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.

Remember SFA on Give to the Max Day Nov. 13

SFA is asking for your support on Minnesota's annual day of charitable giving, Give to the Max Day, which this year is Nov. 13.

Click here to visit SFA’s page on GiveMN.

Feel good about donating to SFA – we are not burdened with costly overhead expenses, so your dollars go directly into helping us provide more farmer networking and educational events. SFA is an inclusive organization for all farmers and local food supporters, and our programs are devoted to improving our food and farming systems. With your help, we can make an even larger impact on our food and farming systems in the Upper Midwest.

Give to the Max Day has moved to a new site after last year’s five-hour blackout, so hopefully those issues will not return. Some SFA folks were unable to donate because of the blackout, but
Executive Director's Note

Agricultural practitioners have known forever that everything in the environment is connected with every human being on the planet. Nothing new to us. SFA was started 25 years ago in part because of that very idea, that what we do on our farms affects the environment and the community and the food we produce as a nation.

Actually, we’ve become known for our coordinated approach to sustainability. So much so, I’ve been invited by Conservation International to talk about what we are doing to promote sustainable agriculture in general and soil health in particular.

As I write this, I am in Washington, D.C. with other sustainability leaders to attend Conservation International’s Ocean Health Index Roundtable. Conservation International has developed an Ocean Health Index, and the idea here is that everything on the planet contributes to the overall outcomes in terms of ocean health. The first global rating of ocean health is not exactly stellar. Businesses, including farms, and countries individually contribute to our earth’s ocean health. Something I hope to bring to Conservation International is the understanding that ocean health is rooted in soil health (pun intended).

This is actually a part of a larger effort in global sustainability circles to assign a credit or a debit to a company’s books or a country’s economic ledger based on the contribution each entity makes to environmental health. It’s gotten me thinking about the assessment of our own farms and how they contribute to overall soil health and water quality.

We know certain farming practices work for the benefit of the environment. It’s hard to miss with the soil health building practices such as cover crops and grazing, and the intense combination of those, that we will be highlighting at the 2015 Midwest Soil Health Summit. But what do those practices actually contribute to the bottom line of the environment? And as a part of financial sustainability, what do they contribute to the bottom line of the farm’s economy, the community’s economy and our societies social health? I’ll let you know what I learn from this trip and what other sectors of our economy are doing to integrate environmental accounting into their outcomes.

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.

**Upcoming Webinar: Building Farm to Institution Markets**

A free webinar and survey to help Minnesota food producers grow, “Building Farm to Institution Markets,” is set for 3-4 p.m. this Thurs., Nov. 6.

This webinar is for farmers, ranchers and producers currently selling to, or interested in selling to, schools, child care centers, hospitals or other institutions. It will provide an introduction to farm to institution practices and benefits. It will focus on how the needs of the producer can be matched with the needs of the buyer, accessing the potential of this rapidly expanding market channel. This webinar pairs with a new survey that invites producers to share their input on farm to institution opportunities, barriers and resource needs.

Presenters scheduled to appear include:

- **SFA member producer Greg Reynolds**, who will discuss his experience with farm to institution sales
- **Andrea Northup from Minneapolis Public Schools**, who will talk about the institution’s perspective
- **Ryan Pesch from University of Minnesota Extension**, who will talk about the market potential of institutional sales

This is a project of: Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Renewing the Countryside, and Sustainable Farming Association.

Click here to register.

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

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

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

Sept. 2015: HARVEST FESTIVAL, Bayfront Park, Duluth

SFA WORK

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 and sustain the beef and dairy industries in Minnesota while protecting...
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.

Deep Winter Greenhouse Workshop Registration

A class from the SFA Sustainable Food Production Program, “Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy,” will be held from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Jan. 31, 2015, in Ashby, Minn.

During the class, farm owners Sue Wika and Tom Prieve will provide a 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. Students will be in the greenhouse to see how greens and fodder are planted and harvested.

