Farm Skills 101 Registration Now Open for Spring 2016

Registration is now open for the Spring 2016 semester of our Deep Roots Farmer Development Program’s Farm Skills 101, which consists of around 50 hours of on-farm education in three weekends of fun and fulfilling learning. This hands-on training consists of days in the field, not field days – participants will need pants, closed-toe shoes, gloves and safety glasses.
Spring 2016 classes will be held on April 15-16, 22-23 and 29-30 at farms near Alexandria, Minn. Friday classes run from 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Pack sack lunches and breakfasts; Friday local-foods suppers are included. Tuition also includes housing at nearby Viking Valley Hunt Club.

Deep Roots programs include small class sizes and individualized attention. Every student engages in the activities, like Spring 2015 student Dacia Stiles (above). This is real-world, real-time education.

Fall 2015 student Holly Pearson said of her experience, “I knew this was gonna be cool but 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. I think this class has made me a better human.”

Another student said FS 101 was a “jawdroppingly fabulous program in Minnesota where we learned all sorts of things that we didn’t know we didn’t know.”

Don't wait too long – this class will sell out. Click here to register. To read more, including Fall 2015 student Cassi Dutcher’s Farm Skills diary, visit our Deep Roots homepage.

Executive Director’s Note

Regarding the world of agriculture in Minnesota, the Sustainable Farming Association considers its community to be those farmers, aspiring farmers, agriculture supporters and consumers throughout Minnesota who contribute in diverse ways to agriculture of all types, local food, and rural revitalization. Since 2009, SFA has been expanding our community, broadening our network and serving our region by empowering farmers and farm supporters to work together to address issues in our community and to advance a healthy sustainable food system for everyone. As SFA grows, and we seek to continue to strengthen the organization to best serve our community, there is a need to re-assess our structure and best practices.

The agriculture community, including farms, farmers and support businesses continues to consolidate as it has for the past 50 years. A new problem is on the horizon, however. As Baby Boomer farmers exit agriculture, many do not have a successor in mind either from within the family or outside of the family. This means that when a farmer retires, the farm assets, including land, buildings, equipment and breeding stock, are generally sold to the highest bidder and the production is absorbed by a neighboring farm. When this happens, rural communities lose significant economic, social and civic infrastructure. The economic well-being of a community is threatened.

My belief is that farmers should be the ones leading on this important issue. The consolidation of agriculture has been in response to external factors imposed upon farmers. Solutions to this issue should be developed from within the farming community. Let’s work together to sustain a diverse, robust agriculture and local economy where individual farms and families matter, and where the quality of food produced and the quality of the environment left behind take precedent over merely the quantity and the relative low cost of the food produced.

SFA has organized its community around the need for educational information sharing and networking among farmers, and the ability for farmer-innovators to lead in their communities in
problem solving. You can be a part of this community in several ways. By reading and learning about sustainable agriculture, through SFA Connect for example, you are at the first level of involvement. Next, if you haven’t already, become a sustaining member of SFA. Third, attend the SFA Annual Conference and the Midwest Soil Health Summit, where you’ll really become a part of the community. You’ll meet other like-minded people, learn more about important issues facing agriculture today, and offer your solutions for agriculture through our networking activities.

Thanks for your continued interest in SFA, and more importantly for desiring to make the world’s food better.

Thanks to All Who Gave to the Max

A heartfelt thanks goes out to all who supported SFA during the recent Give to the Max Day fundraiser. Though we fell short of our goal of $10,000 to meet our matching fund pledges, we still raised over $6,000 for SFA programs.

As the year winds down, please remember SFA in your charitable donations. Our organization can not exist without financial support from people like you. Click here to make a tax-deductible donation anytime on our website.

Dr. Allen Williams Webinar Now Archived

Over 30 people attended our most recent soil health webinar, “Improve Soil Health and Yields by Integrating Cover Crops and Livestock Grazing” with Dr. Allen Williams. Dr. Williams’ presentation described why the most profitable systems are a combination of integrated livestock and crops that include perennials in the rotation.

View this and all our archived webinars at our webinar homepage, and be sure to register for our Midwest Soil Health Summit to see Dr. Williams’ next presentation.

Soil Health Field Days Showcase Power of Cover Crops

SFA and the Pasture Project hosted a two-day event series, “Grazing Cover Crops: Innovations in the Field,” on Nov. 12 and 13 in Redwood Falls, Mankato and Blue Earth, Minn. Attendees learned how to use grazing cover crops as a conservation strategy by hearing from experts and touring two local farms.
The Nov. 12 event, pictured above with SFA's Kent Solberg, included a field review of cover crops and grazing management at Dan Tiffany's farm. On Nov. 13, a discussion surrounding the expansion of grazing cover crops and opportunities to build soil health was held, followed by a tour of the Scott Haase farm in Blue Earth to see grazing cover crops in action and learn about benefits, impact and strategy.

WOC Talks to Tap Wisdom of SFA Community

Similar to the popular TED Talks, SFA has a new program that we call WOC Talks (Wisdom of the Community). The idea is that SFA members and supporters will submit talks on subjects relating to sustainable farming and food systems, and the organization will select some of them for presentation at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 13, 2016, in St. Joseph, Minn.

The selected WOC Talks will be filmed and then placed on SFA's website and YouTube channel. Your talks can be existing presentations adapted to the WOC Talk format, or you may create a new presentation. Please be aware that we cannot broadcast any material that you might include in your talk that has a third-party copyright unless you obtain written permission to use the material.

For more information and the complete rules, please visit our WOC Talks homepage.

Registration Open for 2016 Annual Conference, MSHS

Registration is now open for SFA's 2016 winter conferences – get the following dates on your calendar and register NOW for the best prices.

Click here to register for the SFA Annual Conference, set for Feb. 13, 2016, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. Until Jan. 1, registration is just $45 for SFA members and $55 for nonmembers. You may also register children 3-12 for the Budding Farmers program ($10) and for the SFA Leaders Breakfast ($15).

Click here to register for the SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit, set for Feb. 17-18, 2016, at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn. The MSHS features soil health experts and farm leaders for two days of education and farmer networking – all geared at improving the health of your soil. Pricing is $150 for SFA members and $200 for nonmembers.

Sponsor & Exhibitor registration is open for both conferences on their respective homepage linked above. And remember that SFA Business/Organization members earn significant discounts on sponsorships and exhibitor space at our conferences. To learn more about SFA Business/Organization memberships, click here.

Deep Winter Greenhouse Course Added for Feb. 21

Our Nov. 7 Deep Roots short course, “Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy,” is sold out, but we just added a new Deep Winter short course for Feb. 21! If you were hoping to register and missed the November class, click here to sign up for Feb. 21.

At our Deep Winter short course, Paradox Farm owners Sue Wika and Tom Prieve provide detailed overview of the construction and operation of their deep-winter greenhouse, which utilizes passive solar energy with underground heat storage. The greenhouse provides greens for local consumers. In addition, the structure is utilized to produce fodder for the farm livestock.
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 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