Bobby Wenner Will Develop SFA's New Crops Project; Work Will Help SFA Farmers Grow In-Demand Products

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

Minnesotans have an abundance of local food. Ample farmers markets, a well-established network of food co-ops and a simple propensity for home gardening make it nearly possible to eat nothing but local products.

There are exceptions. Coffee and bananas, for two, are staples that can never be grown in Minnesota. Citrus fruit, peanuts, tea, Scotch whisky … some things will always have to be imported.

However, there are a number of foods that SFA farmers could grow in Minnesota but currently aren’t cultivated on a large scale. Quinoa, for instance, is grown largely in Bolivia, but 54 percent of those we surveyed expressed desire for a local source. Nine percent said they would purchase it weekly.

Spelt, currants, teff, hops, sauerkraut, grass-fed meat and dairy, and many other products could all be produced locally, but aren’t on a scale large enough to support demand.

Our New Crops Project is hoping to close that gap. Led by project manager Bobby Wenner (below right), the project aims to increase the availability of locally produced specialty foods while helping Minnesota farmers learn how to cultivate and raise these products.

Having completed the aforementioned survey on new product demand, we will use the data to help SFA’s farmers explore and engage in the production of new, hard-to-find crops and foods that Minnesota consumers are seeking. This knowledge will prevent some farms from entering into new enterprises without a market, and will provide information to farmers who are looking for a new revenue stream for their farm. Both outcomes will result in keeping farms from making costly miscues and contribute more money to the bottom line of innovative farmers while providing a service to consumers and natural food stores.

For more information about SFA’s New Crops Project, or to view a report on the results of the New Crops survey, click here. The project is supported by grants from Lakewinds Co-op, The Blooming Prairie Foundation, and The Minneapolis Foundation's Fourth Generation Fund.
Editor's Note: Wenner graduated in June 2012 from the University of Denver with a BA in international studies, where he focused primarily on international political economy. He has been interested in agriculture and food for a while and was able to turn that hobby into something more last summer when he started working with John Mesko and SFA on the first phase of the New Crops Project.

Bobby says, "It's been really cool to see the project begin to turn into something more than just an idea. This past fall, I was able to take my interest in food abroad to Vietnam where I spent four months studying development and social change. While there, I conducted independent field research on tea farming and the tea industry in Vietnam and compiled all of my findings into a report, which I am hoping to have published. Being abroad was an awesome experience, but I'm very excited to be back in Minneapolis working with SFA again."

**SFA Hosting GrazeFest Farmer/Chef, Booksigning Events June 30 at Mill City Farmers Market**

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

As part of our ongoing GrazeFest series of events, SFA is partnering with Mill City Farmers Market to host a chef/farmer session June 30 at the market, at the Mill City Museum next to the Guthrie Theater in downtown Minneapolis.

SFA farmer-vendors from the market will provide their products to local chefs, who will demonstrate to the market visitors how cooking with local food can be fun, easy and, of course, delicious.

SFA executive director John Mesko, events coordinator Jerry Ford, Bobby Wenner and I will be at the market talking SFA with passersby and spreading the word about our organization, particularly our upcoming Festival of Farms.

SFA member Jim VanDerPol will be on hand, too, signing copies of his book, "Conversations With the Land," from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and culinary coordinator Mary Jane Miller will be there working alongside the chefs and selling copies of the Garlic Festival cookbook.

Also on the calendar: On July 1, Bobby Wenner and I will be at the new Linden Hills Farmers Market on behalf of SFA, so stop by if you're in the neighborhood.

**Registration Now Open for Planning Your Farm's Future Workshop in Northfield**

The recent rainstorms and flooding illustrate the need for strong, comprehensive farmer-to-farmer networks. SFA and its partner, Renewing the Countryside, provide support that helps SFA members weather current storms while preparing for future ones, and a good example is our upcoming Planning for Your Farm's Future workshop in Northfield.