Cost is $100/person. Bring a sack lunch. Beverage and fresh winter salad (grown on site) provided. The class will be held at Paradox Farm, 11643 State Hwy 78, Ashby, MN 56309 (Directions: 7 miles north of Ashby; 10 miles south of Battle Lake). Storm date is Feb. 7, 2015.

Space is limited. [Click here to register.]

Check This Out

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

- In "The Midwest's Vast Farms are Losing a Ton of Money This Year," Tom Philpott writes in Mother Jones magazine, "According to a stunning analysis by Iowa State ag economist Chad Hart, crop prices have fallen so low and input costs (think seeds, fertilizers, pesticides) have gotten so high, that they're losing $225 per acre of corn and $100 per acre of soybeans." [Read the entire piece here.]

- The New York Times analyzes Iowa, the 2014 election and rural migration in its interactive report, "With Farms Failing and Urban Might Rising, Power Shifts in Iowa." [View the story here.]

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.]

Sustainable Food Production Program
Sustainable Food Production, formerly part of M State Fergus Falls, is a much-needed beginning-farmer curriculum that emphasizes all three tenets of sustainability, plus provides extensive skills training.

New Crops Project
SFA's New Crops Project aims to expand the availability of local foods in Minnesota and help farmers expand their markets.
Local Food Innovation Meeting Slated in Pine River

Growers, business owners and food enthusiasts are invited to a community visioning meeting to share your unique perspective on how the local food economy can contribute to the well-being of our rural communities. The meeting will be 6 p.m. Nov. 12 at Happy Dancing Turtle, 2331 Dancing Wind Rd, Pine River, Minn.

Scheduled is a community discussion on starting a Local Food Innovation Center and how it could increase access to local food where we live.

Food and drink provided but seating is limited. RSVP by Nov. 5 to Hannah Klemm at hklemm@hugllc.com or 218.587.5001.

RSDP Seeking Input on Deep Winter Greenhouse Project

The Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships are working with the University of Minnesota Dept. of Horticulture on a research project that will analyze several issues related to growing crops in the winter in Minnesota. RSDP is working with ‘Deep Winter Greenhouse’ operators as well as conventional greenhouses to test the conditions under which their crops are grown. Crops will also be grown in growth chambers at the U to identify conditions under which the crops grow best with controlled light, temperatures, and carbon dioxide.

Crops grown in the study will include kale, spinach, strawberries, cucumbers, and a mesclun mix. We will also be conducting economic analyses of the Deep Winter Greenhouses to determine startup costs, breakeven analyses, and examine the potential market for Deep Winter crops.

Following the conclusion of these studies, short courses will be offered around the state to provide opportunities for growers to learn about the results and techniques of the various production models.

If you are interested in receiving periodic updates on the progress of this study and have the ability to ask questions and provide feedback please contact Greg Schweser at schwe233@umn.edu or 612-625-9706. To learn more about RSDP, visit its homepage.

Cook, Montgomery to Speak at MN Organic Conference

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is excited to announce its keynote speakers
for the 2015 Minnesota Organic Conference in January: Environmental Working Group Co-
founder and President Ken Cook will speak Jan. 9; David Montgomery, a geological scientist

Cook is widely recognized as one of the environmental community’s most prominent and
influential thinkers of industrial agriculture, the food system, and farm policy.

Montgomery will talk about every organic farmer’s best friend: soil. He is a professor at the
University of Washington, where he researches and teaches about how geological processes
affect ecological systems and human societies.

The MN Organic Conference will be Jan. 9-10, 2015, at the River’s Edge Convention Center in
St. Cloud. Learn more here.

Resource Hub Connects CSA Farmers to Expert Advice

Small Farm Central, a provider of web-based marketing solutions for small farms, has launched
the “CSA Solutions Hub,” a database of resources aimed at farmers running Community
Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs across the country. The “hub” is a virtual library of
content that farmers can use freely to help build their CSA programs and connect with their
members.

For more information, visit smallfarmcentral.com or visit the CSA Farmer Discussion Group
Facebook page.
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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