Make A Real Difference in Our Farming Systems. Donate to SFA From Now Until Nov. 14, Give to the Max Day

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

Are you a part of the next revolution in agriculture? Make a direct impact on our farm and food systems – support SFA now until Give to the Max Day next Thursday, Nov. 14.

Donations are crucial to the success of our organization. As a membership organization, SFA membership dues go to each member's designated chapter. Our projects are funded largely by specific grants. SFA is a leader in the sustainable agriculture movement in the Midwest. Our leadership activities advance our mission of supporting the development and enhancement of sustainable farming systems through farmer-to-farmer networking, innovation, demonstration, and education.

And we are making great progress toward that mission. Our continued focus on soil health is culminating in our Midwest Soil Health Summit, which has attracted some of the nation's foremost experts. We are building relationships with like-minded partners to make a real impact on issues like water quality, soil erosion, cover cropping and farm profitability.

Plus, given SFA's extremely low overhead, the vast majority of your dollars go directly toward these difference-making efforts. SFA does not spend money on office rent and utilities – our offices are places like Wellspring Farm in Aitkin, where we held a pasture walk Aug. 10; and GrassStain Farm, hosts of the Lake Agassiz Festival of Farms. Our business hours happen at Minnesota Garlic Festival, Harvest Fest, and the SFA Annual Conference. And our commutes occur at events like our Sept. 7 Cover Crop Bus Tour of four farms that use complex cover crop blends in Wadena and Cass Counties, or when SFA Executive Director John Mesko is invited to give presentations on the power of farmer-to-farmer networking at events like the Seedstock Conference and The Grassfed Exchange Conference.

All this has helped to position SFA for future impact. We are at a critical point in time in the sustainable agriculture movement. Our work really can revolutionize agriculture. Donate on Give to the Max Day at razoo.com/sfa, or anytime on our homepage. Then, keep an eye on us to see your dollars at work.

First Keep Cattle in Minnesota Events Announced

A joint project of Minnesota NRCS and the Sustainable Farming Association, Keep Cattle in Minnesota is a project to sustain the beef and dairy industries in Minnesota while protecting our vast environmental resources.
Led by SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg (right) and project coordinator Wayne Monsen, a key function of Keep Cattle in Minnesota will be on-farm events where expert producers will teach farmers – new and experienced alike – new ways to launch or enhance their cattle operations.

The first scheduled event will be at 1 p.m. Nov. 22 at the Wadena County Courthouse Auditorium, 415 Jefferson St S (U.S. 71), Wadena. Attendees will view a presentation from SFA’s experts then caravan to the Ivan and Dayle Reinke farm southwest of Wadena to observe “bale grazing” of their cow/calf herd. This event is free and no registration is required.

Additionally, a second event is set for 1 p.m. Dec. 9 at the VFW, 115 N Franklin St, Lake City. One of SFA’s longest-tenured members, Ralph Lentz, will talk about his winter feeding as well as give a tour of his farm. This event is free and no registration is required.

For more information on Keep Cattle in Minnesota, as well as ongoing updates and event announcements, visit sfa-mn.org/keep-cattle-in-minnesota.

Executive Director’s Note

Farmers are getting grants. Should you?

There are a number of grant programs available for farmers. SFA is hosting "Grant Writing Essentials for Farmers" on Nov. 16, a FREE program for SFA Members!

As a preview, its helpful to really define what a grant is. It's NOT free money from the government. At least the grants we are discussing at the "Grant Writing Essentials Workshop" are not free money. It's best to think of a grant as an investment. The Grantor (the person, or entity with the money) has an idea of something they would like to see, learn, or accomplish. They recognize they are not the experts, so they offer a grant, or an investment to those people who are the experts to basically hire them to see, learn or accomplish their objectives. The experts who get the grants are called the Grantee.

