Hands-On Skills, Built-In Support Network and Now Scholarships: Enroll in Farm Skills 101 Today

SFA’s Deep Roots Farmer Development Program’s classes give new farmers the skills and resources they need to build a sustainable farm business – hands-on experience unavailable with any other new farmer training program.

As one student put it, SFA Deep Roots Farm Skills 101 taught her “all sorts of things we didn’t know we didn’t know.”

Farm Skills 101 is producing a new generation of farmers who learn the skills needed to launch or shift into a sustainable farm business. It also builds incredibly strong bonds between classmates and instructors – students graduate with the hands-on skills necessary for forage-based livestock producers as well as a built-in support network.

Holly Pearson, a fall 2015 FS101 graduate, said the program changed her outlook toward her farm future.

“I have been blown away by the amount and caliber of material we’ve learned, the patience and awesomeness of the people involved, and the simple elegance of sustainable farming methods,” she said. “I think this class has made me
Amy Fenn, another fall 2015 graduate, called FS101 “a jawdroppingly fabulous program.” Here’s her recap of skills learned:

“Built fences (high tensile & portable electric), learned some knots and grazing strategies, administered basic animal healthcare, butchered turkeys and a sheep, trimmed hooves and inserted ear tags, learned to read a plat book, drove a tractor, repacked rotary bearings in a trailer wheel, built wooden sawhorses, learned to tell if a hen is still laying eggs or not, and much more.”

Space is still available for the Spring 2016 semester, which will be held on April 15-16, 22-23 and 29-30 at farms near Alexandria, Minn.

If you are ready to enroll or simply learn more, visit our Deep Roots homepage or email Sue Wika, Ph.D., at sue@sfa-mn.org.

**BREAKING NEWS:** The Universal Unitarian Church of Underwood has created a scholarship to provide financial aid to an individual committed to sustainability in agriculture, who also demonstrates leadership and communication skills. This scholarship will fund full Farm Skills 101 tuition for one student or half tuition for two students. To learn more and download the application, as well as view an additional scholarship opportunity for students from southeast Minnesota, visit our Deep Roots homepage.

- **Introduction to Homestead Dairy Class Added for 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.

**Executive Director’s Note**

I wasn’t sure what to expect when I registered for the Global Agriculture Summit a couple of months ago. In fact, the only speaker mentioned at the time was the opening session plenary speaker, David Beckman, President of the Bread for the World Institute. But, I registered anyway, for two very important reasons.

First, I’m convinced the answers to global climate change, the reduction in the food producing capacity of the world, and the growing demand for food as the world’s population pushes toward 10 billion by 2050 lie in the hands of farmers. I’m aware that in parts of Africa, many people will die if the agriculture community fails to take the foundational knowledge we’ve developed and discovered regarding the improvement in soil health and make the information accessible and adaptable to those in desperate need. Secondly, I feel a moral obligation to see the created world engaged in harmony with natural systems to affect positive change. This conference was about flourishing communities, not just maintaining the status quo.

Attendees included leaders in the faith community, missionary agencies (including co-host Partners Worldwide), scholars and lots of farmers from here in the U.S. and from 25 different countries around the world. Dr. Fred Kirschenmann was a keynote speaker, and he was supported by dozens of other speakers advocating specific farming practices as well as casting a vision for using agriculture to help people and the environment navigate the next 30 years. All told, this conference had about 500 people come together to promote farming as means of expressing our faith.
SFA Cover Crop Design Workshop is March 25 in Perham

A 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 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.

Farmer-Buyer Networking is March 14 in Mankato

Renewing the Countryside is hosting a Farmer-Buyer Networking event for local institutions, farmers, and community advocates in the South Central Minnesota region. The event, set for 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. March 14 at the MVAC Food Hub in Mankato, is designed to meet the needs of the region and strengthen connections to advance partnerships between local farmers and community institutions.

Who should attend? Farmers, school nutrition directors, public health specialists, hospital foodservice directors, rural development specialists, processors or aggregators, local food advocates, economic development advocates, public health advocates, and child care providers to name a few.

There will be speakers on navigating regulations and food safety, local success stories, and a food policy council, in addition to a tour of the MVAC food hub, networking time, and lunch.

Farms, businesses, and institutions of any size are welcome! Registration is $15 and includes lunch.

Click here for information/registration or visit the event page on Facebook.

Also, SFA Greater Mille Lacs Chapter is hosting the northeast Minnesota Farmer-Buyer
Networking event on March 29 in Aitkin. More information about the Aitkin event is available here.

Southeast Chapter Annual Meeting is This Thursday

SFA Southeast Chapter is hosting its annual meeting from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Thurs., March 10, in the St. Charles Community Room, 830 Whitewater Ave, St. Charles.

Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin of Main Street Project will be giving a keynote address, "Developing a poultry-centered regenerative agriculture system that can change how food is produced around the world."

SFA board chair Jim Chamberlin will also attend and discuss the benefits of SFA membership.

This program is open to all and free for current SFA members. Nonmembers must pay a $10 registration at the door, or join SFA and attend free. Click here to register.

Also, an educational scholarship opportunity is available for those committed to sustainability in the fields of agriculture and forestry. Residents of Rice, Goodhue, Wabasha, Steele, Dodge, Olmstead, Winona, Freeborn, Mower, Fillmore, and Houston counties are eligible. For more information, visit the Southeast Chapter homepage.

Check This Out

From the Heavy Table, Tricia Cornell profiles Grlk Sauce, which is available at (not surprisingly) Minnesota Garlic Festival, among other places. Yum.

AgWeek did a video report on the Small-Scale Sustainable Sheep event held last month in Northern Minnesota. Check it out 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.