Online Voting Ends Soon – Now’s the Time to Help Determine Sessions at 2014 Annual Conference

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're asking you, our members, to help determine session topics at the Annual Conference. Using this online application we've received over 3,000 votes on a variety of topics – from root cellaring to cover cropping, fence management to weed control strategies.

But we can't take votes forever, and the deadline for session topic voting is Oct. 10. Reason is, we must now take the voting results and coordinate the Conference schedule accordingly – and identify session leaders and experts to help guide the discussion.

And voting is unlimited until the deadline – the more votes, the better we can tailor the sessions. It's incredibly easy and kinda fun. Click here to vote! Or, for a video tutorial on voting, click here.

As of Oct. 5, the top vote-getting topics (and therefore likely sessions at the Annual Conference):

- Root cellars (this topic is chosen a whopping 81 percent of the time it's a choice)
- Garlic disease and issues updates (80 percent)
- Integrating crop and livestock production (74)
- Weed control strategies (71)
- Farm-scale permaculture (70)
- Innovative cover cropping (70)

Annual Conference registration is open, too, 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-
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 unpredictable market, or a myriad of other factors.

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.

Executive Director's Note

For the last 20-30 years, SFA and its sister organizations in Minnesota and Upper Midwest have been diligently working to change the face of agriculture. We've sought to keep small and mid-sized family farms in business, we've fostered the local food movement and assisted in the rapid increase in farmer's markets across the region. At the very least, water and soil are on the minds of many more today than they were a generation ago. This is all great work, great accomplishment.

Thank you to everyone who has joined in the effort and who is or has been a financial supporter of SFA and the Sustainable Agriculture Movement.

I think we can all agree, there's more to be done. We cannot rest on our laurels. In the past 20 years, we've seen GMO crops go from 0% of our food supply to nearly 90% for corn, and over 90% for soybeans. There are fewer mid-sized family farms, and more acres of crops and more animals are being raised by industrial methods than ever before. Government crop insurance programs have the (maybe) unintended consequence of driving land costs so high that new and beginning farmers simply struggle to get a foothold in the business. Meanwhile, regardless of the cause, our climate is changing with such potentially deleterious effects that some significant work must be done NOW to prepare for the worst case scenario, lest we embitter future generations.

Over the past 4 years, SFA has become a viable partner in the Sustainable Agriculture
Movement. We are leading the Farmer-to-Farmer Networking conversation, and we are bringing soil health-building agroecology models to the Upper Midwest in a big way, making the adoption of these models apparent and reachable goals. Soil health building as a focus for the future of agriculture can and will be the distinguishing factor dividing productive practices and destructive practices.

We are not playing games. We've got some very important work ahead of us. Now is the time to be involved.

If you want to see the face of agriculture change in the next 20 years, then join us. That's where we are going. We'd love to have you come along.

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.

And the sooner your business or organization signs up, the sooner it can take advantage of those discounts at our upcoming Annual Conference on Feb. 8 in St. Joseph and our Midwest Soil Health Summit on Feb. 19-20 in Alexandria. Exhibitor and sponsor registration for those two conferences is also now open, and business members can receive up to a 20 percent discount on sponsor fees at those events.

We've already seen great interest in both conferences despite them being months away. You probably already know the SFA Annual Conference is the premier farmer-to-farmer networking event in the upper Midwest. But now there's also SFA's new Midwest Soil Health Summit, where we've lined up speakers like Gabe Brown of Brown's Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D., as well as other soil health experts like Wendy Taheri and Kent Solberg. The Midwest Soil Health Summit will put Minnesota on the cutting edge of soil health education and will draw a diverse group of farmers from all over the upper Midwest.

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.

SFA to Host New Conference: Midwest Soil Health Summit
Registration is now open for SFA's new conference: The Midwest Soil Health Summit, to be held Feb. 19-20, 2014, at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria. The Summit will convene 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 the health of your soil.

The keynote speaker will be Gabe Brown of Brown's Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D. Brown is a pioneer in diverse cover cropping, having used no-till techniques for two decades. His family ranch encompasses 5,400 acres, all managed sustainably and with the goal of building ideal soil health conditions.

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.

Cost is $100 for current SFA members and $150 for non-members (Note: When registering, SFA members must choose the "discount" option and enter the code that was sent in a members-only email). If you wish to join SFA and receive the discount code for $50 off registration, click this link to visit our Join page. Once you join SFA, a discount code will be emailed to you.

To register or learn more about becoming an exhibitor or sponsor at the Midwest Soil Health Summit, click here. The Midwest Soil Health Summit is in addition to SFA's Annual Conference, which is scheduled for Feb. 8 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph.

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."

### Healthy Foods Summit Set at Minnesota Arboretum

Let's take the adage "You are what you eat" a step further: "Your world is what you eat."

This year's two-day Healthy Foods Summit, annually co-hosted by the University of Minnesota's Healthy Foods/Healthy Lives Institute and Landscape Arboretum, will focus on food and the environment: the impact of climate and environmental changes on food production and, conversely, the impact of food production on the environment.

The event is Oct. 14-15 – the first day focuses on the latest research on the worldwide impact of climate change on food production, while the second day will highlight how individuals and communities in Minnesota are lowering their impact on the environment by modifying food system practices.

More information and registration: [Click here.](#)