'Secret Atlas' Excerpt Profiles Petry Farm

Editor’s Note: The following is an excerpt from the “Open Arms, Open Farms” chapter of the recent book, “The Secret Atlas of North Coast Food.” The chapter, written by SFA Communications and Membership Coordinator Jason Walker, profiles four SFA member farms; a book signing event is scheduled for June 7 during SFA’s GrazeFest series event at Mill City Farmers Market. You can read more about that event later in this newsletter.

This excerpt features SFA members Bob and Marie Petry and their GrassStain Farm, 1762 160th St, Wolverton.

Located in the Red River Valley about 20 miles south of Fargo, Bob and Marie Petry have been “grass farming” for several years at their 20-acre GrassStain Farm. But farming was in their blood long before they arrived at GrassStain; Bob and Marie both grew up on farms, and both have agriculture-related degrees from North Dakota State.

So, what is “grass farming,” anyway? Well, the most visible proponent of the method is Joel Salatin, the Virginia farmer profiled in “The Omnivore’s Dilemma” as well as the more recent documentary film, “American Meat.” Farmers like Salatin and the Petrys see grass as the basis for their food production: Nature provides the grass through sun and rain, and their animals take turns grazing on that pasture, which provides food for humans as well as food for the soil in the form of manure. It’s a cycle that produces richly flavored, healthier meat as well as weather-resistant, nutrient-rich soil that is perfect for prairie grass production.

The Petrys raise Jersey cows, pastured pork, chickens and eggs, and have both a small garden and an orchard.

“After moving around for several years, we were thrilled to find this 20-acre farm full of trees, grass, and buildings,” Marie Petry said. “It’s the perfect place for us to grow good food and share with friends. And nothing is more satisfying to Bob than sitting down to a delicious meal totally grown on this farm.”

If you visit GrassStain Farm, try to do it when the Petrys’ children, Elizabeth and Karl, are home – the family plays together as a bluegrass quartet.

“One time we entertained guests with turkeys 'singing' along with the fiddler, who was wearing a horse-head mask,” Marie Petry said. “You had to see it to believe it! For us, farming is our work and our play; our food and our fun.”
SFA’s Annual GrazeFest Event at Mill City is June 7

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

SFA’s annual GrazeFest series event returns June 7 to Mill City Farmers Market, held between the Mill City Museum and Guthrie Theater in downtown Minneapolis.

Again this year SFA’s Mary Jane Miller will be cooking on stage with food from the market as well as grass-fed beef from Living Song Farm. We’ll have a family-friendly SFA booth with a few freebies, 2-for-1 Garlic Festival coupons and plenty of SFA folks on hand, and the vibrant market itself with its 60-plus vendors is always worth the trip.

New this year is a book signing of “The Secret Atlas of North Coast Food,” which features a chapter written by me, “Open Arms, Open Farms,” that features several SFA farms, including Jerry Ford and Living Song Farm. Both Jerry and I will be there to sign copies of the book, in which maps and illustrations complement journalistic essays that take readers deep into the history, culture, and gastronomy of the Upper Midwest.

SFA at Mill City is our main urban event, reaching an audience of largely consumers who purchase food from our member farmers yet may not be aware of our organization. It’s a great way to help people learn about sustainable farming in general and the importance of supporting local farms and SFA.

Mary Jane’s samples of Jerry’s beef will be worth the trip alone, but it’s also a great time to pick up the “Secret Atlas” and talk local food. We’ll be there from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and hope to see you there.

If you’re interested in learning more or purchasing the "Secret Atlas" – which includes SFA members’ Living Song Farm, GrassStain Farm, Lakeside Prairie Farm and Round River Farm, as well as a wide array of other essays on Upper Midwestern food – visit the Heavy Table’s bookstore.

Save the Date: Festival of Farms is July 12, 2014

Festival of Farms is an opportunity to learn about sustainable agriculture, network within the community, and have fun at various SFA member farms across the state. The Festival is unique to each chapter, but the goal is the same – to build a unified sense of SFA’s presence in communities across Minnesota and tighten connections within the local food community.

SFA’s chapters are currently planning their Festival of Farms 2014 events. Look for updates here in SFA Connect and on our Festival of Farms homepage.

Other upcoming SFA events for your calendars:

- June 7 – SFA GrazeFest series event at Mill City Farmers Market, Minneapolis
- July 12 – Festival of Farms, various locations throughout Minnesota
- Aug. 9 – Minnesota Garlic Festival, Hutchinson
- Sept. 6 – Harvest Festival, Duluth
- Feb. 18-19, 2015 – Midwest Soil Health Summit, Alexandria

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 1, 2014:
- Salvaging, repurposing, upcycling, and restoring farm equipment and buildings
- Deep winter solar greenhouses
- Cover crops and soil health
- Multi-species grazing
- Direct-marketing meat
- Integrating crops and livestock
- Animal husbandry of large animals
- Fencing
- Maple syruping
- 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.

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!

Buckwheat Growers Assn. Seeking General Manager

The Buckwheat Growers Association is looking for a General Manager to manage all aspects of the feed grade processing plant and custom grain (seed) cleaning facility.

Production Program Sustainable Food Production, formerly part of M State Fergus Falls, is a much-needed beginning-farmer curriculum that emphasizes all three tenets of sustainability, plus provides extensive skills training.

New Crops Project
SFA’s New Crops Project aims to expand the availability of local foods in Minnesota and help farmers expand their markets.

Minnesota Dairy Initiative
For information about MDI and its ongoing projects, email SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg.
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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