'Building Farm to Institution Markets' Survey Now Open

A survey for Minnesota producers, “Building Farm to Institution Markets,” is now available at: www.iatp.org/FTI through the end of November.

For Minnesota farmers, ranchers and producers currently selling to - or interested in selling to - schools, child care centers, hospitals or other institutions, this survey focuses on identifying the information and tools that producers need to build successful, profitable sales with these buyers.

This comprehensive survey has been developed by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, SFA and Renewing the Countryside – with additional input from over 20 farmers, state agencies, experts and non-profit organizations. SFA members will be especially valuable for this survey, as your answers and feedback will help build a better, more profitable farm-to-institution system in Minnesota.

Our collaborative project group also held a webinar in early November that featured SFA member Greg Reynolds, Ryan Pesch from the University of Minnesota and Andrea Northup from Minneapolis Public Schools. You can download each presenter's slides in the right-hand column of this page.

Questions? Contact project partners Pete Huff, Jason Walker or Grace Brogan.

SFA Field Day: 30 Inches of Roots and Soil Health

By Kent Solberg • SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist

A crowd huddled against the brisk November wind during a Nov. 1 SFA Keep Cattle in Minnesota Field Day in Verndale. They were gathered around a freshly dug trench. All eyes were fixed on the man in the trench.

No, this wasn't a funeral. The trench was dug to look at what the roots of a complex cover crop mix could do in sandy, compacted soils. Root hairs had penetrated the compaction layer and were going down at least 30 inches – Kent and Linda Solberg had planted the 12 species blend of cover crops on July 3.

As cattle grazed on the covers in the background, Kent; Jeff Duchene, NRCS Grazing Specialist; and James Schroepfer, agronomist with Ag Resources Consulting, Inc., discussed soil health, cover crops and managed grazing with a group of attentive producers from as far away as Bagley and Mountain Lake.
Earlier that afternoon, the group toured cover crops and managed grazing on Larry Heitkamp’s farm near Sebeka. Larry shared his crop rotation, cover cropping, fertility program, and how he integrates grazing dairy heifers to build soil health.

These farm tours were part of SFA’s Keep Cattle In Minnesota (KCIM) program and an MDA Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Grant. Based on evaluations from earlier KCIM events, we learned that there was a strong interest in cover crops and how to integrate livestock into cropping operations, so keep an eye on SFA Connect for future events focused on these topics.

Free SFA Soil Health Webinar Set for Nov. 21

Registration is now open for a free SFA Keep Cattle in Minnesota webinar featuring soil health experts Michael Lehman and Wendy Taheri of the USDA North Central Agricultural Research Lab in Brookings, S.D. The webinar, set for 1-2:30 p.m. Fri., Nov. 21, is part of our Keep Cattle In Minnesota project and is a timely bridge to our upcoming Midwest Soil Health Summit, where both Lehman and Taheri are scheduled to present.

Presentations include:

- **Cover Cropping: A Great Tool for Building Soils That Work** – Lehman will consider the invisible world of soil microorganisms, what they do that is helpful to producers, and how cover cropping is one management tool that promotes soil microorganisms and their beneficial activities.

- **Understanding the Importance of Diversity in Cropping Systems** – Taheri’s presentation will help farmers understand the importance of diversity in their cropping systems and the role cover crops play in creating and maintaining diversity.

To register, click here. This webinar is sponsored by The Pasture Project.

Executive Director’s Note

Recently, I was invited to attend the 2014 Seedstock Conference in Los Angeles, an annual event that highlights innovations in agriculture, beginning farming, and local food issues. Being set in California means an emphasis on solutions for the massive drought affecting the state, as well as urban farming. Seedstock organizers recognize SFA’s leadership in farmer-to-farmer networking, and the need for better connections between West Coast and Midwestern agriculture. This year, I was discussing, among other things, the importance of good business planning for beginning farmers. Because of our work on Adjust 2015, I was asked for my thoughts on what are the most important aspects of a good business plan. From what we’ve learned and from the collective wisdom of the Sustainable Agriculture movement, those keys are: Flexibility, Benchmarks, Exit Strategy, Sensitivity Analysis, and Professional Development. Over the next few issues of SFA Connect, I'll share a bit more on some of these concepts.

