SFA’s Annual GrazeFest Event at Mill City is June 7; Book Signing, Cooking Demos, and More

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

SFA’s annual GrazeFest series event returns June 7 to Mill City Farmers Market, held between the Mill City Museum and Guthrie Theater in downtown Minneapolis.

Again this year SFA’s Mary Jane Miller will be cooking on stage with food from the market as well as grass-fed beef from Living Song Farm. We’ll have a family-friendly SFA booth with a few freebies, 2-for-1 Garlic Festival coupons and plenty of SFA folks on hand, and the vibrant market itself with its 60-plus vendors is always worth the trip.

New this year is a book signing of “The Secret Atlas of North Coast Food,” which features a chapter written by me, “Open Arms, Open Farms,” that features several SFA farms, including Jerry Ford and Living Song Farm. Both Jerry and I will be there to sign copies of the book, in which maps and illustrations complement journalistic essays that take readers deep into the history, culture, and gastronomy of the Upper Midwest.

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SFA at Mill City is our main urban event, reaching an audience of largely consumers who purchase food from our member farmers yet may not be aware of our organization. It’s a great way to help people learn about sustainable farming in general and the importance of supporting local farms and SFA.

Mary Jane’s samples of Jerry’s beef will be worth the trip alone, but it’s also a great time to pick up the “Secret Atlas” and talk local food. We’ll be there from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and hope to see you there.

If you’re interested in learning more or purchasing the "Secret Atlas" – which includes SFA members’ Living Song Farm, GrassStain Farm, Lakeside Prairie Farm and Round River Farm, as well as a wide array of other essays on Upper Midwestern food – visit the Heavy Table’s bookstore.

Save the Date: Festival of Farms is July 12, 2014

Festival of Farms is an opportunity to learn about sustainable agriculture, network within the community, and have fun at various SFA member farms across the state. The Festival is unique to each chapter, but the goal is the same – to build a unified sense of SFA’s presence in communities across Minnesota and tighten connections within the local food community.

SFA’s chapters are currently planning their Festival of Farms 2014 events. Look for updates here in SFA Connect and on our Festival of Farms homepage.

Other upcoming SFA events for your calendars:

- **June 7** – SFA GrazeFest series event at Mill City Farmers Market, Minneapolis
- **July 12** – Festival of Farms, various locations throughout Minnesota
- **Aug. 9** – Minnesota Garlic Festival, Hutchinson
- **Sept. 6** – Harvest Festival, Duluth
- **Feb. 14, 2015** – SFA Annual Conference, St. Joseph
- **Feb. 18-19, 2015** – Midwest Soil Health Summit, Alexandria

Voting Update: 2015 Annual Conference Topics

It’s time to start thinking about topics for our next SFA Annual Conference, set for Feb. 14, 2015, again at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph.

We have opened voting for the 2015 Annual Conference session topics – click this link to
begin voting. The more votes we tabulate, the more accurately we can tailor the session schedule around your wishes. One thing we hear a lot during an after the Conference is, “there were so many good sessions I had a hard time choosing.” If there was a session you missed in 2014 but still are interested in, be sure to input that topic into the website.

The top ten vote-getters as of May 19, 2014:

- Animal husbandry of large animals
- Salvaging, repurposing, upcycling, and restoring farm equipment and buildings
- Deep winter solar greenhouses
- Food safety and selling to your local school and coop
- Direct-marketing meat
- Cover crops and soil health
- Multi-species grazing
- Integrating crops and livestock
- LLC, LC3 and 501c(3) – which one is right for me? A conversation about limiting liability and your business
- Fencing

Make your voice heard – submit your own ideas and vote early and often.

Also, photo galleries from both the 2014 Annual Conference and inaugural Midwest Soil Health Summit are available on each conference’s homepage. Check them out!

Student-Teacher Ratio Makes Farm Skills 101 A Great Value

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Getting a good bang for your buck is rarely guaranteed in the world of sky-high college tuition.

But not for students in SFA’s Sustainable Food Production Program, which teaches various real-world sustainable farming skills in an on-farm environment. Not only does Farm Skills 101 teach students the hands-on skills needed to become successful sustainable farmers, it’s a great value, too – SFP also boasts a low student-teacher ratio that leads to a fairly intense, in-depth experience.

Farm Skills 101 consists of around 50 hours of on-farm education in three weekends of fun and fulfilling learning. As instructor Dr. Sue Wika is fond of saying, “These are days in the field, not field days.” Students must dress properly: pants, closed-toe shoes, gloves and safety glasses are required. Topics include Fencing Strategies for Forage-based Livestock Systems, Compassionate Animal Husbandry and Handling, Pasture Management and Grazing Basics, and Farm Equipment and Tools.

