SFA Pasture Profitability Field Day Set for Sept. 29; Other Grazing Education Events Planned This Fall

SFA has three grazing-focused workshops coming up in the next month or so, continuing our commitment to grass-fed livestock production.

The first is a Pasture Profitability Field Day at 8:30 a.m. Sept. 29 near Wadena, where attendees will tour two farms and glean expert advice on pasture-based livestock farming. The event begins at Ivan and Dayle Reinke’s farm at 62619 285th St, off County Road 75 just south of Wadena. Kent Solberg, SFA Livestock and Grazing Specialist, will present on pasture-based profit opportunities for beef producers, followed by a presentation on stockpiled forages for fall grazing and outwintering techniques by the Reinkes and Jeff Duchene, NRCS Grazing Specialist.

The group will caravan to lunch at Harvest Thymes Bistro in Wadena, then head to Tom Bilek’s farm for a session by Bilek on cover-crop uses for beef producers. The field day should wrap up around 3:30; Cost is $10, which includes lunch. Click this link to visit our registration page. For more information, contact Kent Solberg at 218.445.7580 or sevenpinesfarmandfence@gmail.com.

Next is another Pasture Profitability tour Oct. 6 in Edgerton at the farm of Bob Schelhass. Planned is a pasture walk and discussion about forages and direct marketing of beef. Check the next edition of SFA Connect and our SFA Facebook page for more information about registration for this tour.

Finally, SFA is sponsoring a farming workshop for war veterans on the benefits of draft animals from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 20 at Central Lakes College Ag Center, Staples. The event hopes to help returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans get involved in farming, and demonstrations include horse farming methods and other opportunities for working with draft animals. Iraq war veteran Mike Sams will lead a tour of his farm nearby and will deliver a keynote address. There will also be a hands-on interactive session for the aspiring farmers to assess their goals and dreams, as well as a beginning farmer resource trade show. Lunch is provided, and the event is free for veterans and their families. For registration details and more information on this event, visit the SFA Facebook page or contact Kent Solberg at 218.445.7580 or sevenpinesfarmandfence@gmail.com.
Executive Director’s Note

By John Mesko

Farmer-to-Farmer. That’s SFA. We are the original Farmer-to-Farmer Network™ in Minnesota, and now increasingly, in the Midwest.

Our Mission Statement has been centered on the development of our Farmer-to-Farmer Network™ for years, and we are programming on that mission.

Here’s how we do it: While membership in SFA is open to all, and the benefits of membership are shared by farmers and non-farmers alike, the core of our efforts are centered on farms, farming and most importantly, farmers. Our board is made up of mostly farmers, our staff members are mostly farmers, and our programs are primarily led by, taught by, and attended by farmers.

SFAs 9 regional chapters are the backbone of our Farmer-to-Farmer Network™. Through our chapters, we conduct diverse, locally relevant programming and networking across all of Minnesota as well as the Dakota’s, Iowa and Wisconsin. Our chapters hold large, state-wide events, such as the Harvest Festival in Duluth and the MN Garlic Festival in Hutchinson. These events are attended by thousands of Minnesotans every year, and are the place where farmers get together with other farmers; networking, growing, learning. Additionally, our chapters hold smaller meetings throughout the year where members come together, learn, discuss, plan and engage with each other around the topics of sustainability, the environment, public policy, as well as the technical aspects of farming sustainably, such as: weed control, grazing techniques, season extension and the like.

In addition to the work done in and through SFA’s chapters, we hold state-wide programs like our Annual Conference in February each year. Next year, the conference will be a 2 day affair in Chaska, at the MN Landscape Arboretum on February 15 and 16. We are excited this year to host specific networking sessions around various sustainable agriculture topics. Look for more details in SFA Connect in the coming weeks.

We also host educational events like the Pasture Profitability Workshops that are mentioned in this newsletter. On September 29, we’ll be in the Wadena area, and on October 6, we’ll be in the Edgerton area, with programs to help grazers fo all types learn effective ways to increase profitability from their grazing operations. Sessions like these are generally designed and delivered by farmers, and are often on SFA member farms.