Before you say, "Why would I want to apply for a grant? All I'm going to be doing is someone else's work." Let me add, that with the right Grantor, you can find a grant that will allow you to accomplish some of your goals along the way. I mean, let's face it, farming is farming, we all want some of the same things. Are there some ways Grantors and Grantees can work together to accomplish mutual goals? I think so, I've seen several examples of this, and in the right situation, a grant can make a lot of sense.

If you are interested in learning more about grants, please consider the FREE workshop on "Grant Writing Essentials for Farmers" on Nov. 16. It's free to SFA Members and $35 for the general public. A discount code was emailed to all SFA members a couple of weeks ago. If you didn't get one of those codes, we don't have you listed as a current member. Contact Jason Walker at jason@sfa-mn.org for more information.

If you have questions about the 11/16 program itself, please feel free to contact me at john@sfa-mn.org. Thanks, and we'll see you there!

Attend 'Grant-Writing Essentials for Farmers' Workshop

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator
Learning how grants work can greatly improve your ability to write a successful application and capitalize on the many sources of money available to local farmers.

In a Nov. 16 SFA workshop, “Grant-Writing Essentials for Farmers,” we will cover the keys to successful proposals and discuss several different grant programs such as Minnesota Department of Agriculture Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant, SARE Farmer-Rancher, and MN Dept of Ag Specialty Crop Block Grant.

The workshop is free for current SFA members and $35 for the general public; SFA members will be emailed a discount code. A few spots are still available – click here to register.

Participants will see both good and not-so-good proposal examples and discuss the differences in each. We will also provide an essential checklist of how to develop a successful proposal start-to-finish, including a timetable and planning chart. Finally, participants will develop a plan and a draft of their desired proposal during the session, receiving one-on-one support.

Presenters include:

- **John Mesko, Executive Director, Sustainable Farming Association** – John has been the lead writer on several successful grant proposals, and collaborated with others on dozens of other smaller proposals.
- **Jeanne Ciborowski, Minnesota Department of Agriculture** – Jean is the administrator of the MN Department of Ag Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant. She's reviewed hundreds of proposals submitted by farmers over the years, and understands what makes a successful proposal.

The workshop will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at room 120 in the Gorecki Center at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. Lunch is not provided but local options, including the St. Ben's cafeteria and several local restaurants, are nearby.

Click here to register. Room is limited, and registration ends Nov. 10.

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**Chapter Update: Central**

By Lisa Baker • Chapter Coordinator

The Central Chapter hosted several activities over the summer and fall: Grazefest in Aitkin, our New Crops Project and Orcharding in the North Field Day in Staples, and Festival of Farms in July 12, 2014:

**Festival of Farms**

Aug. 9, 2014:

**Minnesota Garlic Festival, McLeod County Fairgrounds, Hutchinson, Minn.**

**SFA WORK**

**GrazeFest**

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.

**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.

**Keep Cattle in Minnesota**

Keep Cattle in Minnesota will build on SFA's foundation to grow and sustain the beef and dairy industries in Minnesota while protecting our vast environmental resources.

**Sustainable Food Production Program**

**Sustainable Food**
Onamia. Welcome to the new members who joined the chapter at these events!

We now have a Facebook page dedicated to our chapter news and events – check it out here.

Planning for our chapter’s annual meeting is under way. It will likely be in January. Stay tuned for more details.

With the annual conference hosted within our chapter’s region this year – at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn., we are leading the effort to help chapters promote what makes them unique and recruit new members during the conference. Watch for tri-fold displays from each chapter as well as a short presentation from each during the opening session.

For more information about the Central Chapter and its ongoing projects, contact Lisa Baker at lisa@bakersacresfarm.com or 320.309.0746.

