March 19, 2012

There's Still Time: Sign Up for Friday's Farm Transitions Workshop in Browerville

Browerville, here we come.

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Renewing the Countryside and SFA were happy to see so many farmers from central Minnesota exploring options for succession planning for their farm at the Feb. 17 Clearwater Farm Transitions workshop. Over 40 people attended the day-long workshop, led by Gary Hachfeld and David Bau of the UMN Extension.

Now, we're gearing up for another edition of the class, to be held from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. this Friday, March 23, at Browerville Community Center, 544 Main St S, Browerville. Register now at bit.ly/BrowervilleFT.

Hachfeld and Bau's program introduces participants to what must be considered when planning for the future of a family's farmland. The session covers trusts, wills and insurance, as well as the best strategies to transfer land, assets and wealth while avoiding probate and minimizing exposure to estate or capital gains taxes.

If that sounds like a lot to learn in one day - it is! But don't worry, because after you attend the daylong session, we've still got your back.

SFA and Renewing the Countryside, with support from the USDA Risk Management Agency, will be providing personalized assistance to those who would like help with this process. Some of the decisions that farm families need to make are not simple or easy, and there are many people, including family members, who have an interest in the planning process and eventual outcomes. That's where Renewing the Countryside can help.

For more details or to register, visit our online registration at bit.ly/BrowervilleFT or contact Jason Walker at jason@sfa-mn.org or 612.605.9269.

Also, stay tuned for details on our next session of Farm Transitions, which will take place in April in Northfield. An exact date and site has yet to be determined; but we'll keep you posted.

Executive Director's Note

Spring has sprung! I've not heard complaints from very many folks about the early spring this year. However, it is dry in many places. Here's hoping for some rain if you need it...

Last weekend, I was in Clarks Grove for the South Central Chapter Annual Meeting. A great group of very active SFA'ers who were very interested about the Public Policy Project. Thanks to all who came and let us know what their interest is!

Before you get off and running on this spring's planting work, please keep in mind the next Farm Transitions workshop mentioned earlier FRIDAY March 23 in Browerville.

Also, stay tuned for more information on upcoming projects, including the Northern Minnesota Meat Processing Project.

Chapter Update: Crow River Chapter

SFA EVENTS

Farm Transitions - March 23 in Browerville. For more details or to register, visit our online registration at bit.ly/BrowervilleFT or contact Jason Walker at jason@sfa-mn.org or 612.605.9269.
With several projects in the works, Crow River Chapter is staying busy with MN Garlic Festival, Festival of Farms, Farm-to-School, a Directory and even some work with the Governor's Residence.

We'd like to extend an invitation to apply as a GARLIC FESTIVAL VENDOR. Part of our mission is to give producers from across the state a chance to try out their marketing strategies in a large festival setting. We keep the booth fees quite reasonable, give you lots of guidance, and then put you in a situation where upwards of 4,000 people will see your booth. So if you have farm product, prepared foods or your own artisan wares to sell, please visit the garlic festival website and check out the vendor information: www.mngarlicfest.com.

Also of general interest at Garlic Fest is the new GARLIC GROWING CONTEST. Gardeners and farmers can enter their garlic in several different categories, including a wide range of varieties, "Ugliest" and "Best in Show." Prizes include Extra Virgin Olive Oil from festival sponsor Lucero Olive Oil, ribbons and bragging rights. We're also expanding the Wine Tasting, and Crow River Winery is hosting a "Garlic Ball" on August 10th, the night before the festival.

Our plan for Festival of Farms (July 14th) is to offer a "buffet" of farms to visit throughout the Crow River Area. We already have several on the list, and if you'd like to throw your hat in the ring, please contact Jerry Ford at jerry@sfa-mn.org. Each farm would offer a tour at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., with open house time in between. We'll publish the entire list soon.

In addition to our member's current Farm to School activities - selling healthy produce to school lunch programs, making school visits, establishing school gardens, and arranging cooking demos and taste testing - new plans include an "Ag in the Classroom" program and a Summer Kitchen to help schools preserve summer vegetables for winter use. Both programs are funded by proceeds from MN Garlic Festival.

The Crow River Sustainable Farm Directory, with listing of our chapters' member farms and businesses, is now with the graphic artist, and will come out in print and online in early May.

We are ramping up our involvement with food and gardens at the Governor's Residence, with Mary Jane Miller, and Nick and Amelia Neaton taking the lead. They are expanding the site's vegetable gardens and edible landscape, and even more local food will be used in the kitchen.

