SFA Co-Hosts Cover Cropping & Soil Health Workshop

By Jason Walker • Communications Coordinator

On March 15, the Sustainable Farming Association co-sponsored a GrazeFest series workshop, "Cover Crops for Soil Health and Farm Profitability," at Lakes Cafe in Perham led by Paul Brown of Brown's Ranch (at right in photo above).

Operated with his father, Gabe, Brown’s Ranch is a 5,300-acre integrated crop and cattle operation in Burleigh County, N.D. At the workshop, Paul Brown described how his ranch focuses on soil health using diverse crop rotations, complex cover crop cocktail mixes, no-till & holistic grazing.

According to SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg, 50 people attended despite the poor weather and driving conditions. According to Solberg, "The information was received with great enthusiasm. People are looking forward to our Central Minnesota cover crop demonstration plot field day later this fall."
Executive Director's Note

By John Mesko

As I write this, I'm sitting in a Farm Transitions Workshop in Frontenac, MN. I'm sitting with about 30 other farmers, hearing about the issues farmers are facing when considering a transfer of the farm business. Later this week, I'll be making some more coaching calls to past workshop participants, offering one-on-one support and education to assist them in developing a farm transition plan. About an hour ago, I chatted Kent Solberg, a farmer, and SFAs Livestock and Grazing Specialist, who is here and will also be making some of those coaching calls. We visited about some of SFAs upcoming programming regarding soil health improvement for farm profitability, we also discussed ways in which SFAs Farmer to Farmer Network will be enhanced and expanded over the next 2-3 years. I have about a dozen emails from other farmers that need a response today and later this week, I'll be sending out Adjust 2015 Surveys to pre-screened participants. Next week, the SFA staff will be sitting down to discuss some great opportunities that are before us in the whole area of network development and Farmer-to-Farmer learning opportunities. This week's to-do list also has grant proposals, strategic planning, communication with partner organizations and a few "thank you" notes to key donors on it.

Whew! And that's just the next 8 days. Our Farmer-to-Farmer Network is growing and advancing sustainable agriculture in exciting ways. The support we've received from our community is an affirmation of the effectiveness of Farmer-to-Farmer Networking as a tool for education, advocacy and promotion of the sustainable farming movement.

If you've been receiving this newsletter for a while, you've seen where SFA and sustainable agriculture is headed. If you are not a member, or if you've been one in the past we'd love it if you'd consider becoming a stronger partner with us in this endeavor. SFA Membership is a great way to demonstrate your support of sustainable farmers, a strong local food system, a healthy environment and a healthy rural and urban economy in the Midwest.

Memberships in SFA run from April 1 to April 1, so, look for an email coming soon about joining SFA or renewing your membership. If you are ready to do it now, click here, and thanks so much!

Chapter Update: Crow River

By Jerry Ford • Chapter Coordinator

Plan to attend a unique day of farmer-to-student, farmer-to-farmer and farmer-to-foodie connections at SFA Crow River Chapter's "The Sustainable Table" on March 30th. Happening at Gale Woods Farm from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., the first session includes a farmer panel reviewing U of M student presentations on the effects of a "hotter drier climate," "widely variable weather," "high energy prices" and the "new normal economy."

Starting at 11 a.m., SFA's own food guru, Mary Jane Miller, will serve a lunch of wood-fired pizza while presenting another in her "Culinary and Its Craft" series on farm-to-table recipes, techniques and know-how.

After lunch is a showing of the film "Dirty Work: The Story of Elsie's Farm," followed by an...
Estate Planning workshop with internationally known farm transition expert John Baker. The workshop, to be held March 4-5 and March 25-26 at Villa Maria in Frontenac, will include expert guidance and legal assistance to help ensure that you have a sound plan in place for the eventual transfer of your farm to your family or non-family successor. To register, click here.

The Farm Transitions project is in conjunction with Renewing the Countryside.

Public Policy
Are you interested in state and federal ag policy? Offer your feedback by taking our Public Policy Survey. It will take about 10 minutes, and will really help us determine the interest of our members and your thoughts about the future of SFA.

Mesko to Discuss SFA's Farmer Network at Lecture Series

SFA Executive Director John Mesko will be the featured speaker at What's Up in Sustainable Agriculture from 1-2 p.m. April 1 at 415 Alderman Hall, 1970 Folwell Avenue, St. Paul. The series, a chance for University of Minnesota students, faculty, staff and community members to gather and discuss issues in local and sustainable agriculture, takes place every Monday on the U. of M. St. Paul campus.

Mesko plans to discuss how bringing people together through SFA's Farmer-to-Farmer Network™ is the cornerstone of our mission.

The event is free and open to the public. Coffee, tea and snacks are provided. For more information about the series, email Katelyn Lepinski at lepin016@umn.edu. And mark your calendars for Oct. 26, when Renewing the Countryside's Jan Joannides will discuss "Alternative Financing for Farm and Food Based Business."

SFA-Related Events Planned in Central Minnesota

Several upcoming events in the Fergus Falls and Wadena areas include SFA members and will be relevant to many. The events:

Introduction to Cheesemaking, Two Sessions (April 5-6 and April 20), led by SFA members Sue Wika and Tom Prieve, owners of Paradox Farm, Ashby, Minn., and homestead cheesemakers. Both sessions are at Faith Haven Bible Camp, on Eagle Lake south of Battle Lake, Minn., and are limited to 10 people. Students can participate in the class as a demonstration, or they can bring the necessary supplies to make their own cheese. In Session 1, students will learn the basic science of milk and the essential processes, techniques and ingredients involved in cheesemaking. In this class we will make cream cheese and whole-milk ricotta. In Session 2, Students will learn the essential processes, techniques and ingredients involved in cheese-making to make a stretched curd/pasta filata and a brined cheese. We will make mozzarella and Greek-style feta. Cost: $50/session; or $90 for both. Call 218.747.2202 or email paradoxhomestead@gmail.com for more information.

