After Last Year's Sellout, Midwest Soil Health Summit Returns With Gabe Brown; Registration Now Open

Registration is now open for SFA's second annual Midwest Soil Health Summit, featuring Gabe Brown, set for Feb. 18-19, 2015, at Arrowood 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
- Ian Cunningham, a cow-calf producer and veteran cover cropper from Pipestone County, Minn.

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
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.

Send Us Your Memories to Celebrate 25 Years of SFA

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Next year is a big one for SFA – 2015 marks 25 years since our formation – and we need your help.

As SFA begins a yearlong series of special events and publications revolving around our Silver Anniversary, we are seeking submissions for a special edition of the yearly CornerPost magazine – SFA-related memories, stories, photos, videos, documents. This can be anything you have to share that can help tell SFA's story, whether it happened 25 years or 25 days ago.

A selection of these historical nuggets will be published in the upcoming CornerPost edition as well as archived on our homepage.

Even if you want to just send two sentences about what SFA means to you, that would be terrific. No submission is too large or too small, as we are hoping to collect as diverse a range of information as possible.

Additionally, we're having a video contest: Make a short video (no longer than two minutes) about SFA, sustainability and what it means to you. The videos will be posted on our website, and the best video (as chosen by a panel of distinguished SFA staff) will receive a semi-fabulous prize package of SFA swag as well as free admission to the SFA Annual Conference. Then, at the conference, we'll play the winning video during the opening plenary session.

Email your materials to history@sfa-mn.org, and we'll start compiling. Or, mail to SFA, Box 192, Princeton, MN 55371. Submissions can not be returned without prior consent.

Deadline for submissions is Oct. 31.

SFA Annual Conference Registration Now Open

Get your winter planning off to a sustainable start: Registration is NOW OPEN for the SFA Annual Conference, Minnesota's farmer networking showcase set for Feb. 14, 2015, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph.

A founding concept of SFA is that there is wisdom in our farming community. So, just like last year, YOU will help to determine and lead the sessions, which will include casual but focused networking conversations on topics that you choose. Vote on our AC homepage and view the leading session topics.

Again on Saturday morning will be our yearly Leaders Breakfast and SFA Awards ceremony at 7:30 a.m. This event costs just $15 and includes breakfast, a special "State of SFA" address, and the awards ceremony. This is a separately ticketed event from the Annual Conference.

Also, family programming is returning – admission for children ages 3-12 is just $10 and includes separate programming from Budding Farmers. Children 2 and under are free but will be the responsibility of their parents.

Register through Dec. 30 at the Early Bird rate of $35/members and $45/nonmembers. SFA members will receive a separate email with discount registration instructions. Only SFA members will receive this separate email.
Vendor/Exhibitor Registration is open as well. Visit our Annual Conference homepage to download the proper form.

See you there!

Executive Director's Note

Recently, I learned the MN Department of Agriculture has essentially phased out the distinction they've been making between sustainable agriculture and other, non-organic brands of agriculture. Aside from the Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant program, you'll find very little on the MDA website referring to “sustainable” agriculture.

I think for most of us, this might come as a bit of a surprise, especially given how supportive MDA has been of our organization over the years. Frankly, I don’t expect the change in language on the MDA website is in any way a reflection of a desire on the part of the department to become any less supportive of SFA, but it raises an interesting discussion.

The sustainable agriculture movement of the last 25-30 years or so was a product of the discontent in the land after the farm crises of the 1980s which saw many farmers succumb to the pressures of a farm economy which was heavily rewarding economies of scale and making it very difficult to farm effectively in the small and mid scale. Pioneers banded together against the brand of agriculture forcing them out at that time. The enemies were banks, the government, and big ag. Those pioneers sought low cost solutions in order to survive. As a result there were many innovative models and techniques that were developed and perfected, such as: reduced tillage, no-tillage, cover crops, and the rise of the organic farmer.

Many of these practices have become mainstream in the past generation. The modern farmer, regardless of his or her preferred production model may be more sustainability minded than the previous generation. And while we may differ on the definition of sustainability, there are few out there today who are actively engaging in farming with the intent to waste land resources and knowingly damage the environment.

I understand MDAs decision on “sustainable” agriculture. It means we have more farmers in our audience. More farmers moving toward ever improving sustainable production models is a good thing.

Do you think its possible for all farmers to be in the same category? Or, should we be divided into “sustainable” and “conventional” farmers? I’d like to hear your thoughts.

Deep Winter Greenhouse Workshop Registration Now Open

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.

This newly listed class is distinct from the Feb. 13 Deep Winter class that is offered in combination with the SFA Annual Conference.

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.

This particular Deep Winter class is more in-depth and will provide opportunity for students to "get their hands dirty" in the greenhouse by planting and harvesting greens. It will also cover
greenhouse construction in a more detailed manner.

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.

Lake Agassiz 'Good Food, Good Farms' Event is Nov. 5

SFA Lake Agassiz Chapter is sponsoring a local-food event, “Good Food from Good Farms,” from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Wed., Nov. 5 at the Heritage Community Center in Thief River Falls, bringing sustainable farmers and consumers together for education and networking opportunities. If you are passionate and committed to growing and/or eating good food, you will not want to miss this exciting event. Light refreshments will be served and admission is free.

