Two-Day Annual Conference Set for Feb. 15-16 in Chaska

By Jason Walker • Communications Coordinator

Plans for the 2013 SFA Annual Conference, "Growing our Farmer-to-Farmer Network," are shaping up nicely for the event Feb. 15-16 at Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chaska.

This year's affair will include a bonus day of everything you've come to expect from the SFA Annual Conference: practical education sessions, culinary demonstrations with local chefs, interesting speakers, good food and drink, plenty of camaraderie, and more. But new this year is the beautiful new setting, as the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum is awe-inspiring both inside and out.

Also new is a grazing track. Interested conference-goers may attend a full-day session Feb. 15 devoted purely to livestock grazing techniques and education. SFA's ongoing GrazeFest series has proven so popular and practical that we're expanding it at the Annual Conference. Learn from the best local experts on what it takes to create and maintain a profitable pasture-based livestock operation.

Registration will begin soon, but first a note: The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum has graciously taken the helm organizing our registration for the conference. You will register with MLA's website and staff, but rest assured it is the SFA Annual Conference. Also, folks may register online, by mail or, new this year, by phone during MLA business hours.

We'll keep you posted in SFA Connect on all the details as they emerge, or simply visit our Annual Conference homepage.

Thanks to All Who Donated on Give to the Max Day

Another Give to the Max Day is behind us, and it included a terrific show of support for SFA. We raised over $5,000 to help us support the development and enhancement of sustainable farming systems through farmer-to-farmer networking, innovation, demonstration, and education. Thank you!

We know you are deluged with emails, letters and general pleas each year asking for financial help, so it's quite reassuring to see a one-day event turn out such support. Sustainable agriculture has a home in Minnesota and the upper Midwest, that's for sure!

Once again, thank you.

Executive Director's Note
A very important beginning farmer education program is being threatened by budget cuts. The Sustainable Food Production (SFP) Program at M-State in Fergus Falls has developed a significant hands on learning opportunity for serious potential farmers. This program is taught by teaching professionals with real farming experience.

Several SFA members have attended the program, or are instructors in the program. I personally have been graciously invited to speak to the group annually, and have been impressed with the quality of the instruction and the students. The SFP Program is involved in many of the activities of the SFA Central Chapter.

There is plenty of need for beginning farmer education in MN and the Upper Midwest. You can learn more about the really good things SFP is accomplishing by checking out one of the current student blogs. As you will see, this program is for serious beginning farmers. Please consider learning more about the SFP Program and making an appeal to the powers that be to keep it alive.

Chapter Update: Crow River

By Jerry Ford • Chapter Coordinator

Crow River's ANNUAL CHAPTER MEETING will be Sat., Jan. 5th, 2013, at 10 a.m. at Gale Woods Farm in Minnetrista. With sessions on Seed Saving, Farm Equipment, Appropriately Scaling your Farm, and Mary Jane Miller's Culinary Workshops, here's a chance to meet old friends and new, enjoy local foods, and RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP in Crow River Chapter! Following the post-lunch sessions, we'll have a showing of "Dirty Work: The Story of Elsie's Farm", with organic popcorn and local beer. For more info keep checking at sfa-mn.org/crow-river, or contact Jerry Ford, jerry@sfa-mn.org.

At Halloween, the festivities at the Governor's Residence were accentuated by the presence of Crow River Chapter members who helped the trick-or-treaters decorate over 500 pumpkins supplied by Peterson Produce, Untiedt's, and Missy's Farm Stand. Gov. Mark Dayton greeted a host of ghosts, goblins and superheroes, while chef Micah Pace warmed the hungry and chilled volunteers with homemade chile, corn bread and brownies.

Crow River Chapter has been managing a vegetable garden at the Governor's Residence for the past two seasons, and the produce from the gardens is used at the governor's table, both for small personal meals and when dignitaries visit. Mary Jane Miller, Residence Menu Consultant and Crow River Board member, took both Gov. Dayton's personal tastes and the chef's culinary needs into consideration when planning what to plant. The gardens are open to the public occasionally throughout the summer, which was an excellent opportunity to reach out to educate visitors and further the mission of the SFA. Amanda Simpson, Manager of the Governor's Residence said, "this is the single most talked about feature at the home."

