Free 'Beginning Grazier Handbook' Now Available

Designed to assist the beginning grazier in designing and implementing a grazing system, our new Beginning Grazier Handbook is a starting place to quickly and easily find pertinent information. Most of the resources listed include website links for additional interest-specific grazing information.

The Handbook includes:

- Technical assistance – a list of “go-to” people who can provide advice to help you achieve a successful grazing system.
- Information on training, educational opportunities, mentors, networks, and organizations to help you gain knowledge of grazing and grazing systems.
- Production resources that provide you with reading materials on grazing systems.
- Farm business planning information that helps farmers understand the business side of grazing – recordkeeping, business planning, and marketing opportunities of your products.
- Where to go in Minnesota for loans and grants to help with financing the infrastructure needed for a grazing system.

In the appendices are lists of businesses that supply equipment and seeds for grazing systems. Use this list to find suppliers and negotiate the best value when purchasing. The goal of the handbook was to provide information; listing does not mean we endorse any of these suppliers.

This handbook was compiled by SFA as part of the Keep Cattle in Minnesota Project, with support from the Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Pasture Project.

Click here to visit our Keep Cattle in Minnesota homepage, where you can download the handbook.

Next Soil Health Webinar April 3 with Dr. Shannon Osbourne

Our next free Keep Cattle in Minnesota webinar is set for 1-2:30 p.m. April 3 and will feature Dr. Shannon Osborne of ARS in Brookings, S.D. Dr. Osborne is a Research Agronomist with the US Dept of Agricultural-Agricultural Research Service whose research focuses on understanding how soil and crop management options influence the soil environment and how...
these practices can be developed into production systems that maintain or improve our soil resource conservation and environmental quality, while providing production efficiency.

Click here to register.

Dr. Osborne’s presentation will focus on the impact of crop diversity, no-till, cover crops and residue removal on soil health properties, including soil physical properties and their interaction with soil biological properties. Specific information will include how crop diversity and cover crops impact soil aggregation, carbon and components of soil organic matter.

For more information on these and all SFA KCIM webinars, visit our Keep Cattle in Minnesota homepage. These webinars are presented with support by The Pasture Project.

Our two previous webinars, including the most recent from March 6, "Strategies for Implementing Cover Crops," led by Livestock & Grazing Specialist Kent Solberg, are archived on our Keep Cattle in Minnesota homepage.

Executive Director's Note

What Makes SFAs Farmer-to-Farmer Network unique?

When you look over the landscape of sustainable agriculture today. There are many “farmer networks” in existence. What makes a network, and why is SFAs network unique?

A network, as we are using the term here is defined as:

   *noun. a group or system of interconnected people or things. "a farmer to farmer network"

Twenty five years ago, at the founding of SFA, the idea of farmers networking together to solve the issues of sustainability was a relatively new concept. There were networks, of course, but many of these were bonded with the glue of political partisanship. Such networks are very effective navigating the politics of any issue, but really struggle to provide solutions for issues that cross political lines, and food and farming is one of those issues.

Today, SFA is a Farmer to Farmer Network® organization and is really a network of farmers who work independently and interconnectedly to solve their own issues around sustainability as well as the broader issues of local foods, healthy communities and the sustainable agriculture movement in general. In other words our network is designed to help individual farmers become more successful, as well as elevate the conversations around food and farming, bringing about a sustainable future across the board.

Building a professional network of clients and contacts for your business involves how you relate to people. Developing a professional network includes awareness of people who interact with your business, having a positive attitude about people, communicating effectively with people, and doing the things that build strong relationships.

The strength of any network is really found in the interactions of individuals to help build it. And you may be asking, “Ok, how can I help build this network?” Here a list of things you can do within SFA that will help both you and the bigger sustainable agriculture picture.

- **Be Aware**: Opportunities are all around you, and yet if you are not aware of them, they may as well not exist. Reading SFA Connect is a great way to be aware.
- **Have a helpful attitude**: Being an effective networker isn’t just about what you do; it’s also about your attitude toward what you’re doing. Your attitude influences everything in your life — the goals you set, the risks you’re willing to take, the way you approach people, your willingness to approach people, the way you respond to people, and much more. Volunteering at your chapter and recording your volunteer hours is a great way to demonstrate helpfulness. It’s fun too! Your attitude not only affects what you do; it also affects the way people respond to you. Your attitude can create a barrier and turn people off, or it can communicate with people that you want people
Hone your communication skills: Networking happens through conversation. After mastering the art of small talk, you will feel more comfortable meeting new people and developing rapport. By developing rapport with people, you will be able to turn small talk into opportunities to make requests and be a networking resource. Attend a chapter meeting, workshop or conference connected to SFA. You’ll have a chance to communicate with other like-minded farmers.

