SFA Deep Roots Graduate Making Positive Impact with Native Seed Initiative

It didn’t take long for Zachary Paige to become a positive force in Minnesota’s Native American community, helping to devise a project that culminated late last year in a significant grant to create an indigenous seed keeping network.

As a recent graduate of SFA’s Deep Roots Farmer Development Program, Paige, 30, is also proof that Deep Roots is training the next generation of farmers and community leaders. Paige, of Ponsford, Minn, took the program then known as Sustainable Food Production in 2012-13, and said he gained a holistic vision of sustainable food systems by looking at the issue from many different angles.

"I had no experience farming until after graduating college," he said. "I taught music and worked on farms for two summers in the off-season teaching music. I had all sorts of questions brewing in my mind regarding plant cultivation, breeding and why many ‘sustainable’ farms didn’t save their seeds. I really thought that this was something important that would close the gap in the cyclical nature of sustainable food systems."

While in the program, Paige gained real-world experience, extensive skills training, and the educational background needed to become a sustainable food producer. Further, Deep Roots’ commitment to community development and mentoring boosted Paige’s desire to develop a progressive project that would positively impact the indigenous community.

"There is an ancestral knowledge and history of growing food and saving seeds in White Earth and most other native communities," Paige said. "By pooling resources and working together with other tribes in our region, this information becomes more accessible."

Now, Paige is focused on seed keeping educational events led by native seed keepers in over 12 tribes, tribal colleges and communities in the Upper Midwest. Thanks to the grant Paige and his colleagues received, the groups are sharing resources on seed keeping and creating a protection for indigenous seeds through ancestral agricultural knowledge, respect and care. The issue does not just affect Native Americans or reservations, however, because seed patent laws have a widespread influence on all farmers and, eventually, all who consume the resulting food.
If we don’t have control of our seeds, do we really have control of our food system?” Paige said.

Click here to read the complete Zachary Paige article.

Executive Director's Note

There is still time to RSVP for what I think could be a watershed event in the sustainable agriculture movement: Organic Valley is teaming up with key organizations and experts in the field of sustainable agriculture to bring energy and focus about our future at an event this Thursday called Grass Up!

An invitation-only event, which is set for 6 p.m. May 7 at Macalester College in St. Paul, Grass Up! helps people understand the connections between soil, pasture, climate change, seeds, nutrition, and pollinators. It will gather people with expertise in these areas and help us all understand the points where these six areas intersect.

SFA is a part of this event in several ways.

I'll be one of two keynote speakers, offering a short overview of how these issues connect for farmers today and in the future. Also, Kent Solberg, SFA's Livestock & Grazing Specialist, will join me at the discussion tables after the keynotes to network, learn and share. Kent will be an expert at the pasture discussion table, while I’ll be networking with others about agriculture’s response to climate change.

It's basically a fantastic cocktail party, with great food, great learning, and an excellent opportunity to network, and I hope you'll be able to make it. I'd love to see you there, and to let everyone know SFA's Farmer-to-Farmer Network® organization is providing solutions for our future!

Space is limited. Click here to RSVP.

Lake Agassiz Chapter Spring Blossom Orchard Tour

SFA Lake Agassiz Chapter is hosting a Spring Blossom Orchard Tour from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thurs., May 21, at the Honeyberry Farm & Nursery, 19736 350th St, Bagley (1.5 miles SE of Bagley). The event is free and registration is not required.

During the tour, The Honeyberry Farm and Nursery will showcase the beauty and fragrances of spring blossoms. Honeyberries burst out first, followed by Saskatoons, dwarf sour cherries, currants, aronia, elderberries, and more. Farm owners Jim and Bernis Ingvaldson will lead the tour.

Attendees will learn how to plan orchards to enjoy fresh fruit from early summer to late fall. Cameras and kids are welcome.

For more information about this free event, contact 218.694.3071 or lakeagassiz@sfa-mn.org.

Women Caring for the Land Workshops Upcoming

Are you a female landowner in Stearns or Wright counties looking to learn more about land conservation and connect with local resources and other women landowners? You are warmly invited to attend one of the following Women Caring for the Land workshops:
The free workshops will begin with registration and coffee at 8:30 a.m followed by an informational morning session. We will then enjoy lunch (provided) together before heading out by bus on an afternoon tour of nearby farms where we will see conservation practices first hand, including a demonstration on soil testing. (We will walk a short distance into a field, so please wear or bring appropriate clothing and footwear if you want to participate in the walk.) The bus will bring us back to our meeting site for dessert and wrap-up, and we’ll be finished by 3 p.m.

Attendees will learn ways to assess and improve the health of your soils through cover crops, no-till and strip-till, and other conservation practices as well as meet local conservation professionals who can provide resources and assistance in reaching conservation goals.

Pre-registration is required by contacting Megan Herbst at 320.251.7800 or megan.herbst@mn.nacdnet.net.

Women Caring for the Land is facilitated by the Women, Food and Agriculture Network and Renewing the Countryside and hosted by Stearns County SWCD, Buffalo NRCS District, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, U of MN Extension, and SFA.

**Agroforestry Institute is June 24-26 in Pine River**

The Minnesota Agroforestry Institute, a three-day training that includes classroom workshops and on-farm visits focusing on agroforestry practices, is set for June 24-26 in Pine River. It will provide all participants the opportunity to integrate the concepts learned into a practical farm plan. Participants will learn how to apply agroforestry practices in their educational and technical assistance programs.

This event is being supported by funds from the Rural Resources Extension Act, helping to keep participant fees at $100.

Register online at https://www.regonline.com/MNAgroforestryInst

For more information download a brochure at http://z.umn.edu/agroforestry2015.

**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's New Crops Project aims to expand the availability of local foods in Minnesota and help farmers expand their markets.

Minnesota Dairy Initiative
For information about MDI and its ongoing projects, email SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg.
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)
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