A day will come when you will no longer be able to farm full-time or wish to retire. How will that impact your farm business or your farm legacy? Too often, these uncomfortable questions are avoided or put on hold because they don't seem urgent, but planning now is vitally important. Whether you're 45 or 75, it is in your best interest (and that of your loved ones) to understand the ins and outs of legal, tax, and family implications of farm business transfers.

Renewing the Countryside and SFA have organized a workshop to help farmers and farm-land owners create a transition plan for their business and assets. The Planning for Your Farm's Future workshop is 4-7 p.m. June 28 at Carleton College's Alumni Guest House, 100 College Street, Northfield, MN. The cost is $15 for the first member of the family and just $5 for each additional member.
additional family member; please register here by June 22. This workshop is made possible through a grant from the USDA Risk Management Agency.

Keep watching SFA Connect for more information about SFA's ongoing projects and other Renewing the Countryside programs, like Young Organic Stewards, an educational and social network for beginning farmers; Grow A Farmer, a revolving microloan program of seed packets that are purchased to benefit beginning farmers (on display at Birchwood Cafe, Eggplant Urban Farm Supply, Mississippi Market and Seward Co-op); and a beginning farmer program that, through Farm Transitions, will connect U.S. military veterans who want to farm with land.

Executive Director's Note

Thanks for taking the time to keep up on what's going on in Sustainable Agriculture and SFA. As you can see from this issue of Connect, there's plenty of activity all over the state!

However, more important than activities are results. We all want to see sustainable agriculture continue to advance, with an ever higher percentage of food being produced and marketed with environmentally friendly, community building methods of production and marketing. The "network" of food producers and consumers is critical for us to reach that goal.

SFA is about doing, networking, advancing. Our mission statement says it: 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 farmer-to-farmer networking, innovation, demonstration, and education.

Our farmer-to-farmer network is strong. With the support and participation of farmers throughout the state who are making it work every day, SFA is leading the advancement of sustainable ag in Minnesota. What is the path to long term success? I think it hinges on the whole community of farmers, educators and supportive networks of organizations like SFA and others.

I'd encourage you to take a look at the American Meat Documentary coming to Minnesota next month. Hidden within that film are some building blocks for the movement going forward. I hope to see you on July 12 at the Edina Cinema or one of the many other showings throughout the state.

SFA is Co-Sponsor of 'American Meat' Showing; John Mesko to Appear on Panel Following Film at Edina Cinema

In its Minnesota debut July 12 at the Edina Cinema, the new documentary "American Meat" chronicles America's grassroots revolution in sustainable meat production. The film explains our current industrial meat system and shows the feedlots and confinement operations, not through hidden cameras but through the eyes of the farmers who live and work there. It then shifts to the burgeoning sustainable, local-food movement of farmers, food advocates, chefs and everyday folks who could change everything about the way meat reaches the American table.

The film stars Joel Salatin, the Virginia farmer and former SFA Annual Conference speaker who leads a movement of meat producers who raise their animals outdoors and without antibiotics. The film frames the debate on whether sustainable meat production could ever meet consumers' needs and showcases farmers who believe they can.

The event kicks off with food and wine at 5:15 p.m. at Lucia's Restaurant, 1432 W 31st St in Minneapolis. Hosted by James Beard-nominated chef Lucia Watson, the tasting features local charcuteries, including those from SFA members Star Thrower and Callister Farms. The screening and panel discussion – including John Mesko and Renewing the Countryside's Jan Joannides – follow at 7 p.m. at Edina Cinema, 3911 W 50th St, Edina. The panel also includes "American Meat" filmmaker Graham Meriwether, Watson, and Todd Lein of Thousand Hills Cattle Co.
Cost is $10 for film and panel discussion (online at AmericanMeatFilm.com, or in advance at Edina Cinema box office) and $35 for the food event (call Lucia’s at 612.825.1572).

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Thanks to Heavy Table 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.