Develop relationship-building habits: A network exists as a series of relationships and connections between people. People must relate with and respect one another in order for a valuable networking exchange to happen. Building relationships is your first priority when networking.


New East Central Chapter Hosting First Meeting

A new SFA chapter is forming in the East Central part of the state, and all are invited to the first official chapter meeting, set for 6 p.m. March 29 at Kimberly-Glen Town Hall in Aitkin.

Admission to this event is free and no registration is required.

The purpose of this meeting is to elect a Chapter Board of Directors and discuss the direction and goals of this new Chapter. Here are the particulars about the event:

- Date: March 29, 2015
- Time: 6 pm
- Location: Kimberly-Glen Town Hall, 32631 Dam Lake St, Aitkin, MN 56431
- Cost: Free

For more information, contact Jerry Ford at jerry@sfa-mn.org.

Forage Council Joins SFA as Networking Group

Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council has officially joined SFA as a Networking Group. Since 2000, the Forage Council has provided thousands of people with opportunity to learn, explore,
and network through winter workshops and summer land and water tours. While SFA has regional chapters and individual members, the Forage Council, a collection of citizens working to promote family farms, enhance soil health, forage production and water quality, recently became SFA's first Networking Group.

“Our main goal is to collaborate with others to promote and implement our vision. Our vision is to provide educational information on pasture management and crop production that increases profits while improving area soil healthy and water quality,” said Chuck Horsager, CWRBFC Chairman.

This year, one of the Forage Council’s main events, its Summer Land Tour, will be located in southern Crow Wing County. The tour will showcase research on integrating livestock management on wooded pasture lands.

The photo above includes, front row from left, Melissa Barrick, Chuck Horsager, Jerry Ford, Mel Wiens, and George Geray; back row from left, Jessica Weis, Ivan Reinke, Kent Solberg, Leonard Koering, Jeff Duchene, Jim Chamberlin, and Kenneth Laporte.

For more information about the Forage Council, visit its homepage or contact Horsager at chorsager@unitybanking.com.

At-large Position Open on SFA Board of Directors

The SFA Board of Directors will elect an at-large member at its next meeting, set for April 24, 2015. If you would like to nominate a candidate for this position, contact SFA Board President Jim Chamberlin at jchamberlin@hugllc.com.

2016 SFA Conference Dates Announced; AC Voting Site Live

It’s never too early to mark your calendars, so get ready.

The 2016 SFA Annual Conference will be Feb. 13, 2016. We are already compiling session topic ideas and need your help – please vote in the widget on the AC homepage. Was there a session you missed this year and want to see in 2016? Have a unique idea for a topic that has been on your mind? Enter it here! Then vote often so we can create a conference schedule around the needs of our network.

Also, we are happy to announce the third annual Midwest Soil Health Summit will return Feb. 17-18, 2016, to Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn.

We are looking forward to compiling a slate of leaders and expert farmers who are dedicated to improving the health of the soil on your farm.

This year’s MSHS included expanded programming like Soil Health Basics I and II, an International Roundtable, and more, and we expect the expanded programming schedule to return in 2016. Keep watching SFA Connect and our SFA News blog for announcements.

Also, check out photos from both 2015 conferences on our Facebook page.

Intro to Small Ruminant Husbandry Class Set for May 16
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 our SFA Deep Roots class, *Intro to Small Ruminant Husbandry*, 1-5 p.m. Sat., May 16, 2015, 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.

Cost is $80 and space is limited. [To register, click here.](#)

**Check This Out**

- Here’s a terrific article from the mighty New York Times, and yes, we know what this scene looks like after the past two Midwest Soil Health Summits: “Gabe Brown is in such demand as a speaker that for every invitation he accepts, he turns down 10 more. At conferences, people line up to seek his advice.” [Read the whole story here.](#)

- From the USDA NRCS YouTube page, “The Science of Soil Health,” comes this video entry called “A Short Field Trip with Dr. Beck” recommended by SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist Kent Solberg. [Check it out here.](#)

**Annual Conference Photo Feature**

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2015 Annual Conference, held Feb. 14, 2015, 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.

Sustainable Farming Association (SFA)
Box 192, Princeton, MN 55371
763-260-0209 • info@sfa-mn.org

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