LS-SFA Hosting Annual Farmers Take the Stove Shindig

Join SFA’s Lake Superior Chapter for its annual Farmers Take the Stove, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Nov. 14 at Peace Church in Duluth. Besides a fabulous locavore dinner (grown, cooked, and served by farmers and LSSFA members) and live local bluegrass by the Riverside Bog Stompers, Farmers Take the Stove features our unique silent auction. Our focus is on Farm Experiences and Products. Past auction items have included products from local farms, as well as hands-on demonstrations, learning experiences, and simple enjoyment, like Woodland Consultation, Maple Syruping, Making Raised Beds, Starting Transplants with Soil Blocks, Sleigh Rides, and more. We’ll also be auctioning cakes, pies, and other desserts.

Suggested donation is $12 ($5 for kids 6-10; ages 5 & under free). Remember, proceeds benefit LS-SFA and its activities and programs. Contribute to the silent auction by emailing LS-SFA coordinator Jean Sramek. To donate a menu item for the dinner, contact Joel Rosen at 218-389-3306 or plfarm@q.com.

Mesko to Speak at Seedstock Conference in L.A.

SFA Executive Director John Mesko has been invited to speak about SFA’s farmer-to-farmer networking at the second annual Seedstock Sustainable Agriculture Innovation conference on Nov. 6 at the UCLA Anderson School of Management in Los Angeles.

The event will feature a broad lineup of speakers from urban agriculture experts, sustainable farmers and aquaponics entrepreneurs to investors, crowdfunding experts and organic and local buyers and distributors; and will cover a variety of topics, including: sustainable agriculture startups; growing new farmers; the social and economic impact of urban farming; the future of farmers markets; and, funding for new farmers and ag entrepreneurs.

Seedstock is a company focused on innovation and sustainability in agriculture. Through the use of a variety of tools, including the news and information blog Seedstock.com and live events, the company promotes agricultural start up companies, university research, urban agriculture initiatives, and farmers employing innovative new techniques and approaches. The magazine profiled SFA state board treasurer Josh Reinitz’s family farm in 2012.

Bieber, Fuhrer Added to Midwest Soil Health Summit Agenda

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

We’re still putting together the slate for the Midwest Soil Health Summit, to be held Feb. 19-20, 2014, at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, and we’re proud to announce the participation of two of the Upper Midwest’s most respected experts: Richard Bieber and Jay Fuhrer.

Note to SFA members: Registration is available at a $50 discount for current SFA members. You should have been emailed a discount code; if you need help or a reminder about the code, email Jason Walker at jason@sfa-mn.org.
As it develops, the Summit is becoming what we intended: the bridge between what SFA stands for and what soil health experts practice every single day.

Bieber, a producer from South Dakota, has been practicing no-till for 27 years and cover cropping for over a decade. Bieber says, “When it comes to soil health, you are speaking directly to my passion.” Bieber will give a second keynote address after Gabe Brown.

Fuhrer, District Conservationist with the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in Bismarck, N.D., will lead a session on how to make soil health principles work on your farm.

As you can see, the Summit is going to deliver some of the most innovative farmers and researchers in the Upper Midwest for two days of networking, speakers, panel discussions and breakout sessions – all geared at improving your soil health.

Also slated to appear: Wendy Taheri, Research Microbiologist with the North Central Agricultural Research Laboratory, who will present on cover cropping and mycorrhizae in soils; and Kent Solberg, SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator, will be leading a session on designing and customizing cover crops.

More information, registration and exhibitor/sponsor applications are available at our MSHS homepage.

**Apply Now for SFA Sustainability Conference Internships**

The Sustainable Farming Association is offering four internship positions for Winter 2013-14 in conjunction with our two February events: the SFA Annual Conference and the Midwest Soil Health Summit.

All four internships will involve at-home, non-residency work collaborating with one of the event coordinators, plus on-site work at both conferences. Interns will learn the finer details of nonprofit sustainability event production, and will have the opportunity to attend conference sessions on a wide variety of topics, as well as meeting leaders in the sustainable agriculture movement.