Wika said the Farm Skills 101 was developed for both students with some farm knowledge as well as for those who didn’t grow up on a farm.

“It’s a way to experience and learn some of those skills ‘farm kids’ acquired through daily interaction with farm processes,” she said. “The course is designed with a low student-teacher ratio, so the experience will be empowering.”

And then there’s the bang-for-your-buck factor. Tuition for the Fall 2014 semester of Farm Skills...
101 is just $1,025, and scholarships are available. For the sheer amount of useful knowledge packed into this course – students learn in practice, not in theory – Farm Skills 101 tuition is a smart investment in the future of anyone considering a sustainable farming career.

Fall 2014 classes are Oct. 3-4, 10-11 and 17-18 at farms near Alexandria, Minn. All students receive a free one-year SFA membership.

To enroll, visit this link and view payment information. To learn more or view a more detailed curriculum, visit the SFP Program homepage or contact Dr. Sue Wika at paradoxhomestead@gmail.com.

Free Regional Plant Swap Planned in Wadena

SFA Central Chapter is co-sponsoring a free, regional plant swap is planned May 31 in Wadena.

A Plant Swap is just as it sounds: an opportunity to trade all kinds of plants, plant materials, and garden supplies. All are invited to the event, set for 10 a.m.-2 p.m. May 31 at Green Island 850 Scheer Dr NE, Wadena (right north of town off Highway 71).

Take cuttings, prepare slips, and sort seeds of you favorite or unique plants in order to be prepared. If bringing items to swap, please label or create signs, as 10-foot spaces are provided. Bring pots or packaging, and instructions. Tables and chairs will be available in Pine River; in Wadena, you must bring your own tables and chairs.

Hold a free space for yourself and your trades by contacting Kent Scheer at rscheer@charter.net.

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.

Extension Hires Hakanson as New Hennepin Ag Educator
Karl Hakanson is the new Agricultural Educator with University of Minnesota Extension in Hennepin County. He has spent more than 24 years working on agricultural education and program initiatives at the grassroots level. He has led successful partnerships that included very large and very small farms; nonprofit organizations and public sector agencies; and with people who have a strong affinity for the natural environment and with those whose primary motivation was to maximize profit.

The net result of those partnerships was better public policy, a stronger sense of community, and a greater utilization of sustainable farming practices. He has worked in various capacities with the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension and College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, MN Department of Ag., River Country and Golden Sands RC&Ds, and the Cannon River Watershed Partnership in Northfield. He holds a B.S. in Agriculture from the UW-River Falls and a M.S. in Land Resources from the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, UW-Madison.

Karl’s work has focused primarily on improving the environmental and economic performance of farming operations. He is very interested in farmer-led methodologies and the use of performance-based approaches to watershed management. He would like to get to know the farmers in the county and is excited to make connections with farmers that are interested in exploring the development of a more sustainable agriculture. Contact Karl at khakanso@umn.edu and 612.596.1175.

Organic Farm Transition Program Returns in 2014

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture is offering its Organic Transition Cost Share program to farmers again in 2014. The program reimburses Minnesota farmers who are transitioning their land or livestock to certified organic status, paying part of the cost to work with a USDA accredited organic certifying agency during the transition period, which typically lasts three years.

In addition, farmers can request reimbursement for soil testing costs and registration fees to attend an organic education conference in Minnesota or a neighboring state. Farmers transitioning to organic can receive a 75 percent rebate of these eligible costs. The maximum payment is $750 per year for three years or until they achieve organic certification, whichever comes first.

Transition Cost Share Program application forms and a set of Frequently Asked Questions are available at [www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/transitioncostshare.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/transitioncostshare.aspx) or by calling 651-201-6012.

RSDP Plans Rural Design Conference in July

The U of M Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships is co-sponsoring its Rural Design Conference, "Thriving by Design 2: Achieving Rural-Urban Economic & Community Health," on July 30-31 at the University of Minnesota-Crookston.

The event, which begins with an evening reception July 30 and then an all-day conference July 31, will focus on three themes: Extension Reconsidered, Nature-Based Recreation/Tourism, and Food Systems. A traveling rural design exhibit will be displayed throughout the conference.

Registration will begin soon. For more information, contact Kathryn Draeger at draeg001@umn.edu or watch for updates on the RSDP homepage.
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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