Chapters & Groups: Easily Email Your Members

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

SFA is a farmer networking organization, making communication key to furthering our mission. But historically, for many reasons, it hasn’t always been easy for SFA Chapters and Groups to quickly and easily communicate information to their members.

Thanks to improved technology options, we are currently upgrading our database management system and as a result are announcing another new feature to help chapters and groups operate effectively and efficiently. Building on the heels of our recent SFA Event Entry form system, we now have built a similar intake page for chapters and groups to quickly email your entire membership.

The form sends an instant alert to SFA communications staff, who, assuming the email content is appropriate and aligns with SFA’s mission, will send the email using SFA-branded templates as soon as possible, usually within two business days.

The emails must be submitted by a chapter coordinator or board member and contain information about SFA-specific programming. Is your chapter hosting or co-sponsoring an event, annual meeting, or field day? Seeking member feedback? Writing a chapter- or group-specific newsletter? Great – simply input your text and contact information into the form.

Have photos you’d like to add? Great. Email those to me at jason@sfa-mn.org. And remember that the answers to most of your questions, as well as the links for all forms you will need, are on our Chapter Resource Portal and Networking Group Resource Portal.
Executive Director's Note: St. John's Wort

St. John's Wort (Hypericum perforatum, shown above) is an interesting herb crop growing in the SFA New Crops Herb Plot. As a medicinal crop, St. John's Wort proponents claim antidepressant activity and potent anti-inflammatory properties. It is often considered to be an invasive weed in the U.S. Care should be taken in production, as in pastures, St John's wort acts as both a toxic and invasive weed. It replaces native plant communities and forage vegetation to the extent of making productive land nonviable or becoming an invasive species in natural habitats and ecosystems. Ingestion in large doses by livestock such as horses, sheep, and cattle can cause photosensitization, central nervous system depression, spontaneous abortion, and death (Wikipedia).

So, is it worth considering for commercial production? The answer isn't a simple one. Clearly, producing SJW is not for the faint of heart. It's invasive properties are enough to scare away most potential producers. Still, there is a demand for SJW products, and it can grow in MN. There is much commercial production in Canada. One of the keys to establishing a niche crop or new crop for revenue on a farm is to understand the importance of being early to the market. While SJW doesn't appear to have a significant fit for many growers, demand may increase as more and more consumers turn to herbal and biological solutions.

Lake Agassiz Festival of Farms is July 9 in Bagley

Lake Agassiz Festival of Farms is set for 1-4 p.m. Sat., July 9, in Bagley and features tours of two diverse, innovative farm operations.

Free and open to all, the day will begin with a farm tour at Split Oak Farm, 32837 201st Ave, just south of Bagley. Farmers Jeff and Angie Ness will discuss crop and animal rotation with a focus on using the animals to "work the ground," sustainable soil health methods, and grazing practices on their biodiverse small-scale farm. Also, tour the gardens and visit with the dairy goats, pigs, poultry and rabbits.

Then, attendees will caravan just 3.2 miles up the road to Amazing Grace Homestead, where
Dianne Moen used a desire for a natural, sustainable, spiritual, and self-sufficient lifestyle to create her "mini-farm" both as a means of producing food and as a steward to the land. Come view the Buff Chanticleer chickens, Royal Palm turkeys and poults, Scottish Highlander cow and calf pairs, Katahdin sheep, and a good dog. The day will end with light refreshments.

Please RSVP here.

- **Other SFA Chapters and Groups**: If you are planning Festival of Farms events, be sure to enter the event details into our new Event Entry Form. More information about that form can be found in a recent SFA news item.

**Garlic Growers Field Day is July 9**

A free SFA field day for current and prospective garlic growers will be 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sat., July 9 at two farms: Living Song Farm, 7616 25th St SW, Howard Lake, MN, with a tour of Jerry Ford's garlic operation; and Chris and Joanne Kudrna's farm, Plum Creek Garlic, 2547 195th St E, Clearwater.

Click here to RSVP.

Joining the farmer presenters will be Dr. Carl Rosen, a soil scientist who has done extensive research on growing garlic in northern climates and is head of the Department of Soil Water and Climate at the University of Minnesota.

**Forage Council Summer Tour is July 14 in Wadena**

Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council, an SFA networking group, is hosting its summer tour from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. July 14 at Ivan and Dayle Reinke's Cloverleaf Grass Farm, 62619 285th St SW, Wadena.

Presenters include the Reinkes, SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist Kent Solberg, and NRCS Grazing Specialist Jeff Duchene.

The event is free and dinner is included; a freewill donation will be accepted at the door to cover the meal. Please preregister for planning purposes by clicking here.

**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 the Process of Custom-Ordering
- Year-Round Income Streams on 15 Acres or Fewer
- Farming is Great, But I Need a BREAK!: Strategies and Tools for Dealing with Livestock When You Need to Get Away
- Deep Winter Greenhouse Production: Mastering the Three Winter Seasons
Apply Now for 2016-17 SFA Sustainability 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.

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:

- Gabe Brown is popping up all over the media these days. Here's the second article we've seen in the New York Times that quotes him.

- From AgWeek, a headline pulled straight from the Five Principles: “Introducing Livestock Into Arable Cropping Systems Can Improve Soil Health.”

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.