Gabe Brown Returning for 2015 Midwest Soil Health Summit

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Soil health really is the key to sustainability and is becoming top of mind for SFA.

Shifting the focus of agriculture from maximum yields to maximum soil health quality is critical to the sustainability of agriculture in Minnesota, the Upper Midwest, the United States and globally. SFA is committed to continued soil health programming, including programs addressing the integration of cover crops, row crops and livestock grazing, and will continue the pursuit of funding and programs that foster the development of soil health building practices for the long term.

To that end, SFA is proud to announce the return of the Midwest Soil Health Summit, set for Feb. 18-19, 2015, again at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria.

We are also especially proud to announce that Gabe Brown of Brown's Ranch will be returning to the MSHS in 2015 as the keynote speaker. Next year, however, Gabe and the other
presenters will have a dual focus: there will be specific workshops for soil health beginners as well as advanced farmers.

Plus, we will be planning even more farmer-to-farmer networking time. The popularity of the "Gab With Gabe" session, the discussion tables with each presenter (right, with Rick Bieber), and the Q and A sessions in 2014 means even more opportunities to network will be on the slate in 2015.

So, if you attended this year's Summit, don't think 2015 will be a repeat. Some of the presenters may be the same, but the programming will be varied and tailored to farmers of all stripes and expertise levels.

It's never too soon to start planning your conference season calendar. Just ask anybody who attended the sold-out 2014 Midwest Soil Health Summit, and they'll tell you it's a conference you can't afford to miss.

Pencil in Feb. 18-19, 2015, and we'll keep you updated on Summit speakers, registration, and everything you need to know.

Executive Director's Note

As I've said before, one of the keys to changing our food culture in the US is consumers. In fact, the link between consumers and farms is so critical, it may be the key to making sustainable agriculture the default brand of agriculture. This was echoed by Gabe Brown at the Midwest Soil Health Summit in February, and we are taking it seriously.

To this end, SFA is sponsoring the Midwest Premier of the new documentary movie, "Resistance," to be held Tuesday, April 8, at 7PM at Grandview Theater, 1830 Grand Ave., St. Paul.

I have seen the director's cut of this movie, which tells the story of the importance of antibiotics to every person in the US, and how the effectiveness of antibiotics in humans is threatened by the sub-therapeutic use of antibiotics in animals. There is a great message supporting natural, organic and grass-based farming which we all want to get into the hands of consumers.

Stay tuned for your opportunity to register to attend this premier showing of "Resistance." You really won't want to miss this.

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Follow me on Twitter: @johnmesko.

RTC, MOSES Hosting New Farmer Summit April 4-5

Renewing the Countryside and MOSES (Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service) are hosting the New Farmer Summit where beginning and aspiring farmers, or anyone interested in high quality sustainable farming workshops, can learn about both the field and financial sides of farming while making valuable connections. A number of full scholarships earmarked for Minnesotans remain thanks to Minnesota NCR-SARE. Click here to fill out our brief scholarship application.

The New Farmer Summit is April 4-5 at Primrose Valley Farm outside of New Glarus, Wis. Registration includes two full days of practical workshops, large group sessions hosted by National Young Farmers Coalition and Agrarian Trust, a farmerpanel, organic meals, a seed
SFA Member Writes Post on Paradox Farm

SFA member Emmy Tolbert (at right with Sue Wika) recently wrote an article for the Stand for Food blog after attending an SFP Workshop on Deep Winter Greens at Sue and Tom Prieve’s Paradox Farm. Here’s an excerpt:

Have you ever dreamed of owning a “deep winter” greenhouse—one of those polycarbonate covered structures, with interiors that feel like spring and summer, surrounded by black gold (soil) and lettuce seeds that grow into many shades of glorious green? That once found, built, or structured, is a true treasure during our cold Minnesota winters?

Just imagine my joy when I received the last reserved spot in the “Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy” class held at Paradox Farms in Ashby, MN. Now sponsored by the Sustainable Farming Association, Sustainable Food Production instructors Tom Prieve and Sue Wika taught this class in a warm and cozy corner of their barn to thirteen energetic and excited students of various ages on a cold, blustery January day.