The 7th ANNUAL MN GARLIC FESTIVAL was a smashing success – you can read a full report in the CornerPost, SFA's print newsletter coming out next month – but for now, here's an index of some fascinating figures:

- Official attendance: 3,700
- Vendors: 81
- Garlic Vendors: 14
- Kites flown: 100
- Number of Promenade Grand Marshals who were over the age of 86 and still farming: 3
- Volunteers: 90
- Coordinators: 26
- Sponsors: 23

For information about MDI...
2-for-1 Ticket Coupons redeemed: 952
Percentage of participants who went home smelling quite different: 100%

The SUMMER KITCHEN FOR SCHOOLS PROGRAM, a project sponsored by MN Garlic Festival and managed by Crow River Chapter, is exploring ways to have schools process local produce in the summer for use in the winter. Two trial projects were a resounding success. The first one was making pickles out of some of the surplus cucumbers. Hopkins schools produced several batches of pickles to see how the process worked, if the students would eat them, and to gauge how many pickles they would have to make to carry them through February. The second Summer Kitchen project was making a roasted tomato sauce. The goals were the same, with the added step of freezing the sauce to get some experience with storing it. The students were excited to find out the sauce was made in house with local tomatoes, and ate it readily. With the experience gained this summer, Hopkins schools are planning to expand the program next year.

North Coast Nosh Postponed as Ticket Sales Lackluster

There's bad news to report: The SFA-benefiting North Coast Nosh sip-and-sample event set for Dec. 9 at Crow River Winery has been canceled due to low ticket sales and rescheduled for Feb. 9 at Peace Coffee Roastery in Minneapolis. Heavy Table made the decision after concluding that the event's timing so near the holidays was likely keeping folks from buying tickets.

However, SFA will likely be involved in some way in a future North Coast Nosh event, and we'll keep you posted. For all who had bought tickets, they will be honored for the Feb. 9 event, which will also include a special pre-Nosh event. For a full refund or questions, please email store@heavytable.com.

Nominations Sought for SFA Distinguished Service Awards

SFA award season has begun: We're seeking nominations for the Farmer Emeritus and Distinguished Service awards, to be presented at the Leaders Breakfast during the 2013 SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 16 in Chaska.

Criteria are pretty simple: Farmer Emeritus nominees should have a distinguished career history of farming in Minnesota; Distinguished Service nominees must have a demonstrable strong connection to local food or sustainable agriculture.

If you know someone who fits either or both of these descriptions, please consider nominating them. Our SFA awards are special honors that reward the backbone members of our sustainable agriculture community, and we value a wide range of nominees. Last year's winners were Kent and Linda Solberg (Farmer Emeritus) and DeEtta Bilek and Mary Ellen Frame (Distinguished Service).

Please download the nomination form here, complete and send to: SFA, c/o Mary Hanks, 10500 295th Street W, Northfield, MN 55057, or email your nomination to Mary.Hanks@state.mn.us.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Thanks to Heavy Table photographer Crystal Liepa, we have a stockpile of awesome photos from our 2012 Annual Conference, held Feb 18 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph. Look for a new photo in each SFA Connect, and read Heavy Table writer Tricia Cornell's story about the conference here.
Photo Contest Winner for October: Barb Eller

Who doesn't want to win a free T-shirt, let alone a cool SFA one? Here's your chance. Send communications coordinator Jason Walker your photos, and the best each month, chosen by a panel of distinguished judges, gets an SFA T-shirt. Send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org, and we'll include the winner in SFA Connect. Note: We don't have unlimited quantities of T-shirts, so certain sizes may not always be available. But we'll try our best. And check out our Facebook page for all the photo submissions.

