SFA Board Gathers for Meeting, Retreat, Farm Tour

By Jason Walker • Communications Coordinator

SFA's board and staff enjoyed a retreat this past weekend in and near Willmar, gathering for a farm tour, brainstorming session and dinner, and regular board meeting. Also on the agenda was a workshop, led by consultant Joanne Kudrna, regarding SFA's strategic plan.

The retreat began at Jim and LeeAnn VanDerPol's Pastures A Plenty farm outside Kerkhoven. The board and staff was treated to a tour by Jim, who explained his pig-raising techniques and described his theories on sustainable agriculture regarding pork production.

Especially interesting was a farrowing building under construction devised entirely by Jim and his son. The building will allow pregnant sows a generous-sized area that is cooled by geothermal-powered water pipes running through the building's cement floor; the geothermal system will also provide heat for the piglets in the same area as the sows.

The VanDerPols graciously took a couple hours out of their day to accommodate SFA, and for that we are grateful. And from a personal perspective, seeing the VanDerPol farm was an extremely rewarding and intriguing experience that certainly bolsters the argument that sustainable agriculture on a larger scale is possible, profitable and, ultimately, sustainable.
After the tour was a lively dinner at which board members and staff enjoyed great conversation. It was the board's first gathering since April, so catching up with the hardworking SFA folks from around the state was a lot of fun. Saturday's strategic plan session and regular board meeting was productive and enjoyable as well; it was clear everyone left feeling refreshed and optimistic about both the immediate and long-term future of SFA.

Thanks to the VanDerPols and all the board and staff for their attendance. The next board meeting will coincide with the Annual Conference, set for Feb. 15-16 at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chaska.

Chapter Update: Central

By Jim Chamberlin

The Central Chapter co-sponsored a Pasture Profitability Workshop and field day in the Wadena area on Sept. 29th in lieu of a 2012 Festival of Farms. It was well-attended by farmers and food citizens from several counties in Central Minnesota. Thanks to Kent Solberg for his fine work in organizing this event.

We are planning to return to the Festival of Farms format for 2013 with an event in the Onamia area. Onamia has a very active local foods community, and we are looking forward to showcasing a part of our Chapter that we may have somewhat neglected in the past.

The Central Chapter is working to revive The 100 Orchards Project. The project is to promote ecological and economic diversity and resilience on marginal farmlands through perennial cropping systems. Activities to date have included the Sky Dance Plant Swap held April 28 at Green Island in Wadena and a Keyline workshop held June 7 at Camphill Village in Long Prairie. Contact Jim Chamberlin at islandlakefarm@brainerd.net for more information on this project.

We would like to express our congratulations to the Sunup Ranch for their recognition as UMN Extension Cass County Family Farm of the Year. Vickie Kettlewell and Greg Booth own the ranch and are active members of SFA. Vickie currently serves on the Central Chapter Board.

Our 2013 Annual Meeting will be Feb 2 at M-State Fergus Falls in conjunction with the Sustainable Food Production Program. We are excited to have Chef Lucia Watson of Lucia’s Restaurant in Minneapolis and Matt Annand of Prairie Bay Restaurant in Brainerd as featured speakers for the event. Watch the Central Chapter webpage for more details. Contact Sue Wika at sue.wika@minnesota.edu for more information.
Several Central members have been actively involved in farm to institution efforts. Chair Arlene Jones reported that the initiative she is working with in the Brainerd region has distributed over 13,000 pounds of locally grown fresh produce to local schools so far this year! Other areas with similar SFA-member-driven initiatives include Wadena and Onamia.

The Central Chapter is currently seeking applications for a Chapter Coordinator. Successful applicants must have knowledge of sustainable farming practices and strong public relations skills. This is a part-time, year-round position. If you're interested, contact Arlene Jones at stmathiasfarm@gmail.com or Mel Wiens at lmwiensfarm@gmail.com.

Solberg Draws Crowd for Energized Fencing Workshop

The Sustainable Farming Association sponsored a fencing seminar Oct. 13 in Fergus Falls led by SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator Kent Solberg, owner of Seven Pines Farm and Fence of Verndale and an instructor in the Sustainable Food Production program at M-State in Fergus Falls. Kent has 18 years of professional experience designing and installing energized fence systems for livestock.

The workshop, part of SFA's ongoing GrazeFest series, was also sponsored by the Sustainable Food Production program at Fergus Falls and the Minnesota Dairy Initiative. Some scenes from the workshop:

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.
It's a Beautiful Fall: Submit Photos and Win a T-shirt

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 looking for? Simply anything related to sustainable agriculture or SFA members. At an SFA event, on the farm, in the garden, at a meal, a funny-looking carrot, a beautiful sunset at your farm, your family loading hay, an antique tool ... anything other SFA folks might get a kick out of seeing.

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.

The first two winners were Ivan Reinke and David Weinand. Readers, send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org and join the contest.

Potluck, Diffley Book Signing Planned Nov. 3 in Watson

An upcoming potluck and book signing will feature SFA member Atina Diffley and her book, "Turn Here Sweet Corn: Organic Farming Works."

The event, "How Can Cooperatives Strengthen Local Food Systems and Democracy in Western Minnesota?" is set for 6-11 p.m. Sat., Nov. 3, at Watson Town Hall, Watson. Diffley, who will lead a session at the SFA Annual Conference, will discuss her book and its belief that organic farming can sustain everybody. Copies of "Turn Here Sweet Corn" can be purchased at the Moonstone Farm store, the LSP office in Montevideo, CURE offices in Montevideo and Granite Falls, and the Granary Co-op in Ortonville.