RTC Farmer/Buyer Networking Events Scheduled

Renewing the Countryside has been facilitating a series of farmer/buyer networking events for more than five years. From farm to school programs sourcing large amounts of fruits and vegetables to linking caterers with niche gourmet growers, we have helped hundreds of successful relationships develop. This approach to connecting regional buyers and farmers also provides information on new opportunities that are helping to scale up the implementation of local foods.

This year, workshops will be held in Moorhead (March 26), St. Charles (March 28), and Duluth (TBA). For more information, please contact Sarah: sarah@rtcinfo.org or 612.741.6074.

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.

Read Heavy Table writer Tricia Cornell's story about the conference here.
Scholarships for Transitioning and Recently Certified Organic Farmers

While transitioning to organic farming can present financial uncertainty for farmers, there’s a special program in Minnesota to help them accomplish their goals. The “Tools for Transition” program, led by the University of Minnesota (UMN), Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and other partners, provides farm business management scholarships of up to 90 percent to qualifying farmers.

“Tools for Transition” is aimed at helping clarify the cost and process of transitioning to organic. Minnesota field crop or dairy farmers who have any acres in transition or who have been certified fewer than three years are eligible to apply, and project leaders are eager to expand the program to more farmers this year.

Farmers in "Tools" work directly with a farm business management instructor on a personally designed program to help them understand and better manage their own cost of production, profitability, and other financial measures. UMN agricultural economists analyze the data to look for patterns and trends, while carefully protecting the privacy of all participants' financial information.

Program participants get the chance to participate in special workshops and to receive a discount to attend the annual Minnesota Organic Conference. To learn more about the scholarships, call administrator Meg Moynihan at 651-201-6616.

Local Food Resource Hubs Open to Minneapolis Residents

Minneapolis residents who want to learn how to grow their own food and those interested in low-cost seeds, seedlings, compost or classes can now become part of a neighborhood-based support network of urban gardeners and local food advocates. The Local Food Resource Hubs Network, an initiative from the City of Minneapolis, community partners and Gardening Matters, is designed to get Minneapolis residents and community gardeners the tools and education they need to grow, preserve, cook and compost their own fresh produce by offering supplies, classes and connections. Hubs benefit communities by connecting neighbors and have been established in four Minneapolis areas: north Minneapolis, south Minneapolis, Phillips and Ventura Village, and northeast and southeast Minneapolis.

Residents can join a hub and select the type of membership. Small garden memberships will receive 10 packets of seeds and 12 seedlings, medium garden memberships will receive 20 packets of seeds and 24 seedlings, and large garden memberships will receive 50 packs of seeds and 72 seedlings. Members can pick up packets of seeds and seedlings at their hub's
distribution event this spring. Seeds and plants will be distributed April 14 and May 19. More information about distribution events will be sent to members and be available at [www.gardeningmatters.org](http://www.gardeningmatters.org).

Memberships are available on a first-come, first-served basis. To reserve a membership spot, residents can contact Gardening Matters at 612-821-2358, download the membership form (in English, Spanish, Hmong or Somali), or sign up at [www.gardeningmatters.org/hubs](http://www.gardeningmatters.org/hubs).

Linden Hills Farmers Market Seeks Vendors for Upcoming Season

The new Linden Hills Farmers Market in Minneapolis still has some vendor spots open. The market, held 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sundays June 3-Oct. 28, will be held in the Settgren Ace Hardware parking lot, 2813 W 43rd St, Minneapolis.

Just down the street from the Linden Hills Co-op, the market will be set in a vibrant neighborhood where residents value and appreciate eating local food from local farmers and purveyors.

For more information, contact market manager Kate Ostheimer at 612.345.0946 or kate@lindenhillsmarket.org. Visit the market on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/lindenhillsfarmersmarket](http://www.facebook.com/lindenhillsfarmersmarket).

'Marketing Farm Products Online' Workshop Set in Winona

"Twitter, Facebook and Blogs, Oh My!," a workshop on how to get started using online marketing tools to sell products straight off the farm, will be held from 9 to 11 a.m. March 27 at the First Congregational Church, 161 West Broadway St, Winona. The workshop will be followed by a one-hour individual technical help session, and participants are encouraged to bring their laptop computers. During the workshop, Land Stewardship Project and University of Minnesota Extension staffers will highlight some of the social media and Internet tools available to farmers. There will be discussions on how Facebook, Twitter, blogs and websites can be used to connect farms to potential customers throughout the region. In addition, farmers from the region will discuss their online marketing strategies and how they use affordable online tools to build customer relationships by telling their story.

The fee is $10 for Land Stewardship Project members and $15 for non-members. Register by contacting Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org.