A “Pork on Pasture” Workshop will be held from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. April 27 at 18618 Co. Rd. 23, Verndale. As part of the M-State Sustainable Food Production program’s short course series, SFA members Kent and Linda Solberg will be sharing information on how they successfully raise pork on pasture. Presentation will include how hogs fit into their pasture rotation, fencing, feeding strategies, farrowing on pasture, marketing, castration, and managing sows and pigs overwinter. Cost: $50/person or $75/family; bring a sack lunch. Beverages provided. For more information, call 218.445.7580 or email sevenpinesfarmandfence@gmail.com.

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.
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.

Take a Photo, Win a Free SFA T-Shirt!

Editor's Note: No submissions were received for February, and we haven't seen many for March yet, either. What does this mean? You have a GREAT chance of winning if you send a photo by the end of the month! Now, back to the details ...

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.

U. of M. Extension to Host Urban Ag Expo

The 2013 Urban Agriculture Expo, an event is for those who currently have an urban farming enterprise, are considering starting one, are supporters of urban farming, or are just curious to learn more, will be held from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. April 20 at the Sabathani Community Center, 310 E 38th St, Minneapolis.

The Expo will include three different topic categories; growing topics, business topics, and people topics. The growing topics will include water management, unique growing systems, and soils management. The business topics will include record keeping skills and tips, understanding your cost of production, and assessing which market option is right for you. Lastly, people topics will include updates in local food policies, the Urban Agriculture Alliance, and engaging communities around you.

No preregistration is required for the event. There is suggested donation of $5 to attend. For
Mobile Farmers Market Launching in Twin Cities

A new farmers market coming to the Twin Cities, Honeybee Mobile Market turns the market mobile by using a custom trailer to bring it directly to neighborhoods, businesses, schools, events, and more. The idea behind Honeybee is to bring fresh, local foods to where Twin Cities residents live, work, and play.

In the market trailer, customers enter through the back, select their groceries as if they are perusing a grocery store aisle, and exit out of the front side door, where they'll be able to pay for their purchase using cash or credit card. The market will offer local, seasonal foods – fruits and vegetables, meats, fresh bread, flowers, cheese, milk, eggs, and other artisan groceries.

Honeybee works directly with farmers and producers within 200 miles of the Twin Cities who share Honeybee's goal of providing fresh, natural food that's as good for the community as it is for the land. Info: Tony Pavelko at 612.483.8102 or info@honeybeemobilemarket.com.

Agricultural Value-Added Workshop Slated in Palisade

A value-added workshop for local farmers and property owners will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 25 at the Long Lake Conservation Center in Palisade. The workshop is designed to supply information to local farmers and landowners who may wish to consider new options for income producing opportunities. Workshop topics and presenters include:

- Selling High Quality Hay, Troy Salzer, U of MN Extension – Carlton County
- Raising and Selling Grass Fed Cattle, Thousand Hills Cattle Company, Cannon Falls
- Selling Grain Locally, Wright Co-Op and Aitkin Feed and Farm Supply
- Raise Your Fuel, Robert Schafer, Director, Central Lakes Ag Center, Staples
- How to Find Funding, Scott Kittleson, NRCS; Rich Miska, AgStar; Ross Wagner, Aitkin County

Registration is $15 and covers the workshop, lunch and refreshments. Please register here or with Ross Wagner at rwagner@co.aitkin.mn.us or 218.927.7305.

USDA Audit Prompts Organic Crop Insurance Program Shifts

On Feb. 22, 2013, USDA’s Office of Inspector General issued an audit of the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance program for organic farming practices. The audit found that Transitional yields* (T-Yield), offered to organic growers generally exceeded what they had produced using organic farming practices for the crop years of 2008-2010. In response to this audit, RMA plans to make several changes to their Federal crop insurance program for organic farming practices - including eliminating the 5 percent organic surcharge and changes to the T-Yields offered to organic producers beginning with crop year 2014. RMA is also working toward having organic prices in crop year 2014 or 2015 for almonds, apples, barley, blueberries, oats, pears, additional stonefruits, table grapes and wheat.

A transitional yield, in this instance, does not refer to the yields during the transition to certified organic production. For crop insurance purposes, a T-yield is an average yield for a county, determined by RMA in the collection of producer data, which may be used to substitute for low yields in a producer's yield history ('yield substitutions') or to ensure an overall minimum level of insurance coverage. The purpose of the T-Yield is to minimize the downward impact on insurance coverage that can occur after an unusually bad year, or series of years.

USDA Risk Management Agency has posted two documents concerning its response to the USDA Audit Prompts Organic Crop Insurance Program Shifts:

- 2103 Organic Crop Insurance Fact Sheet
Organic Crop Insurance Audit and Next Steps Questions and Answers

These documents can be found on the RMA "Current Issues/Organics" page. There is also a link from the RMA main page. Organic Producers should contact their approved insurance provider/Agent should they have any questions about the changes to Transitional yields and guarantees.

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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