October's winner: Barb Eller of Onamia, who sent this photo of a Hereford-Galloway-Shorthorn calf. And thanks to all our other submitters for October!
Workshops Set on Wholesale Success with Produce

Join Atina Diffley, former co-owner of Gardens of Eagan and now official Wholesale Success trainer, for three daylong workshops devoted to learning about wholesale marketing and post-harvest handling of fruits and vegetables: cleaning, cooling, packing, storage, transport, sanitation, and more.

Diffley, who will also lead a session at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 15-16 at Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, draws on her decades of experience in large-scale vegetable production and marketing to provide operators of produce farms of any size with useful, practical, profit-making guidance on how to achieve the highest quality produce for sale. The workshops:

- Dec. 6, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista
- Jan. 4, 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Beltrami Electric Co-op, Bemidji
- Jan. 26, 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Community Resource Bank, Northfield

Farmer-Buyer Networking will be part of the day’s events, coordinated by Renewing the Countryside. Farmers and potential wholesale buyers will have an opportunity to meet, learn about each other’s interests in locally grown produce, and exchange contact information. These sessions will take place during the last hour and a half at each location. Farmers and buyers who want to attend just the networking session may attend that session only for free. Workshop co-sponsors and collaborators include the SFA Crow River Chapter.

Cost is $15 and refreshments and lunch are provided. Register at www.misa.umn.edu, 800-909-6472, or email misamail@umn.edu.

For more information about each workshop, contact the local organizer:

- Gale Woods Farm: MISA office, 800-909-6472 or misamail@umn.edu
- Bemidji: Linda Kingery, 218-281-8697 or kinge002@umn.edu
- Northfield: Kathy Zeman, (507) 664-9446 or kzeman@mfma.org

Attend Open House on Minneapolis Urban Farming Plans

The City of Minneapolis is holding an open house Dec. 5 featuring the Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council. Participants will catch an update on Minneapolis’ progress with urban agriculture initiatives, hear from two urban farmers and weigh in on possible future policies and programs. The event is 5:30-9 p.m. Dec. 5 at East Phillips Park Cultural and Community Center, 2307 17th Ave S, Minneapolis.

The open house will include an information fair with organizations that support urban agriculture; lessons on composting, gardening and bee keeping; and a discussion on the future work of the Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council. Sisters Camelot will serve a light dinner from 6-7 p.m. The event is free and open to the public, but please RSVP to jane.shey@minneapolismn.gov.

Farmers, Ag Businesses Target of New Grant Program

Minnesota agricultural producers and processors can now apply for grants to implement value added projects to their operations. A total of $700,000 in funding was made available through the Agricultural Growth, Research and Innovation Program (AGRI), established by the legislature to advance Minnesota’s agricultural and renewable energy industries. Specifically, these grants are intended to:

- initiate or expand livestock product processing;
- create feasibility, business, marketing and succession plans for existing and new businesses;
- purchase equipment to initiate, upgrade, or modernize value added businesses;
- increase on-farm food safety, such as implementation of a food safety plan
increase farmers’ processing and aggregating capacity to enter farm-to-school and other markets

Proposals that have a meat processing, farm-to-school (or other institution) component, or are addressing Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) or similar type of food safety plan will receive priority, but all value-added proposals are encouraged to apply. Small to medium sized operations will also receive special consideration.

Apply here. For more information, contact David Weinand, MDA grants administrator, at 651-201-6646 or david.weinand@state.mn.us.

Back to Basics Sustainable Living Fair Set for Jan. 26

Happy Dancing Turtle will be hosting its annual Back to Basics sustainable living event from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Jan. 26, 2013, at Pine River-Backus school in Pine River. This year's theme will be "Steps Toward Sustainability: The Solution Is YOU!" Chuck Marohn, President of the Community Growth Institute, will be the keynote speaker.

Happy Dancing Turtle is looking for sponsors, exciting new ideas and knowledgeable presenters for workshops as well as quality vendors and exhibitors, providing quality products and information to help participants lead more sustainable lives.

Join the workshop for a fun filled day of learning, networking, and inspiration. For more details please visit the Happy Dancing Turtle website http://www.happydancingturtle.org/.

