SFA Launches New Gardening Blog, 'Produce in a Pinch'

Editor's Note: SFA Communications Coordinator Jason Walker and his wife, Leita, have launched a new blog, "Produce in a Pinch," that will chronicle their efforts at creating a garden on their city lot that's both productive and beautiful. The Walkers, who live with their children, Hank and Nettie, as well as six chickens in southwest Minneapolis, have been gardening with varied success since 2001.

The excerpt below is from their first post. Read the entire post here.

Boulevards are one of the most underused potential garden spots in the city. The often-narrow space between sidewalk and street, boulevards are nearly impossible for lawn fanatics and, despite attracting a growing number of devotees who want to expand their gardens, most languish with spotty, weed-infested grasses. Like most urban patches of dirt not being used to grow something beautiful or productive, they drive me nuts. Along with grass growers whose inability to fine-tune a sprinkler results in their watering nothing but the pavement and pedestrians, un-gardened boulevards give me one more thing to grunt, groan and gripe about on family walks.

When we bought our house in 2007 the front yard was already entirely planted as a flower garden – except for the boulevard. It stunk dragging the mower around the house and down the stairs; thus we realized the grass had to go and started by moving some peonies from behind our retaining wall to the boulevard to anchor the walkway and a mix of annuals and perennials throughout the rest. Given that a salty snow pile rests here for months each winter, the soil is obviously not ideal and needs the right plants as well as plenty of organic aid. The peonies seem to thrive, as do mums, moss rose, poppies, Russian sage, sedum, and zinnias. We’ve tried vegetables with mixed success. Tomatoes have done ok – the spot next to the street gives them plenty of sun. Failures include kale, carrots and radishes. You’d think radishes were fail-safe, but I’ve never had good luck with them in any soil, and we’ve worried about putting root crops in what may be chemical soil. Maybe we should leave radishes to Hank (he’s almost 5) as he could probably do better.

Click here to read the entire post. Produce in a Pinch will be updated periodically. To contact Jason and Leita, email jason@sfa-mn.org.

Executive Director's Note
By John Mesko

Recently, I sat down with a colleague of mine from Pennsylvania. Brian Snyder is the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA). PASA has been around about as long as SFA, and has over 6,000 paid members.

PASA impresses with their annual conference, held in February each year. Their website has a wealth of information on sustainable agriculture as well. Like SFA, they hold a number of informative workshops throughout their state every year.

Organizationaly, they were established as a statewide non-profit, and are just now getting their chapter structure refined and productive. Sound familiar? SFA already has 9 regional chapters that are the backbone of our Farmer to Farmer Network.

Currently, we are seeking to strengthen that network. We are looking for the right person to lead the expansion and development of the network. Over the next year or so, we'll be investing in our chapters and other ways SFA brings people together. Would you like to learn more about this exciting opportunity? You can see the job description here.

SFA, Living Song Farm Awarded Lakewinds Grants

Lakewinds Natural Foods, with stores open in Minnetonka and Chanhassen and plans for a third location in Richfield, recently announced the recipients of its 2013 Lakewinds Organic Field Fund. The three groups will receive $22,000 collectively for a variety of projects including establishing organic grazing pastures for chicken and cattle, educating local farmers about in-demand crops like quinoa and spelt, and immigrant farmer training.

The Lakewinds Organic Field Fund was created by the grocery cooperative in 2011 as a means to reinvest profits into the co-op’s core mission: supporting local, organic food producers by enhancing the development and sustainability of organics through research, training, organic certification, transitioning farms from conventional to organic, creating new farms and land trusts for organic farms.

The three groups receiving awards are:

- **Living Song Farm (Howard Lake).** Project: Establish additional organic pasture for rotational grazing of cattle and chickens.

- **Minnesota Food Association (Marine on St. Croix).** Project: Continue the development of its immigrant farmer training program through Big River – a certified organic farm.

- **Sustainable Farming Association (Princeton).** Project: Continue previous work on the New Crops Project to develop educational materials for local farmers about the demand for and requirements for growing crops like quinoa and spelt.