Invite a friend, bring a dish to pass, and bring your instruments for a musical jam session. This is event is sponsored by LSP, Moostone Farm, CURE, the Granary Food Co-op, Pomme de Terre Food Co-op, Western Chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, and Community-Owned Grocery. Information: Rebecca Terk at 320-305-9685.

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/.

Organic Field School Hosting Food-Sampling Fundraiser

Support Organic Field School and partake in some of the metro's most imaginative flavors at the same time at a fundraiser Nov. 17 at Kitchen in the Market at Midtown Global Market in Minneapolis. Taste small-batch craft beers, artisan cheese, summer-sweetened local wines, sumptuous pastries, and more.

Besides sampling tasty food and drink, attendees can meet farmers from Gardens of Eagan, Loon Organics, Fazenda Boa Terra, Humble Pie, and Bossy Acres as well as buy raffle tickets for delicious prizes. Sip, sample, and share the bounty: a major portion of the proceeds will help support OFS and its beginning farmers.

Tickets are limited, so reserve yours soon by RSVP to libby@gardensofeagan.com. Or, mail a check by Nov. 12 to Organic Field School, c/o Gardens of Eagan, 25494 Highview Ave., Farmington, MN 55024.

NCR-SARE 'Hero Recognition' Honors Bill Wilcke

The North Central Region-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (NCR-SARE) is pleased to announce that William F. Wilcke, a lifetime member of SFA, is the first person to receive the “NCR-SARE Hero Recognition.”

Coordinated by the NCR-SARE Alumni Organization, this recognition recognizes the leadership, vision, contributions, and impact that these heroes have made in the field of sustainable agriculture in the North Central region. The first recipient, William (Bill) Wilcke, has brought great credit, visibility, and leadership to the NCR-SARE program in his long career of service to sustainable agriculture and its people and communities.

Wilcke was born and raised in Northwest Iowa on a small diversified crop and livestock farm where hard work and perseverance were valued. After graduating from Battle Creek High School, Wilcke attended Iowa State University at Ames, Iowa, where he received all three of his post high school degrees in Agricultural Engineering in 1976, 1980 and 1985. His focus was on grain drying and storage with a minor in energy engineering.

After receiving his Ph.D. at Iowa State, he worked at Virginia Tech in Extension Crop Drying and Storage. After almost four years at Virginia Tech, Bill came to the University of Minnesota in an extension and research position in post harvest crop drying and storage. He researched the storability of grain and advised Minnesota farmers about their grain drying and storage systems.

Grant Funds Available 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 Public Schools Seeks Farmers to Connect With Students

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.

Cover Crop Walk-N-Talk Set for November 7

Join event partners from 1 to 3 p.m. Nov. 7 for a cover crop discussion at the Ackermann farm near Lakefield. Heron Lake Watershed District (HLWD) and Jerry and Nancy Ackermann were awarded a North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Farmer/Rancher grant to continue their work with cover crops.

A cover crop mixture of winter cereal rye, tillage radish, and purple top turnip was planted into standing corn and soybeans by helicopter in late August 2012 just north of the Ackermann farmstead. This aerial application allows for a longer cover crop growing season in the corn-soybean system. The Ackermanns chose the cover crop species for their ability to scavenge nitrogen, add organic matter to the soil, increase water infiltration, decrease soil erosion, and reduce weed competition.

More information: Kate Seager at 612-625-8235 or kseager@umn.edu.

Cover Crops Field Walk Planned Nov. 17 Near Lanesboro

The relationship between cover crops and better soil is the focus of a short field day from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Nov. 17 at the Brian Hazel dairy farm north of Lanesboro. This is a free event, but to help guarantee enough coffee and rolls, please reserve a spot by contacting Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or caroline@landstewardshipproject.org. Hazel's farm is located at 27919 State Highway 250.

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.

Farm Beginnings Program Party Set at Bryant Lake Bowl

Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program is throwing a party from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Nov. 4 at the Bryant Lake Bowl in Minneapolis.

Enjoy great live music featuring Mike Monroe, Brad Frenholz and the Cactus Blossoms as well as the chance to buy creative, beautiful art from local artists at the silent auction. There will be
plenty of fun conversation and lots of bowling. It's going to be a fun time and all for just $10, which goes to help support Farm Beginnings efforts to get more sustainable farmers started on the land. You can pay at the door, or online [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](#). You can find more information about sustainable agriculture at [sare.org](http://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.

**Organic Certification Cost Share Accepting Applications**

Minnesota organic farmers and processors can apply for a rebate of up to 75 percent of the cost of their organic certification as the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is accepting applications for the Minnesota Organic Cost Share Program through Oct. 31.

Funds for the cost share program come from a cooperative agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Operations that received certification (or had ongoing certification) between Oct. 1, 2011 and Sept. 30, 2012 are eligible for reimbursement of up to 75 percent of certification-related costs up to a maximum of $750 per category (crop, livestock, processing/handling, wild harvest). Last year, the MDA disbursed nearly $381,000 to 480 certified organic farmers and processors in the state.

More information: [www.mda.state.mn.us/organic](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/organic) or 651-201-6012.

**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
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.

Fall Harvest Event for Women in Sustainable Agriculture

Come share ideas, conversation and laughter while enjoying the beauty and relaxation of the Root River and surrounding bluff country of the Cedar Valley Resort during the annual Fall Harvest Gathering for Women in Sustainable Agriculture Nov. 9-11 in Whalan.

The weekend will include a presentation and demonstration on proper chainsaw use and safety, virtual farm tours, engaging women farmer speakers, small and large group discussions, songs, and plenty of time to relax and unwind.

For more information, contact staceyleighbrown@yahoo.com.

SFA Connect is your bi-weekly link to the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota

The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota 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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