The onsite portions will be on all or some of these dates, depending on duties:

- Feb. 7-8, SFA Annual Conference, College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN
- Feb. 19-20, Midwest Soil Health Summit, Arrowwood Resort, Alexandria, MN

In addition to the educational opportunities, the interns will also receive complimentary registration to both conferences, free one-year membership in SFA, Farmer-to-Farmer Network T-shirt, and lunch at Midwest Soil Health Summit.

Internship categories include Executive Director’s Assistant, Conference Coordinator’s Assistant, Communications Coordinator’s Assistant, and Grazing & Soil Health Specialist’s Assistant.

Application Deadline: Nov. 10, 2013. To apply, contact Jerry Ford, Conference Coordinator, at jerry@sfa-mn.org or 763-244-6659.

**SFA is Lead Sponsor of GLCA's Annual Videoconference**
SFA is proud to be the lead sponsor of the Grazing Lands Conservation Association's annual videoconference, to be held Dec. 5 at seven sites around Minnesota. Click here to register. Agenda and topics include:

- Opening Addresses on why NRCS and DNR encourage grazing – Don Baloun, NRCS State Conservationist & Dave Schad, DNR Deputy Commissioner

- Importance of soil health and ways to incorporate soil health strategies – Gene Groven, North Dakota farmer

- Keynote: “Keep it Growing, Keep it Green: Soil Health and Water Protection are the Answers:” New research on managing soil biota, Dr. Kristine Nichols, USDA-ARS (from Mandan, ND)

- Using Livestock to Enhance Prairie: Opportunities to graze public and private conservation lands. Monitoring to see the results of grazing – Carmelita Nelson and Greg Hoch, DNR

- Producer Panel and Discussion: Strategies MN farmers are using to improve soil health to improve pastures and increase farm income, including "Options for increasing soil health and profitability for your farm or ranch" with SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg.

- Introduction to SFA's Keep Cattle in Minnesota Project

The videoconference is held at locations in Crookston, Lamberton, Morris, St. Paul, Rochester, Winona, Austin, Pine City and Staples.

**Annual Conference Session Schedule Being Compiled**

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

The SFA Annual Conference, set for Feb. 8, 2014, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn., has a theme: "Back to Our Roots." Drawing from the wisdom of the SFA community, our annual gathering will be a more laid-back affair focused on farmer to farmer networking and education – the bedrock of SFA since our inception over 25 years ago.

That's why we asked you, our members, to help determine session topics at the Annual Conference. Using an online tally system we received over 3,000 votes on a variety of topics – from root cellaring to cover cropping, fence management to weed control strategies.

Now, we're taking the voting results and coordinate the Conference schedule accordingly – and identifying session leaders and experts to help guide the discussion. Look for a schedule announcement in the near future.

Of course, Annual Conference registration is open, and a discounted price of $45 is valid through Nov. 31 for SFA members, who should have received an email with a discount code. Starting Dec. 1, the cost goes up to $55 for members and $65 for everyone else; if you need help or a reminder about the code, email Jason Walker at jason@sfa-mn.org.

Also, family programming is returning, so that the entire farm family can come enjoy our farmer-to-farmer showcase. Admission for children ages 3-12 is just $10, while kids under 3 are free. Click here to register today.

**Annual Conference Photo Feature**

Photographer Crystal Liepa documented our SFA Annual Conference again in 2013 at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Watch for a new photo each issue of SFA Connect and learn more about Crystal at her website.
Photo Contest Winner for September: Kelsey Wulf

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.

What kind of photos are we seeking? Simply anything from your farm, family, garden or kitchen – anything that's related somehow to sustainable agriculture that you'd like to share with SFA members.

Send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org, and we'll include the winner in SFA Connect. Check out our Facebook page for all the photo submissions.

September's winner was this photo from Kelsey Wulf of St. Cloud, who says, "My garden grew the funkiest tomato I have personally ever seen.":
Sustainable Food Production Program Deep Winter Class

A new 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. 25, 2014, 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).

For more information and to register, [click here](#).