These awards recognize the work each group is doing towards a collective goal of producing locally grown, organic and sustainable foods, a key value for Lakewinds. “Our purpose for this grant program was to strengthen our support of the local farming industry. Supporting the local food system is an integral part of who we are as a natural foods co-op,” said Dale Woodbeck, General Manager of Lakewinds.
Community and Local Food Resource Website Launched

A new, tri-state collaboration has resulted in a website to assist rural community food system development. Designed to support rural communities beginning to build local food systems, as well as those with more developed ones, the website brings together the following organizations:

- Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (UMN Extension)
- North Dakota State University Extension Service
- Buy Fresh Buy Local South Dakota
- FARRMS, a non-profit based in Medina, N.D.

“The release of this website coincides with the kickoff of a new season of farmers markets, CSAs and farm-to-institution programs,” said Greg Schweser, community food systems planner for the University of Minnesota Extension’s Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and an SFA member.

The project was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program’s North Central division. Researchers worked with rural Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota communities to identify needs and meet them through the website’s tools and resources for farmers, community groups, Extension educators and others interested in local food systems. It will be useful to those working in local foods seeking production assistance, expanded marketing opportunities, developing stronger businesses, creating new sourcing options, educating citizens and crafting more beneficial public policies.

Click here to visit the site.

FARRMS of North Dakota Hosting Soil Day Fundraiser

FARRMS, a sustainable organization that focuses on helping small-scale sustainable farmers, is holding a fundraising event called Symphony of the Soil on June 18 in Fargo, N.D.

The event will include a day of learning about soils. The day begins at 9 a.m. at North Dakota State at a soils discussion with Fred Kirschenmann from Iowa State’s Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Later, the event moves to Probstfield Farm in Moorhead for a soil tour, followed by a gala reception with Kirschenmann and filmmaker Deborah Garcia. After the reception there will be a screening of Garcia’s film, “Symphony of the Soil,” at the Fargo Theatre.

Learn more and purchase tickets here.

Cover Crop Fact Sheet Now Available for Download

With our unpredictable weather, soil health is more important than ever for sustainable farmers. At SFA, we are ramping up our commitment to soil health education – it’s the bedrock of not only sustainable food production but also environmental stewardship.

Alongside our ongoing GrazeFest series of pasture-based events, SFA’s Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg has prepared a Cover Crop Fact Sheet, a one-page guide to the...
basic tenets of cover cropping, the four main groups of cover crop varieties, and additional resources graziers and farmers should utilize.

The downloadable fact sheet is available on our GrazeFest page. Please feel free to spread the Fact Sheet with friends and neighbors.

New Issue of Farm Transitions Newsletter Now Online

Our Farm Transitions program with Renewing the Countryside has its own e-newsletter, covering various topics on farm transition, wills and trusts, and estate planning.

Click here to read the latest edition that includes several timely articles about long-term care, including the importance of long-term care insurance. Contributors to this edition of the Farm Transitions newsletter include Renewing the Countryside Executive Director Jan Joannides, University of Minnesota farm transition expert Gary Hachfeld, and RTC staff attorney Robyn Ingber.

Also, watch for upcoming expanded Farm Transitions content including podcasts, a print newsletter, a collaborative Farm Transitions online portal, and more.

To view the latest newsletter and the newsletter archive, visit our Farm Transitions homepage at sfa-mn.org/farm-transitions/.

SFA GrazeFest Series Pasture Walk Event Set for Aug. 10

By Kent Solberg • SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator

Attention dairy and beef producers: A pasture walk and farm tour will be held at 9:30 a.m. Sat., Aug. 10, 2013, at the Gans farm north of Aitkin. We will be looking at Joe's energized fence and watering systems, grazing management, and soil health in relation to pasture management. Watch SFA Connect for more information on the event and registration as the date approaches.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer Crystal Liepa documented our SFA Annual Conference again in 2013 at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Watch for a new photo each issue of SFA Connect and learn more about Crystal at her website.
SFA Photo Contest Winner: Andrew Wirtz of Melrose

Who doesn't want to win a free T-shirt, let alone a cool SFA one? Here's your chance. Send communications coordinator Jason Walker your photos, and the best each month, chosen by a panel of distinguished judges, gets an SFA T-shirt. What kind of photos are we seeking? Simply anything from your farm, family, garden or kitchen – anything that's related somehow to sustainable agriculture that you'd like to share with SFA members.