Flexibility. In food and farming, there are so many variables: supply and regulatory issues, weather effects, labor issues, and family concerns. Farms, even large ones are typically classified as small businesses and as such face an uphill struggle from the start. These are often growing businesses, in a competence market requiring unique relationships with suppliers, customers and other producers. This interdependence creates great opportunity as well as great risk. The more dependent a business is on these connections, the greater chance problems can arise, requiring the business to respond with flexibility. According to the Purdue University Agriculture Economics Department: “Strategic risk management requires the
capability to be flexible. Flexibility is the managerial/organizational capacity to change in response to changing circumstances. To be flexible, a farm must have the resources and skills to successfully change strategies regarding key strategic business choices, such as business enterprise focus, financial/organizational structure, marketing and channel linkages, growth/downsizing, etc.

This is what Adjust 2015 has researched, and a good bit of the New Farm Reality Check curriculum we are developing will focus on building flexibility into business plans. Look for this to become available at the 2015 SFA Annual Conference, set for Feb. 14, 2015, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph.

**GMO Labeling on Agenda at MN Farmers Union Convention**

By Kirsten Saylor • Right to Know Minnesota

GMO Labeling can not go forward in Minnesota without farmer support. MN Farmers Union supported state and federal mandatory GMO labeling on last year’s public policy platform. This year, there is an amendment coming to strike state labeling from this year’s platform and for MFU to only support federal labeling. If you are also a member of MFU, please attend the MFU Convention on Nov. 22-23 in Minneapolis. Members can attend and speak up for the policy platform. Delegates vote on amendments, but a critical mass of voices will be necessary to prevent a backslide. And as we see in Oregon, every voice counts!

As you may know, important federal policies that we take for granted today emerged only after multiple states took action and passed legislation. As with the case of national organic standards, passing a GMO Labeling bill in Minnesota will ensure that Minnesotans have a voice in the development and implementation of federal labeling.

As we gear up for the 2015 session, your voice will be critical in passing legislation in Minnesota for labeling foods that contain genetically-engineered ingredients. Transparency is the hallmark of a free market, and a properly functioning free market means that consumers need to have information in order to make informed choices. Right To Know MN is the leading organization working to make GMO Labeling a reality in Minnesota. You can find them at www.righttoknowmn.org and learn how your voice can make a difference.

If anyone needs a place to stay or a meal, while they are in Minneapolis for MFU convention, just let us know — we can take care of them! Email me at kirsay@gmail.com.

**SFA Annual Conference Tidbits**

The 2015 SFA Annual Conference is set for Feb. 14 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, and registration is open. Other tidbits:

- **Art and science projects, cooking lessons and more** — the Budding Farmers program is coming to the 2015 SFA Annual Conference. Children attending must be between 3 and 12 years old and potty trained; kids under 3 are welcome to attend the conference but are the responsibility of their parents. Click here to register.

- **Volunteer registration is now open** — all 2015 volunteers receive a newly designed SFA t-shirt. Volunteers are needed to be session monitors, help with parking and registration, setup/teardown, and more. To volunteer or to learn more, contact SFA Volunteer Coordinator Gretchen Boyum at 218.535.1567 or boyumfarms@gmail.com.

- **Register through Dec. 30** at the Early Bird rate of $45/members and $55/nonmembers. SFA members should have received a separate email with discount registration instructions. Only SFA members will receive this separate email – new members will upon signup.

- **Vendor/Exhibitor Registration is open as well.** Visit our Annual Conference homepage to download the proper form.

- **Scholarships to attend the SFA Annual Conference are available for current students and require a volunteer commitment; for more information, email Jerry Ford at jerry@sfa-mn.org.**

**MSHS Returns With Gabe Brown and Dr. Allen Williams**

Aug. 15, 2015: MINNESOTA GARLIC FESTIVAL, McLeod County Fairgrounds, Hutchinson, Minn.

Sept. 2015: HARVEST FESTIVAL, Bayfront Park, Duluth

Adjust 2015

Have you had to make changes to your farm plan since you started farming? Your experiences could help other farmers. Check out our survey.

Our ongoing GrazeFest series of grass-based livestock and cover cropping events is led by Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg. Visit our GrazeFest homepage and watch SFA Connect for updates on our upcoming on-farm events.

Keep Cattle in Minnesota

will build on SFA’s foundation to grow...
Registration is now open for SFA's second annual Midwest Soil Health Summit, featuring Gabe Brown, set for Feb. 18-19, 2015, at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn.