Local celebrity chef Sue Doeden will demonstrate cooking with local food and provide samples to taste. Along with the demonstration will be four “lightning workshops” to visit, including:

- Lake Agassiz Chapter SFA information table offering Free Membership until April 2015 and highlighting the 2015 Lake Agassiz Chapter SFA Chicken Festival
- Homemade Cheese Press for your kitchen
- Thief River Falls Growing Forward food network
- High Tunnels

Come share ideas, learn new skills, find new markets, and meet others who think and live sustainably. For more information, email Marie Petry at grass@wtc-mail.net.

Students: SFA Scholarships, Internships Available

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.

Also, SFA is accepting applications for Sustainability Conference Internships. These hands-on internships are for late fall and winter 2014/15 and require attendance at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 14 as well as the Midwest Soil Health Summit on Feb. 18-19. Those interested in an application should contact SFA Network Coordinator Jerry Ford at jerry@sfa-mn.org.

Click here to learn more at our internships homepage.

Check This Out

A new SFA Connect feature, “Check This Out” is a section of links to articles and videos chosen by SFA staff that you might enjoy. Consider:

- From The Western Producer, "NDSU is the only land grant university in the U.S. that has adjusted its corn fertility recommendations to account for the benefits of zero tillage and conservation agriculture." Read more here.
- Kent Solberg shared this link to a set of Public Service Announcement videos regarding soil health. Good stuff 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.
Success With Sheep Pasture Walk Set in Medina

Attend a pasture walk all about raising sheep from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sat., Oct. 11, at Red Hawk Farm, 3955 Chippewa Circle, Medina. Learn about the facilities to house and feed your flock, handling your animals, and managing pastures.

Presenters include farmer Julie Humiston, Alternative Livestock Specialist Wayne Martin, DVM and sheep farmer Holly Neaton, and NRCS Grazing Specialist Tom Gervais.

This event is relevant to both those considering sheep or experienced shepherds serious about raising productive, healthy animals. The free, informal event will include plenty of time for discussion and interaction.

RSVP by Oct. 8 to Karl Hakanson at 612.596.1175 or khakanso@umn.edu.

Cover Crops Field Guide for Farmers Expanded, Updated

Farmers interested in planting cover crops to improve soil health now have an updated and expanded resource in the second edition of the Midwest Cover Crops Field Guide. The pocket guide, released Sept. 22, is produced by Purdue University and the Midwest Cover Crops Council.

The first cover crops guide was released in February 2012. The updated guide is in response to the increasing interest in cover crops in the Midwest and to requests for additional information.

The guide’s second edition is available at Purdue Extension’s The Education Store. Search by the name of the publication or product code ID-433.

Food Licensing Questions Answered at Videoconference

What kind of a license do you need if you sell eggs, chickens and pork at a farmers’ market? Or if you sell jams and jellies? Or fruits and vegetables? Baked goods? Coffee?

Get your food licensing questions answered directly from Health and Agriculture staff from 12:30 to 4 p.m. Thurs., Nov. 6, during a videoconference hosted at eight sites around the state. The Minnesota Farmers’ Market Association is teaming up with the Minnesota Dept. of Health and the Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture to host this afternoon learning session using MDH’s &
MDA’s statewide videoconference system.

In addition to learning about the various food licenses that are needed, participants will enjoy a fun hands-on safe food sampling lesson, presented by U. of M. Extension.

The eight videoconferencing locations are: Bemidji, Duluth, Fergus Falls, Mankato, Marshall, Rochester, St. Cloud, and St. Paul.

More details are coming soon! For more information, contact MFMA at info@mfma.org or 320.250.5087.

Sheep and Fiber Farm Tour is Oct. 11-12

The Four Annual Sheep & Fiber Farm Tour is set for Oct. 11-12 at five farms as well as Faribault Woolen Mills and two art centers in Southeast Minnesota.

The two-day event will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day and will showcase sustainable natural fibers as well as the animals and farmers who provide it. Sheep, yaks, alpacas, llamas, angora rabbits and goats will be on the tour. Yarn, roving, felt and other fiber products from these animals will be for sale as well as the famous natural fibers products of the Faribault Woolen Mill. Presentations will include natural dying, spinning, weaving, felt machine and needle felting during ongoing demonstrations at the different farms.

Also on the tour will be Janice Arnold, a well-known felt artist who has exhibited her natural fiber work at Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt Museum.

Admission to the farms, mill, presentation and reception is free; there is a fee only for the Janice Arnold workshop.

Register and learn more at www.fiberfarmtour.com.

Registration Open for Food Access Summit

Registration is open for the Food Access Summit 2014: Organize for Equity, set for Oct. 28-30 at Duluth Entertainment Convention Center.

The Summit will highlight efforts that improve access to healthy food for Minnesotans with limited financial resources and launch the Minnesota Food Charter. In addition, it will provide social policy tools, training and action-oriented ideas to educate and organize participants to support local, state and national efforts to make the food system equitable for all.

Register and learn more at www.foodaccesssummit.com or 651-214-2498

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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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