SFA Cover Crop Design Workshop is Friday in Perham

A few spots remain for SFA's upcoming free workshop for livestock, dairy and crop producers interested in integrating cover crops and livestock into their operations will be held from noon-3 p.m. March 25 – this Friday – at Lakes Cafe, 136 W Main St, Perham. Led by SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist Kent Solberg (above), this event will discuss designing cover crop blends to improve soil health and produce livestock feed.

Limited to 20 participants, registrants should bring: a field photo or map of one field in which to integrate cover crops, cropping and herbicide records for the past four seasons for that field, and a wi-fi enabled laptop or tablet computer. Experts will be coaching attendees through designing a custom cover crop blend.

Click here to register.

Refreshments will be provided but not lunch – it is recommended that attendees eat prior to and not during the workshop.
This event is sponsored by SFA and the West Central Minnesota Dairy Initiative.

Also, SFA is in the early stages of planning a grass-based dairy workshop with Dr. Allen Williams, likely to be held sometime in May. Keep reading SFA Connect for updates and registration information.

Executive Director's Note

National Ag Day was March 15, 2016.

The Agriculture Council of America (ACA) is the organization behind National Ag Day. I’d like to thank them for the effort they make “to increase the public’s awareness of agriculture’s role in modern society.”

Clearly, our society is in need of more awareness of agriculture’s role. Have you noticed our presidential candidates have barely mentioned agriculture in their debates and campaigns?

On the ACA website, there are information and tools available for helping ourselves and those around us understand many of agriculture’s impacts on our society and our communities. ACA sponsors are dominated by large corporations and conventional farming-related organizations and, at first blush, much of this information is focused on making sure our society understands the contributions of agriculture in terms of a safe, affordable food supply. But ACA doesn’t stop there, and it's good to see!

The ACA website includes resources and references representative of a broad spectrum of agricultural genres. Yes, there are even some resources connected to the agroecological impact of agriculture. This is heartening to see. Food production, and its affordability, is obviously a very important contribution of U.S. agriculture, one that should be celebrated. But too often, in an attempt “to share a positive story about agriculture,” advocates can miss other great contributions agriculture can make.

Agroecology, or the promotion of soil health building practices, has the potential to feed our growing global population, mitigate climate change, raise profits for farmers, and reduce our farm economy’s reliance on government support for success. How fitting is it then that the 2016 theme for National Ag Day is “Agriculture: Stewards of a Healthy Planet?” I know some who read this will ask, “Is the planet still healthy?” It depends on who you talk to, but one thing for sure, our planet’s ecosystem does contain the ability to heal itself under the right management and, for that reason, I think it can still be considered healthy.

But the stewardship question is still undecided. Will farmers move further on the Sustainability Continuum, toward a focus on healthy soil, or will we remain focused on the greatest output at all costs? It’s up to the next generation of farmers. The ones we should be celebrating are those farmers who are growing in knowledge about soil health and its implications for production, animal health, soil health, profitability and changing our world's food for the better.

Over the next several years, one of the goals of the Sustainable Farming Association is to bring all of agriculture together, keeping us focused on developing and remaining good stewards of a strong, resilient, healthy planet. I believe nearly every farmer is interested in sustaining life on this planet for the long haul.

There’s no reason for us to argue about which brand of farming is better. Let's journey together.

WOC Talks, Annual Conference Videos Now Online

The 2016 SFA Annual Conference, held Feb. 13 at the College of Saint Benedict, marked the debut of our new Wisdom of the Community – WOC – Talks. Similar to the popular TED Talks, WOC Talks are a platform for SFA members and supporters to submit talks on subjects relating to sustainable farming and food systems at the SFA Annual Conference.
View the 2016 WOC Talks – from Scott Haase, Joe Borgerding, and Eric DeBlieck, at our WOC Talks homepage.

Also, a new video about the SFA Annual Conference featuring John Mesko is now available on our AC homepage.

Farm Skills 101 Sold Out; Homestead Dairy Class May 1

SFA Deep Roots Farmer Development Program’s Farm Skills 101 is now sold out for the Spring 2016 semester. Fall 2016 classes will be announced as their details are available; keep watching SFA Connect and the Deep Roots homepage for details.

Our next Deep Roots course is Introduction to Homestead Dairy on May 1, 2016. Anyone wondering about adding a dairy component to their farm enterprise or who would like more information to guide their current dairy practices should consider this class. Registration options include two milking labs. Click here to register.

Central Chapter Hosting Keyline Design Workshops

Come learn from two Central Minnesota farmers about using keyline design principles on their farms to manage water during two upcoming SFA Central Chapter workshops, "Restoration Agriculture & Keyline Design for Improving Hydrology." This demonstration project explores how we can utilize excess water as an asset to increase productivity and resilience by capturing and storing it high on the landscape.

The first workshop is 6 p.m. Fri., April 8, at Bakers’ Acres, 36861 County Rd 9, Avon. Farmer Lisa Baker installed 900’ of berm and swale to move water from concentrated areas out to drier hillside ridges. This free field day will discuss the strategy and construction process.

The second workshop is 4 p.m. Fri., May 6, at Island Lake Farm, 23111 State Hwy 18, Deerwood. Farmer Jim Chamberlin has been researching and installing berm and swale terraces for over a decade. This free field day will include hands-on demonstration of surveying and installing a keyline terrace, as well as touring other established systems.

These workshops are free but advance registration is recommended. Click here to register.

For more information, visit the SFA Central Chapter homepage.

Cannon River Chapter Annual Meeting is April 2

The SFA Cannon River Chapter is hosting its annual meeting from noon-4:30 p.m. Sat., April 2, at Waterford Town Hall. This meeting is free and open to all who have interest in sustainable farming and farmer networking in the region.

The meeting will include a potluck lunch, a presentation on recent farmer trips to China and Mexico, a chapter business meeting, and more. Please bring your own dishes, utensils and glasses for the lunch.

Waterford Township Hall is just north of Northfield. Take County Rd 3 (Water St) north to 321st St W, turn right to town hall.

Registration is not required. For more information, email cannonriver@sfa-mn.org or visit the Cannon River Chapter homepage.

Greater Mille Lacs Chapter Producing Local Food Directory
SFA's Greater Mille Lacs Chapter, which is centered in the Aitkin area, is producing a Local Food Directory brochure for area farmers to list their contact information and products for sale. The directory listing is free to Greater Mille Lacs Chapter members but also open to nonmembers for a $20 fee.

For more information, email greatermillelacs@sfa-mn.org or visit the Greater Mille Lacs Chapter homepage.

Check This Out

- The anchor got our name wrong, but Duluth's ABC affiliate posted a video report on Lake Superior Chapter's recent “Farmers Take the Stage” event. Check it out here.
- From Drovers Magazine, this article, “Treating Cover Crops as Cash Crops,” is really cool. Sample quote: “In the off-season, the cover crop and cattle system increases organic matter and the potential for stronger row crops.” Read it here.
- From Iowa Ag Connection, “Chicken Ranching Boosts Pasture Soil Health.” Read it here.

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.

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