Concessionaire Seeks Source of Minnesota-Grown Popcorn

Andy MacPhail, owner of Drew Concessions, is looking to buy between 100-150 50-pound bags of locally-grown popcorn each year. He currently must buy his popcorn from a Missouri grower, and reached out to SFA to find someone local. MacPhail, who said he needed a "big pop" for his caramel corn and referred to it as mushroom-style popcorn, can be reached at 612.743.5400 or drew@drewsconcessions.com. More information about his business is available at www.drewsconcessions.com.

Gardens of Eagan Workshops Focus on Farming Skills

A hands-on workshop for returning veterans pursuing a career in farming or non-veteran beginning farmers is set from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. July 14 at Gardens of Eagan’s Organic Field School, 25494 Highview Ave, Farmington. This workshop will focus on business planning and marketing for diversified, entrepreneurial agricultural enterprises, such as grass-based livestock, mixed vegetables, orchards, and organic production.

Also, attend a workshop on starting a diversified vegetable farm from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. July 22 at the Organic Field School. Explore what it takes be successful in popular marketing channels such as Community Supported Agriculture, farmers’ markets and wholesale marketing. Participants will engage in hands-on activities to evaluate what marketing options will work best for their operations, and how to enter those markets effectively. The program includes lunch and a tour of the Gardens of Eagan vegetable farm. Presenter Tammy Hinman is a farmer and horticulture specialist for NCAT.

For more information and to register, contact NCAT by calling Hannah Lewis at 515-450-8126 or help us determine the interest of our members and your thoughts about the future of SFA.
LSP’s Farm Beginnings Accepting Applications Until Aug. 1

The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) is now accepting applications for its 2012-2013 Farm Beginnings course, sessions of which will begin this fall and are being offered in the communities of Morris, Minn., and River Falls, Wis. The application deadline is Aug. 1. For application materials or for more information, see www.farmbeginnings.org or contact Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or lspse@landstewardshipproject.org.

Grazing Seminar Series Planned at World Dairy Expo

Save the date for the Grazing Seminar series, which will be held starting at 10 a.m. Oct. 5, in the Mendota 3 Room of the Exhibition Hall at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison, Wis., during the 2012 World Dairy Expo. Topics will include using automatic milking systems (robotic milkers) in grazing systems, balancing pasture supplementation with high grain costs, and a question-and-answer session with grazing experts from around the world. The seminar speakers will be on hand for a grazing reception immediately following the last seminar so farmers can network and socialize. More information available here.

Pastures for Profit Grazing Videos Available

Video recordings of the Ohio State Pastures for Profit Grazing School are available for download from the Ohio State University Extension Forage Team. The 30- to 45-minute presentations were recorded live in mp4 format during a Pastures for Profit grazing school offered in April of 2012 and cover a variety of topics. View the videos here.

U of M Small Farm Team Hosting Beef Workshop

So, beef on a small farm? Actually, it’s a great fit – small farms are still the backbone of the beef industry, and of the more than 14,000 beef farms in Minnesota, over 12,000 have fewer than beef 50 cows. The University of Minnesota Small Farm Team will host a Beef Management Workshop from 9 a.m. to noon July 14 at UMopre Park near Rosemount. The class will provide an overview of the basic elements needed to successfully manage a beef herd, regardless of size. Dr. Alfredo DiCostanzo has developed a herd of about 50 Angus cows at Umopre Park, and the class will observe and discuss the cows grazing on pasture.

For information, visit www.extension.umn.edu/smallfarms or contact Wayne Martin at marti067@umn.edu or 612.625.6224 or Betsy Wieland at eliza003@umn.edu or 612.596.1175.

Organic Valley Seeks Sustainability Program Coordinator

Organic Valley is looking to hire an On Farm Sustainability Program Coordinator who will be responsible for the oversight and implementation of the On Farm Sustainability Program. This role works with farmers to implement a variety of sustainability initiatives on their farms; including renewable energy, ag plastic recycling, water conservation, nutrient management and ecosystem services. This position is responsible for working with media sources and within CROPP to message this work. This role also works with the cooperative to promote and source sustainable alternative fueling sources. Position is in La Farge, Wis.