Send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org, and we'll include the winner in SFA Connect. Check out our Facebook page for all the photo submissions.

April's winner: Andrew Wirtz of Melrose sent this photo of their son, Jayden, checking out their hogs.

Take Part in Quick Survey for SFA; T-shirt Up for Grabs

Thanks to all who participated in the recent SFA Stress Survey, a simple, two-question survey. We will use this data to assess the need for stress-related programming at future SFA Farmer-to-Farmer Network events.

We’re collecting data with another super-quick survey on the new topic of SFA members’ use of mobile technology and how it pertains to SFA. The survey is now available at this link, so please take a few minutes to respond. A random survey-taker will receive an SFA T-shirt. Thanks!

Lakewinds Natural Foods Member Loan Campaign Begins

Lakewinds Natural Foods is expanding and needs the community's support building its third store – on Lyndale Ave at 64th St in Richfield. Co-ops continue to anchor their communities as
places to shop for organic and natural foods.

The planning for this store has been under way for several years and Lakewinds is excited to bring the co-op to a suburb where no other grocery co-ops exist. As part of Lakewinds’ commitment to the financing package for this $9 million project, it must raise at least $1.8 million in member loans to make the new store a reality. Lakewinds offered similar member loan programs in 1995 and 2005 with great success and is counting on your participation for another success.

You can put your money to work in an ethical, socially responsible business and strengthen Lakewinds’ foundation for continued success. Your support will have these impacts on our community:

- The creation of up to 80 additional full-time jobs with benefits.
- Increased support for local and organic farmers and producers.
- Strengthen Lakewinds’ competitive position in the marketplace.
- Get the word out about the benefits of co-op ownership and co-op economy.
- Keep our dollars circulating in the local economy.

For further information on the member loan campaign, including loan rates and terms, please visit lakewinds.coop.

Research on Integrating Prairies & Row Crops Bus Tour

What combination of annual and year-round plants can be grown to significantly improve soil health, water retention and biodiversity without sacrificing the economic needs of a farmer? That is one of the major questions that will be discussed during a bus tour originating from southern Minnesota on July 9. Space is limited and participants must reserve a spot by contacting the Land Stewardship Project’s Caroline van Schaik at caroline@landstewardshipproject.org or 507-523-3366.

Featured during the tour will be research conducted by Iowa State University as part of the Science-based Trials of Row Crops Integrated with Prairies (STRIPS) project. STRIPS researchers are experimenting with mingling bands of permanent vegetation with annual crops such as soybeans and corn at central Iowa’s Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Field treatments were established beginning in the fall of 2006 and findings to date indicate that bands of grass-forbs taking up no more than 10 percent of a cropped field can cut soil erosion by as much as 95 percent, among other benefits.

Holistic Management of Goats Workshop Planned in Ashby

An upcoming event in the Fergus Falls area includes SFA members and will be relevant to many. The event:

- Holistic Management of Goats Workshop is 10 a.m.-4 p.m. June 15. As part of the M State Sustainable Food Production program’s short course series, this day features a hands-on opportunity to learn about incorporating meat and milk goats into a farming operation. Topics: animal selection for a forage-based system; nutrition requirements; planned grazing; fencing; shelters, animal handling. Instructors are Sue Wika and Tom Prieve of Paradox Farm, a forage-based, permaculture farm featuring integrated livestock systems located at 11643 State Highway 78, Ashby, Minn. Cost: $50/person; $75/family. Bring a sack lunch. More information: paradoxhomestead@gmail.com or 218.747.2202.

Apply for USDA's Farm Service Agency Microloans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) developed the Microloan (ML) program to better serve the unique financial operating needs of beginning, niche and the smallest of family farm operations by modifying its Operating Loan (OL) application, eligibility and security requirements. The program will offer more flexible access to credit and will serve as an attractive loan alternative
for smaller farming operations like specialty crop producers and operators of community supported agriculture (CSA). These smaller farms, including non-traditional farm operations, often face limited financing options. For more information, click here.

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**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.

Sustainable Farming Association (SFA)
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