Cover Crops for Livestock on Display at Four-Farm Field Day

By Kent Solberg • SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist

On Sept. 25, we hosted a tour of four central Minnesota farms and looked at the results of a three-year Minnesota Department of Agriculture Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant project on various applications of cover crops in livestock operations.

Approximately 24 people attended the tour, held in Wadena County, that featured complex cover crop blends. Producers discussed how they are using the covers to build soil health and integrate livestock.

The event began at the farm of Kent and Linda Solberg in Verndale then traveled via a coach bus to the three other farms: Larry Heitkamp’s farm in Sebeka, Dan and Rosie Middendorf’s farm near Verndale, and Marcus Edin’s farm near Staples.

To view all our upcoming on-farm events and field days, click here or view our Events Calendar. Two workshops are scheduled in November – in Redwood Falls on the 12th and Blue Earth on the 13th – as well as a webinar with Dr. Allen Williams on Nov. 6. Watch the website and SFA Connect for details and registration information.

Further, did you know our “Back End of a Cow” t-shirts (like the one I’m wearing in the photo above) are available to purchase online? Visit our online store and get yours today!
Register by Nov. 1 for Early Bird Conference Pricing

Take note: It's October, and Early Bird pricing for both SFA conferences ends Nov. 1. Get the lowest possible rate – see the links below and register today!

The SFA Annual Conference is set for Feb. 13, 2016, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. Register NOW to get the cheapest early bird rate. Members can register for just $35; children 3-12 are just $10; and our Leaders Breakfast will return, too!

- Click here to register for the SFA Annual Conference.

Registration is also open for our third annual Midwest Soil Health Summit, set for Feb. 17-18 at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn. Members save $50, and registering by Nov. 1 guarantees an additional early bird discount. Come find out why the MSHS is often described by attendees as "the best conference I've attended" and why twice-keynote Gabe Brown said, "That's why I love coming to this conference, it's all about farmer-to-farmer networking."

- Click here to register for the SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit.

Executive Director's Note

I hope you have been reading, as I have, the great series of articles by Jeff Meitrodt of the StarTribune on farm safety and accidents.

Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in the U.S., despite dramatic improvements in implement and tractor safety features in the last three decades. All farmers are subject to these important farm safety issues, but those who choose to use older equipment need to pay special attention.

Much of the equipment on our farm is of the "older" variety. Some of these implements were never equipped with safety features; some that were had safety features removed or disabled long before I came upon them. I can relate to many SFA members on whose farms I've been or who have told me what they are using for equipment. New and beginning farmers often purchase older equipment just to get started.

There is no amount of precaution that should be considered "overboard" when it comes to farm safety. We've all heard the horror stories, but most of us never think it will happen to us. Some families who have had a severe farm accident have made little or no changes, rather simply assuming, "That's farming for ya ..."

The definition of sustainable includes sustaining the health of the farm workers. Farm injuries or death due to improper safety precautions are not sustainable. Read the articles. As harvest comes on this fall, stop and think, take the extra walk around the combine before getting in to back up, double check, triple check. Please.
Farm Skills Diary: Practical Knowledge Already Absorbed

By Cassi Dutcher • Farm Skills 101 Student

The first weekend of this fall's semester of Deep Roots Farm Skills 101 was stacked with practical skills. We spent time building fences out of the most efficient materials for rotational and multi-species grazing as well as removed outdated fencing.

Our carpentry skills portion of the weekend was designed to be useful for those of us who have virtually no skills, and was still appropriate for students well-versed in woodworking. As a bonus we were able to build and take a home a sawhorse (that's me building mine above).

We extensively discussed and observed classes of animals, and learned how to choose animals to achieve our farming goals. The considerable time we spent handling the animals allowed us to become familiar with animal husbandry techniques such as hoof-trimming and temperature-taking, among others.

In addition to the list of tangible skillsets necessary for farming, we enjoyed outright encouragement to farm, which is an experience always relished by a beginning farmer. The socializing that takes place during all of the learning makes for a dynamic and fun environment that makes me very excited to return in a week!

Vote Now for 2016 Annual Conference Session Topics

A founding concept of SFA is that there is wisdom in the community, so YOU will help to determine and lead the sessions, which will include casual but focused networking conversations on topics that you choose. Using an online voting system, SFA members choose session topics; we will analyze the data and create the schedule around your wishes.

To enter your topic ideas and vote using our system, visit our Annual Conference homepage.

Here are the current leading vote-getters:

- Growing Fruits Organically in a Northern Climate
- Farm Power Primer: Machinery Options, Operation and Maintenance
- Beyond the Farmer's Market: Marketing Alternatives for the Small and Mid-Sized Producer
- Know Before You Buy: What to Look/Out for When Considering a Property for a New Farm
SFA Accepting Winter Internship Applications

SFA is offering internship positions for winter, 2015-16, in conjunction with our two February events: The SFA Annual Conference and the Midwest Soil Health Summit. These internships will involve at-home, non-residency work collaborating with one of the event coordinators, plus onsite 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.

Click here for more information.

Blueberry and High Tunnel Production Tour

SFA Central Chapter is sponsoring a Blueberry and High Tunnel Production Tour from 9 to 11 a.m. Oct. 16 at Redfern Gardens Produce, 18298 270th St, Sebeka.

Join us for an educational tour of Redfern Gardens Produce with Kathy Connell and learn about a 3-year project studying the effect of mulches and soil amendments on blueberry production as part of a Greenbook and MDA Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant project. Learn what worked and didn't work. The event will also look at high tunnel production for in-ground lettuce and peas, sharing time-saving tips and best practices learned over 30 years of experience growing vegetables.

Registration begins Sept. 29 at www.sfa-mn.org/central; check-in begins at 8:45 a.m. Oct. 16.

Information: central@sfa-mn.org or Lisa at 320.309.0746.

Deep Roots Deep Winter Greenhouse Course Sold Out


But if you were hoping to register and missed out this time, don’t worry – we will announce more classes as soon as the details are available. Keep watching SFA Connect and our Deep Roots homepage for details on this and all our short courses, as well as an upcoming announcement on the Spring 2016 semester of Farm Skills 101.

Grazing Management Focus at Stockmens’ Workshop

The Northwestern Stockmens Association is hosting a winter workshop featuring Neil Dennis and Gene Goven on improving profits through grazing management from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Nov. 21 at Ralph Engelstad Arena in Thief River Falls.

Topics include pros and cons of high stock density grazing, methods to monitor success, winter grazing, improving soil health for increased forage production, and more.

To register, send a check ($50 for NWSA members, $75 nonmembers) to NWSA Winter Workshop C/O Dana Didrikson, 28243 County Rd 4, Badger, MN 56714. Info: 218.689.1480.
Organic Farmers: Weigh In on National Survey

Several organic farm groups, recognizing certified organic's growth and growing prominence in the marketplace, have discussed the need for a more effective and clear voice for organic farmers. We believe now is the time that farmers, who are at the core of this success, establish a focused and strong voice. Please complete this short 10 minute survey to tell us your thoughts about a national effort to organize organic farmers and identify issues important to you.

Contact Kate Mendenhall, kate.mendenhall@gmail.com, 585-944-2503 for more information and how to be part of the larger discussion. Paper surveys are available to those without access to the web.

Check This Out

FoodTank recently profiled SFA in an interview with Communications and Membership Coordinator Jason Walker (and published a great photo from Lakeside Prairie Farm, taken by former SFA staffer Bobby Wenner). Read it here.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2015 Annual Conference, held Feb. 14, 2015, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. To learn more about Crystal, visit her website.
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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