Applications for NRCS Organic Initiative Due March 30

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Don Baloun reminds potential applicants to contact their local NRCS office soon to find out if they are eligible for the agency’s Organic Initiative. Applications for the second ranking period of 2012 are due at NRCS offices by close of business on March 30. The NRCS Office Locator is available at [go.usa.gov/Uo8](http://go.usa.gov/Uo8).

Nationwide, NRCS has nearly $50 million in financial and technical assistance available to certified organic producers, those who want to make the transition to organic production and producers who sell less than $5,000 in organic products annually.

Learn more about the Organic Initiative at [go.usa.gov/Uo9](http://go.usa.gov/Uo9) and find out about other NRCS initiatives and programs at [go.usa.gov/UoX](http://go.usa.gov/UoX).

Invasive Species in Agricultural and Rural Landscapes Workshops Set

A series of three workshops has been scheduled in the rural areas of the state to discuss five invasive species which may cause damage to rural areas. These include: Emerald Ash Borer, an insect affecting Ash trees in windbreaks and rural communities; Thousand Cankers Disease, a...
disease spread by an insect affecting Black Walnut found in native woodlands, communities and windbreaks; and Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, an insect affecting over 300 plants including apple trees, grapes, corn and soybeans. Two woody invasive plants: Buckthorn, a small tree which is host to the over wintering soybean aphid and Oriental Bittersweet, an invasive vine. Both of these plants are extremely invasive and change the understory environment of windbreaks and woodlands. Workshop topics will include history, life cycle, identification, damage and control. Free handouts will also be available. Learn how to correctly identify and control these pests to promote healthy woodlands and Minnesota landscapes.

The three workshops will be held March 28 in Windom at the MN DNR Office, March 29 in Waseca at the Southern Research and Outreach Center, and April 4 in Willmar at the University of Minnesota Extension Regional Office. Times for all workshops are from 1 to 4 p.m. Registration is $20; pre-registration is requested and the public is welcome. This workshop is sponsored by the University of Minnesota Extension. Woodland Advisor and Master Gardener credits are available upon request. For more information or to register, contact Kathy Eckwright, 507-389-6972 or 888-241-3214, eckwr001@umn.edu.

**Central Chapter of SFA Plans Plant Swap, Birding Event**

Save the date: April 28 is the Sky Dance Plant Swap. The SFA Central Chapter present a 100 Orchards project – from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., enjoy a regional plant swap with an evening birding event at Green Island in Wadena. Events include: barter and exchange plants and plant materials of every kind, witness the woodcock's sky dance, free workshops and a book reading.

Green Island is at 850 Scheer Dr NE (off Highway 71) in Wadena. For more information, call 218-631-3084 or email rscheer@charter.net.

**'Farm to School' Film Upcoming; Regional Screenings Planned**

Farm to School partnerships have flourished across Minnesota as communities have risen to the challenge of addressing the health, education and economic impacts of the childhood obesity epidemic. More schools are incorporating fresh, local food into their lunch menus as farmers work to meet this growing demand. "Farm to School: Growing our Future," a 30-minute documentary film addressing this topic, will air at 8 p.m. March 25 on TPT. Produced by TPT, the Minnesota Dept. of Health and the University of Minnesota Extension, the film explores the advantages and remaining challenges for businesses, farms, schools and communities as they work together to improve our children’s health and education. It features a diverse cast of characters, including SFA member Mary Jo Forbord.

There also will be a series of regional screenings in various Minnesota cities. To view a list of screenings or RSVP, click here. More information on the film and the farmers involved is available here.

**Program to Spread Word, Expertise about Solar Energy**

Join Clean Energy Resource Teams for a solar energy program from 1 to 4 p.m. March 28th at Riverside Park, 1800 Killian Blvd, St. Cloud. Learn more about solar energy, the solar industry in Minnesota, how solar works in your community, and resources to get started. Participants can connect with experts serving Central Minnesota that can talk to you more about your site, specific technologies, financing options, and solar resource. Attendees also will learn the basics of solar energy, hear from a panel of people who have solar power systems installed on their home or business, find out about incentives and rebates for installing solar power systems, and get resources to start your solar energy project.

This event will include a resource fair, networking opportunities, and refreshments, and is free and open to the public. Register now and see the agenda at solarworkscentral.eventbrite.com or call 612-626-0555.
Growers Sought for On-Site Supermarket Greenhouse

BrightFarms, a New York-based finance, development and management business that creates hydroponic greenhouse farms at supermarkets, is hiring growers to operate state-of-the-art greenhouses on site at Minneapolis supermarkets. The goal is to build a network of growers to supply supermarkets with locally-grown produce including lettuce, tomatoes, and herbs and includes training, technology and tools to work with supermarkets. BrightFarms provides the capital to construct the greenhouse and provides an agreement with the supermarket to purchase the produce grown at the farm.