For information, click here or email hr@organicvalley.coop.

Tri-State Conservation Grazing Workshop Slated Aug. 21-22

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture is encouraging natural resources professionals and livestock producers to attend the 2012 Tri-State Conservation Grazing Workshop set for Aug.
The workshop will link natural resource professionals and livestock producers from Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota to learn more about the application of livestock grazing as a grassland management and conservation tool. Early registration for the two day event is $40 per day until July 15. After July 15, registration is $50 per day.

Register here or by phone at 800.627.0326 ext. 456.

Cover Crop Cost-Share Dollars Available

Rural Advantage is seeking farmers willing to establish cover crops. Funding is available for up to $20 per acre for up to 20 acres ($400 maximum per farm). Participating farmers may plant the cover crop(s) of their desire. A demonstration aspect and simple reporting will be required. Funding for the project runs from Fall 2009 to Fall 2012, and farmers from all areas of Minnesota are welcome to participate. Cost-share dollars are available. This project is funded by NCR-SARE.

Information: Jill Sackett at 507.238.5449 or sacke032@umn.edu.

Blaine Man Seeks Support for Self-Sustaining Pilot Project

Civil engineer Ken Gust grew up on a North Dakota farm and worked for decades as a consultant for land developers, and seeing the way land was being used unsustainably gave him a deep concern for the future. Now 75, Gust has spent the past 12 years pursuing a vision for self-sustaining rural communities that could produce their own nutritious food and renewable energy.

Knowing his ideas were far from corporate-style farming and industrial agriculture, Gust reached out to SFA, and soon after realized his answer could lie in a small ethanol facility that processed corn raised for animal feed into ethanol fuel for home heating and farm machinery, as well as high-protein distillers' grains for the same animals.

Using Easy Energy Systems' machinery for modular ethanol production, he hopes to open 10 projects in Minnesota in the next five years, but needs a working pilot project to demonstrate its potential.

Gust is working to gain financing for a pilot project from outside sources, but he's interested in finding a prospective site for a working pilot project. If you have any interest in learning more, or feel you can help Gust in his quest, contact him at 8757 Hastings Circle, Blaine, 763.795.0410 or kengst78@gmail.com.

Participate in Survey to Help Farmers Protect Hearing

Hearing loss and ringing in the ears is a big problem among farmers, now here’s your chance to do something about it. HEAR on the Farm is a study to test several programs designed to help farmers to make good decisions in protecting their hearing. For a limited time, adult farmers who have e-mail are eligible to participate. Simply go to www.hearonthefarm.org and enter the access code saveears. Farmers can earn up to $40 for participating, and they will be contributing to the future development of better safety programs for farmers.

For more information, contact study administrators at hearonthefarm@umich.edu or 734.763.3211.

Summit Seeks to Expand Food Opportunities for Low-Income Minnesotans

How can we work together to increase access to healthy food for low-income Minnesotans? What are the health and economic benefits of a healthy food system? Learn answers to these questions and more Aug. 21-23 at the Food Access Summit at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center. This statewide summit will provide information and action-oriented ideas on how food policy, food systems and food literacy impact low-income Minnesotans. Participants
will learn about barriers to healthy food for low-income Minnesotans and share perspectives from a variety of sectors.

Information: hungersolutions.org/food-access-summit.

**U of M Field Day: Diversifying Organic Cropping Systems**

The University of Minnesota Southwest Research and Outreach Center's annual Organic Field Day will be 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m. July 11 at Lamberton. Attendees will take field tours to present ongoing organic research, including a visit to the SWROC's high tunnel season extension facilities. Field tour stops will focus on edible beans; forage management to suppress weeds and build fertility; alfalfa mulch; popcorn variety trials; and high tunnels for season extension to produce organic vegetables.