The MSHS, newly expanded for 2015, also will feature Dr. Allen Williams, a champion of the grass-fed beef industry.

Brown, the keynote speaker, owns Brown's Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D., and is a pioneer in diverse cover cropping who has used no-till techniques for two decades. At the 2015 MSHS, Gabe will discuss soil health programming for beginners as well as lead a separate program for advanced farmers – if you attended the previous MSHS, rest assured this year’s version will include plenty of fresh information from Gabe.

Last year's MSHS was a sellout; register now to guarantee your spot. Walk-up registration will be dependent on pre-registration numbers, and SFA members receive a $50 registration discount. Click here to register.

Also scheduled to appear:

- **Jerry Doan**, farmer from Black Leg Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D., a multi-generational family farm that emphasizes soil health.
- **Dr. Michael Lehman**, a research microbiologist whose studies include evaluating soil microbiological responses to agricultural management practices.
- **Dr. Wendy Taheri**, a research microbiologist who specializes in the study of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (AMF).
- **Kent Solberg**, SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist, will discuss Designing Complex Cover Crop Blends
- **John Mesko**, SFA Executive Director, will lead a program on Soil Science Basics
- **Ian Cunningham**, a cow-calf producer and veteran cover cropper from Pipestone County, Minn.

Also returning this year is our exclusive "Gab With Gabe" networking session from 4 to 6 p.m. Feb. 18, 2015, with Gabe Brown. ONLY 10 TICKETS will be sold at $50 each for this chance to network one-on-one with a soil health pioneer. You must register for the MSHS separately – this ticket will ONLY get you into "Gab With Gabe." Click here to register for "Gab With Gabe."

Need a room? Arrowwood Resort is a family friendly location with ice fishing, cross country ski trails, snowmobiling, ice skating, broomball, and more. For more information or to reserve a room at the special MSHS rate of $99, call the resort at 320.762.1124.

**Check This Out**

“Check This Out” is a section of links to articles and videos chosen by SFA staff that you might enjoy. Consider:


**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.
NWF’s ‘Cover Crop Champions’ Seeks Applicants

The National Wildlife Federation is accepting applications for farmers and conservation professionals, i.e. “champions,” to conduct outreach to promote cover crops and provide region-specific information and farming knowledge to farmers and crop advisors.

Selected applicants will receive benefits in the form of financial support for time and travel and access to an elite network of other cover crop champions. Because of our funder’s priorities in the Mississippi River Basin, priority will be given to champions from the following states: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. However, we are also seeking and could accept a limited number of applicants from South Dakota, Nebraska, Indiana, and Ohio, especially those working in listed or priority watersheds within the Mississippi River Basin.

Priority will be given to applicants working in pairs/groups. The preferred model for the NWF cover crop champions program is at least one outreach champion working with one or more farmer champion/s.

A stipend of a maximum of $10,000 will be provided to help champions undertake outreach activities.

Download the application here. For more information, contact Lara Bryant at 202.797.6649 or bryantl@nwf.org.

MFA Hosting Info Session for Immigrant, Minority Farmers

Want to start a farming business? Are you a farmer who wants to learn to grow organically? Attend an info session about the Big River Farms Training Program for Immigrant and Minority Farmers, where you can talk to the training program coordinator and current farmers in the program.

The session will be 5:30-7:30 p.m. Nov. 19 at Rondo Public Library, 461 N Dale St, St. Paul, MN 55103. RSVP to Laura at laura@mnfoodassociation.org or 651.433.3676.

For more information, visit www.mnfoodassociation.org.

Clean Water ‘Green Ideas and Ham’ Breakfast
Environment Minnesota is hosting a “Green Ideas and Ham” breakfast on the topic of protecting clean water from 8 to 9:30 a.m. Nov. 18 at Red Stag Supperclub, 509 1st Ave NE, Minneapolis. Besides a delicious breakfast, the event includes speakers and audience discussion about the loopholes in the Clean Water Act and what the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed rules to close them will mean for Minnesota and the nation.

Speakers are Doug Norris, Wetlands Coordinator for the Minnesota DNR; and Gary Botzek, Executive Director of the Minnesota Conservation Federation.

Cost is $15, which includes $5 to Environment Minnesota and $10 to the Red Stag Supperclub. RSVP to Cora@EnvironmentMinnesota.org.
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

Unsubscribe | Privacy Policy