Prieve kicked off the morning with a tour of their deep winter greenhouse, where the students observed the unique practicality and benefit of this polycarbonate-covered structure. The pair of educators (a pair of docs) were inspired to build this greenhouse to fit their personal farm needs, to nurture their goals of being more self-reliant, and to foster the ethic of neighborhood supported agriculture.

Click here to read the entire post.

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.
SFP Course: Introduction to Small Ruminant Husbandry

Anyone considering adding goats or sheep to their sustainable food production system or those who want to manage their small ruminants more holistically should attend a SFA Sustainable Food Production workshop, Introduction to Small Ruminant Husbandry, from 1 to 5 p.m. Sat., April 26, at Paradox Farm, 11643 State Highway 78, Ashby, Minn. (ten miles south of Battle Lake; seven miles north of Ashby).

This course provides students opportunity for hands-on work with sheep and goats. In a working-farm setting, students can learn how small ruminants can fit into a natural systems farm. Course topics include: holistic management, ruminant nutrition, animal handling, fencing, grazing strategies, holistic veterinary care, shelters, weight and age estimation. Wear clothing appropriate for working with animals: closed-toe shoes, gloves, long pants.

Paradox Farm owners Sue Wika and Tom Prieve will share their perspectives on how small ruminants can fit in holistically managed food production systems. Small ruminants have been an integral element of Paradox Farm for ten years. In addition to enjoying and appreciating small ruminants, Wika and Prieve are experienced sustainable farming educators and lead SFA’s Sustainable Food Production Program, which is also gearing up for its Fall 2014 semester.

To learn more and to register, click here.

Healthy Soils on Diverse Lands Topic of Forage Council

The Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council held its 14th Winter Workshop, "Cover, Cattle, Crops – Keeping Healthy Soils, on Diverse Lands, at the Center of Profitability," on Feb. 11 at Central Lakes College in Staples.
The workshop was sponsored in part by the Keep Cattle in Minnesota Project, a collaborative project of SFA, NRCS, and Grazing Lands Conservation Association.

Over 80 people turned out to hear presenters Ken Miller and Joshua Dukart, both District Technicians with the Burleigh County (N.D.) Soil Conservation District. Miller and his wife operate a 2,000-acre ranch near Fort Rice, N.D. Dukart, a Certified Educator of Holistic Management, remains involved in the management of the family ranch and teaches regularly throughout the US and Canada. Through diverse cover crops, rotational grazing, and crop rotation, they explained how farmers have increased soil carbon, reduced inputs of fertilizers and herbicides, and increased farm production all while improving wildlife habitat and water quality. Dukart was adamant of the need to get cattle back on the land, stating “that science has yet to replicate what comes out the back end of a cow.”

For more information about the Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council, contact Jim Chamberlin at jchamberlin@huglic.com.

Discover Farmers Market looking for 2014 Vendors

In its second year, the Discover Farmers Market, 1400 81st Ave. N in Brooklyn Park, in the parking lot of Discover Church, is hoping to expand by bringing in quality vendors from the area. The market is seeking a full range of vendors – produce (a wide variety), eggs, meat, dairy/cheese, jams & jellies, cut flowers, etc.

The market enjoys easy access and a highly visible location at the intersection of Highway 252 and 81st Ave. The market is held from 3 to 7 p.m. Tuesdays from May 20 to Oct. 14.

There are no vendor fees but vendors are asked to submit a spot deposit. Included in the listed vendor spot deposit is a nonrefundable $10.00 Market Membership charge.

If you are interested, or need more information, email discovermarketbp@gmail.com, visit www.discovermarketbp.com or call 763-242-1571 to speak with Dorinda or 763-670-9974 to speak with Sara.

Minneapolis Brewery Offering Free Spent Grains

Harriet Brewing, 3036 Minnehaha Ave, Minneapolis, is hoping to find a greener place to send its spent grains (about one ton per week). Spent brewing grains can be fed to livestock, and farmers may have interest supplementing their feed in this way.

The grains are free for pickup at the brewery, and can also be used as compost. The brewery has a number of 30-gallon barrels that can be used for grain hauling.

If you are interested, contact Steve West at stviewest@aol.com.
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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