Educational programs will feature a brief presentation by Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture Dave Frederickson; Organic Popcorn Production by Gene Mealhow, Tiny But Mighty Popcorn; DriftWatch - Minnesota's New Sensitive Crops Registry by Meg Moynihan, MDA; Crop Rotation Impacts on Soils by Dr. Jeff Strock, SWROC; Adding Edible Beans to Your Rotation by Dr. Tom Michaels, UMN; and Camelina Oil Production and Processing by Kathleen Batalden Smith, Omega Maiden Oils.

The Organic Field Day is free and open to the public. An $8 fee will be charged for lunch. If you plan to attend, or would like to have an exhibit, please register in advance by contacting the SWROC at 507-752-7372 or werne022@umn.edu.

**SFA Farmers: Obtain Free Animal Welfare Approved Status**

Animal Welfare Approved is a free third-party certification and food label that audits and certifies family farms that utilize high-welfare methods of farming, outdoors on pasture or range. Certified farms use the AWA label as a way to add value and to assure customers of high-welfare farming practices, and have access to free expert technical and marketing support.

Here is a quick summary of the free resources Animal Welfare Approved offers farmers:

- **Free AWA marketing materials** including brochures, signs, pens, magnets, note pads, post-it notes, banners and metal gate signs.
- **Technical Advice Fact Sheets** and access to direct guidance from our expert technical staff.
- **Good Husbandry Grants**, available exclusively to AWA certified farmers (and applied farms) to help improve farm animal welfare (look out for new application details in summer of 2012).
- **Farm-to-Farm sales** between AWA farmers.
- Listings for farms, retailers, restaurants, and more offering AWA products in our online directory.

AWA also has resources for consumers, including comprehensive and regularly updated guides to food label claims, including *Food Labeling Guide for Dummies* and *The Grassfed Primer*; and an online searchable database of farms, restaurants and retail locations offering AWA products. For more information, visit www.animalwelfareapproved.org.

**Jaycees Seek Nominations of Outstanding Young Farmers**

Since 1954, the Minnesota Jaycees have been recognizing the importance of strong young leaders in the Minnesota agricultural industry through the Outstanding Young Farmers award. Nominees submit information about their farm, background, and knowledge of the industry and are judged on the following criteria: progress in agricultural career; extent of soil and water conservation practices; and contributions to the well-being of the community, state, and nation.
The winner of the Minnesota Outstanding Young Farmer program will go on to compete in the national OYF program against OYF winners from other states, in which four will be named National Outstanding Young Farmers.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Nominee must be age 18 through 40, not becoming 41 prior to January 1, 2013.
- Nominee must be an actual farm operator, deriving a minimum of two-thirds of their income from their farming.

Nomination forms are available here; and deadline for submissions is July 1, 2012. For questions or more information contact Katie Hunt at katie@mnjaycees.org or 952.890.8000.

Join the Conversation at Healthy Eating Minnesota Network

At the intersection of food and health is community, the Healthy Eating Minnesota Network is based on the idea that in-person and online collaboration can catalyze knowledge exchange, networking, and coalition building around healthy eating and healthy food access in Minnesota. Explore the network, share your ideas, and connect with others across the state who are working to create healthier food systems by taking the following steps:

1. **Create a profile.** Go to www.healthyeatingmn.org. On the left side of the screen is a box asking you to sign up. Click on it, answer the questions, and create your profile. Having a profile lets you take part in the best parts of the network—asking questions, commenting on posts, building networks, and more.

2. **Join a community.** Communities are places to ask questions, seek feedback, and connect with other Minnesotans who care about healthier food systems. Right now, the network features communities focused on healthy kids, urban agriculture, food policy, food justice, and farmers markets.

3. **Share content.** Have an event you’d like to publicize? Want to share a great news story? What about some pictures from your urban farm, community garden or healthy food-related event?

4. **Spread the word.** Invite your friends and colleagues to join the network. Send an email, share a link to our Facebook page, and post to listservs.

The Healthy Eating Minnesota Network will also feature original writing from network members, links to case studies and resources, and event listings from across the state. Learn more at www.healthyeatingmn.org.

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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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