Grant Funds for Sustainable Farming Innovations

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program will award up to $100,000 in 2013 for on-farm sustainable agriculture research or demonstration projects. The MDA is now accepting applications for the grant program which promotes environmental stewardship and conservation of resources and strives to improve profitability and quality of life on farms and in rural areas.

Grant applications are available on the MDA website at http://go.usa.gov/YBSj or by contacting the Agricultural Marketing and Development Division at 651-201-6012. Completed applications must be received by MDA no later than Jan. 11, 2013.

Minneapolis Schools Seeks Farmer-Student Links

Many Minneapolis Public Schools students are more familiar with processed food from bags and boxes than farm-fresh fruits and veggies. Most have never met a farmer before. Therefore, MPS is looking for growers who’d like to make a difference in our students' lives, and get them excited about fresh, locally-grown fruits & veggies.

Get involved by visiting visit a school this winter and talking to students about what you do, why it's important, and how the food choices students make impact neighboring farmers. MPS can offer a small stipend for your time.

Or, become a pen pal to a class of elementary school students and write a letter to them once or twice a month. Share pictures, how the fall went, plans for the upcoming season, or what farmers do in their rare spare time.

MPS will help connect you with a school and coordinate all of the logistics. Contact Andrea at 612-568-2424 or farm2school@mpls.k12.mn.us for more information.

Opinions Sought in Farmer Internship Survey

A four-question, informal survey is being conducted by researchers at the University of Minnesota to gather preliminary data for a SARE grant proposal. Our goal is to better understand farmers’ thoughts and concerns about internships. We welcome a diversity of farm
models and sizes (fruits, vegetables, livestock, and grains). All information submitted will remain anonymous; we will not have access to any identifying information. All questions are optional.

To access the survey, [click here](#).

**Scholarship Created for Sustainable Food Program**

Fergus Area College Foundation has established a scholarship to provide financial assistance to a second-semester student in the Sustainable Food Production program at M-State Fergus Falls. Program faculty will recommend eligible candidates, and the final determination of the scholarship recipient will be made each December.

Those interested in helping students pursue study in the sustainable agriculture field may make a tax-deductible donation to the Sustainable Food Production program scholarship fund. Checks should be sent to Fergus Area College Foundation, 1414 College Way, Fergus Falls, MN 56537. Or donate online at [www.minnesota.edu/facf](http://www.minnesota.edu/facf); click on "Making Donations" and write "Sustainable Food Production" in the comments section.

For more information, contact Carolyn Glesne at 218.736.1514 or [facf@minnesota.edu](mailto:facf@minnesota.edu).

**NCR-SARE Announces Farmer Grant Call for Proposals**

The 2013 North Central Region - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (NCR-SARE) Farmer Rancher Grant Call for Proposals is now available.

Farmers and ranchers in the North Central Region are invited to submit grant proposals to explore sustainable agriculture solutions to problems on the farm or ranch. Proposals should show how farmers and ranchers plan to use their own innovative ideas to explore sustainable agriculture options and how they will share project results. Sustainable agriculture is good for the environment, profitable, and socially responsible.

Interested applicants can find the call for proposals online as well as useful information for completing a proposal [here](http://www.sare.org). You can find more information about sustainable agriculture at [sare.org](http://www.sare.org) or take a free National Continuing Education Program online course about the basic concepts [here](#).

Proposals are due on Thursday, November 29th at 4:30 p.m. at the NCR-SARE office in St. Paul, MN. Potential applicants with questions can contact Joan Benjamin, Associate Regional Coordinator and Farmer Rancher Grant Program Coordinator, at [jbenjami@umn.edu](mailto:jbenjami@umn.edu) or 573-681-5545 or 800-529-1342.

**MDA Has $1 Million in Funds for State Livestock Farmers**

Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson has announced that $1 million in grant funding is being made available to livestock producers in the state for on-farm improvements. The Livestock Investment Grant Program was first funded by the Minnesota legislature in 2008. Since then, 89 grant recipients have invested an estimated $31 million in improvements to their operations.

The deadline to apply for the grant program is January 14, 2013. More information on the Minnesota Livestock Investment Program can be found [on the MDA website](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/).