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.

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.

The Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture's Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant program proposals are especially timely, as they are due Jan. 29. This workshop will present information that will help with any grant proposal, but farmers thinking about applying for MDA funding will find this workshop especially timely.

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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.
- **Jean 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.

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.

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 Unveils Revamped, Mobile-Friendly Homepage

If you’ve visited our homepage in the past few days, you have probably noticed it looks a little different. Thanks to hard work from our webmaster, Laura Borgendale, www.sfa-mn.org has been revamped with a cleaner, easier-to-navigate format that is mobile-friendly.

Some registration pages and emails like this will look the same for a while, but soon all SFA online communications should be slightly tweaked to fit the new format. Studies show that over 30 percent of online users access the web exclusively with a mobile device, so we have to adjust to the change.

We hope you like the new look. Check it out!

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. More information and registration will be coming soon – watch SFA Connect for details. 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, Pine City and Staples.

Sustainable Food Production Program Deep Winter Class

August 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 Production, formerly part of M State Fergus Falls, is a much-needed beginning-farmer curriculum that
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.

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.

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.

SFA Launches New Project: Keep Cattle in Minnesota

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

As SFA continues to mature and grow, we are learning that projects focusing on soil health are right in our wheelhouse. Soil health is at the crux of sustainable agriculture, it's the focus of our new Midwest Soil Health Summit and our GrazeFest series of events, and we have an extensive network of farmers who practice and are interested in practicing soil health principles like cover cropping and livestock integration.

But livestock producers, particularly cattle, are dwindling in Minnesota due to retirement, an
A new project, 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. A joint project of SFA and the Minnesota NRCS and led by SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg, Keep Cattle in Minnesota is targeted toward four main audiences:

- Brand-new Farmers
- Experienced farmers who are looking to add or adjust a business enterprise
- Retiring dairy producers
- Farmers seeking to re-integrate livestock into their row crop operations for the purpose of building soil health

On-farm education and networking events throughout Minnesota that feature SFA and NRCS experts will be the hallmark activities of Keep Cattle in Minnesota, as well as consumer-related events intended to increase the demand for grass-fed beef.

As more details develop regarding the Keep Cattle in Minnesota project, we'll let you know right here in SFA Connect and at our KCIM homepage.

SFA Unveils Business/Organization Memberships; Exhibitor Registration for SFA's Conferences Now Open

Is your organization or business looking for a useful way to effect real change in the sustainable agriculture movement?

Support SFA through our new membership tier. Become a Business and Organization Patron or Member and buoy the Sustainable Farming Association and our mission of supporting the development and enhancement of sustainable farming systems through farmer-to-farmer networking, innovation, demonstration, and education.

And thanks to our first SFA Business and Organization Member: University of Minnesota Regional and Sustainable Development Partnerships!

SFA is making real change in our farm and food systems through our flagship farmer network as well as our educational conferences and events, and we created these new memberships with our longtime partners in mind. Like-minded businesses and organizations that become SFA members receive free or discounted ads, discounts on exhibit space at SFA events, free booth space at Minnesota Garlic Festival, linked SFA Connect ads and more — all while financially supporting the goals of SFA. Choose from two tiers of membership and either a one- or a three-year membership.

To view our Business and Organization memberships and their related perks, click here.

To register or learn more about becoming an exhibitor or sponsor at the SFA Annual Conference, click here.

To register or learn more about becoming an exhibitor or sponsor at the Midwest Soil Health Summit, click here.

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.":

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.

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