BrightFarms is seeking interested people with entrepreneurial spirits who have a passion for farming, sustainability, food quality and share the company's mission to reduce environmental impacts from industrial agriculture. Eligible candidates should have a minimum of one year of hydroponic growing experience. For more information, visit www.brightfarms.com. To apply, please send a resume and cover letter to: farmers@brightfarms.com.

FACT Healthy & Humane Farm Project to Give Grants

FACT's Healthy & Humane Farm Funds Project will provide small grants to qualifying humane farmers who need assistance in improving the welfare of their farm animals. Grants will be awarded for projects that (1) help farms transition to pasture-based systems, (2) improve the marketing of their humane products, or (3) more generally enrich the conditions in which farm animals are raised. Applications must be postmarked by April 1 for awards to be made in June. At least five farms will be funded each year, with grants ranging up $1,500 per farm.

View guidelines and download an application at humanefarmfunds.org. For more information, contact Lisa Isenhart at grants@foodanimalconcerns.org or 773-525-4952.

Cedar Summit Dairy to Mark 10th Anniversary

Please help us celebrate our first ten years and the beginning of the next ten. Cedar Summit Farm Milkapalooza celebrates ten years of farm-bottled, certified organic, 100 percent grass-fed milk and will be from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 23 at the farm, 25830 Drexel Ave, New Prague. It will be a day of free family fun, music and farm tours, the farm store will be open, and lunch will be served outside under the big tent. We will have our own burgers for sale, along with drinks, chips and a couple vegetarian options. Come join the fun and help us look forward to the next ten years!

Extending the Growing Season Workshop in Lamberton

Are you interested in learning about low-input methods of growing produce earlier in the spring and later in the fall? Attend the Extending the Growing Season workshop from 9 a.m. to 4:45 pm. April 4 at the University of Minnesota Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton. The session will highlight topics related to earlier- and later-season vegetable production techniques and include a tour of the SWROC's high tunnels. It will also feature a screening of the new documentary film, "Farm to School: Growing Our Future.

For more information, visit swroc.cfans.umn.edu.

FESSA Hosting First Annual Conference in Stillwater

Farm Enterprises in Small-scale Sustainable Agriculture, a self-described "group of eclectic, enterprising small-scale farmers," is hosting its first annual conference March 31 from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Stillwater Public Library in Stillwater. The conference is geared for new and aspiring farmers, farmers looking to diversify, and any creative people interested in sustainable agriculture. FESSA hopes attendees will gain inspiration and resources, confidence to begin a new enterprise, and an introduction to a network of like-minded people.

Preregistration is required and capped at 100 attendees. A freewill donation of $10 is requested. To register or for more information, email mail@fessa.org.
U of M Extension Offers Workshop for Small-Farm and Acreage Owners

Do you dream of owning acreage in the country? Do you have an existing acreage that is need of a plan and strategies for the best possible results? The Living on the Land Workshop Series, offered by University of Minnesota Extension, will equip you with the education and resources to be successful. The eight-week course is designed to arm landowners with agricultural information to enable them to be good stewards of their land.

The series will be taught by Extension educators and natural resource professionals at two locations – from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday evenings through April 26 in Hutchinson at the McLeod County Fairgrounds 4-H Café and in Mankato at the Historic Courthouse in the Conference Room. Early registration is $175 until Friday, March 2 and all registrations received afterwards will be $200.

Contact Nathan Winter for a hard copy of the brochure and other questions regarding the Hutchinson Location at 320-484-4303 or by e-mail at wint0146@umn.edu. Contact Diane DeWitte at 507-304-4325 or by e-mail at stouf002@umn.edu for more information on the Mankato location and registration questions.

Specialty Crop Growers: Apply for Business-Boosting Grants

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has received $700,000 in federal funding to help promote and enhance the specialty crop industry. Fruit, vegetable and other specialty crop farmers can apply for Specialty Crop Block Grants to help them compete in today's marketplace. Grant projects may include outreach to increase consumers' nutritional knowledge about specialty crops, assistance in the development of good agricultural practices, investment into specialty crop research, development of new and improved seed varieties, and pest and disease control.

MDA Marketing and Development Director Mary Hanks says growers of fruits, vegetables, culinary herbs and spices, medicinal plants, tree nuts, flowers, and nursery plants are eligible to apply. MDA will accept grant applications through April 20, 2012. A list of eligible and ineligible commodities can be found at [www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp](http://www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp). A grant manual is available on the MDA website at [www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx).

Questions regarding the grant program or the application process can be directed to David Weinand at 651-201-6646 or email David.Weinand@state.mn.us.

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.

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