, and people interested in sustainable and international food issues should consider attending.

For more information, contact Jon Kerr at jon@isla.cc or 612.819.8877.

Local Food Festival, 'FEAST!,' Headed to Rochester

FEAST!, a celebration of local foods, will premiere Nov. 2-3, 2014, at the Rochester Civic Center. The first day of this two-day event will be open to the public with a Sunday showcase of the best of local food by producers and makers from Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin. Sunday's theme, "Homegrown for the Holidays," will feature over 150 exhibitor booths plus chef demonstrations, tastings, live music, workshops on healthy eating and holiday cooking, activities for kids, and sampling of local beer, wine and craft liquor.

The public FEAST! event on Sunday will be followed by a trade event on Monday, "Grow It, Make It," planned exclusively for food growers, makers and buyers. The conference will offer multiple tracks and give producers and buyers opportunities to meet, network, discuss sales, and forge supply-chain relationships. A first of its magnitude in the region, this conference will offer buyers workshops and connections to accelerate local sourcing. The day’s educational workshops will include industry panels providing technical assistance and access to funding opportunities, plus timely, in-demand classes for market-ready producers as well as aspiring farming and food business beginners.

Event partners include Mayo Clinic Foundation, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Renewing the Countryside. Other organizations and individuals are invited to join as sponsors and volunteers. To learn how you can participate, please contact Devon at Renewing the Countryside, devon@rtcinfo.org or call 507-353-0407.

To learn more about FEAST! visit its homepage.
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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