SFA recognizes that farms without consumers are isolated islands that really will have no lasting impact on agricultural sustainability in the future. To that end, we have developed a number of programs that are geared toward engaging consumers in our Farmer-to-Farmer Network™. The New Crops Project is one that is rapidly addressing the gaps in our local food system where producers and consumers can come together, meeting demand, and developing new markets.

There is a great deal of excellent work going on in sustainable agriculture by a multitude of organizations. SFA is connected and working with these folks as well. Look for more information on these connections soon. Safe harvest, everyone!

Chapter Update: Southeast Chapter

By Edgar Hansgen • Chapter Coordinator and State Board Member

SFA EVENTS

Annual Conference:
Sat., Feb. 16, 2013
Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, Chaska

SFA WORK

Organic Certification Cost Share Seeking Applicants

Produce Growers: "Pack 'N Cool" Mobile Refrigeration Plans Available

Organic Farm Report Shows Fairly Strong Performance

AWA Calls for Animal Husbandry Grant Proposals

MDA Has $1 Million for State’s Livestock Farmers

Fall Harvest Event for Women in Sustainable Ag

SUPPORT SFA

Join SFA

Give to SFA

Meat Processing
The Northeast Regional Correctional Facility has a meat processing plan that
The Southeast Chapter is still alive and looking forward to an active season ahead. We started a program on soils last year but a really early spring ended it before completion. We will finish it this year, I hope! The board will meet soon, date unknown, to plan activities for this fall and winter. If you have any ideas, please call me at 507.932.4219 as they will be appreciated.

We need two new board members, ones that would like to become more active. I really do appreciate the two that are really helpful: Ray Nelson and Roy Michaelis. We also have Lonnie Dietz as our past chairperson. Thanks, guys.

Energized Fence Strategies for Grazers Seminar Set

Attend a fencing seminar Oct. 13 in Fergus Falls led by SFA’s 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 seminar will run from noon to 3 p.m. Oct. 13 at the M-State campus in Fergus Falls. Cost is $15 per person and includes a local foods lunch. Please register by Oct. 9 by contacting Marci King at 218.736.1625 or marci.king@minnesota.edu.

The workshop is sponsored by SFA, Sustainable Food Production and the Minnesota Dairy Initiative.

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.

Photo Contest Winners Revealed: Bringing the Cuteness

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

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panel of distinguished judges, gets an SFA T-shirt. What kind of photos are we looking for? Simply anything related to sustainable agriculture. 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 I'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.

Now, for the winners: First up is Ivan Reinke, who sent this photo of his son, Conrad, moving chickens from brooder to mobile pasture pens.

And since we didn't get around to naming a winner for August, here's the other winner: David Weinand sends this shot of his daughter, Miriam, walking in a field.
Congratulations David and Ivan!

Readers, send your photos to jason@sfa-mn.org and join the contest.

Registration Open for Farm Succession & Estate Planning Session in Victoria

SFA and our friends at Renewing the Countryside are hosting another Farm Transitions workshop, this time from 4 to 7 p.m. Tues., Sept. 25, at The Lowry Nature Center at the Carver Park Reserve in Victoria.

This workshop will provide an overview of the critical issues and opportunities farmers and agricultural landowners need to consider as they age. It includes practical information and strategies to help farm families and agricultural landowners to begin to develop a plan that will help make the future easier for themselves and their families.

A panel of financial and farm succession professionals, including attorneys and financial planners, will discuss an array of topics related to planning for the future and transitioning the farm including financial planning, estate planning, insurance issues, and tax implications. Information on farmland preservation, land trusts and easements will also be covered. There will be plenty of time for questions and answers with the experts.

The cost is $15 for the first member of the family and just $10 for each additional family member. The fee includes a light dinner. Please register here by Sept 20th – or call Brett at 612.910.7601. Email questions to brett@rtcinfo.org.

This workshop is made possible through a grant from the USDA Risk Management Agency and...
Nursery Seeks Grower to Supply Pumpkins, Christmas Trees

Squire House Gardens & Nursery, a small gift, home decor, and outdoor goods shop in Afton, Minn., is seeking a grower to furnish pumpkins and/or Christmas trees for our fall and holiday season. The nursery is seeking sustainably grown, preferably organic products. This is our first season carrying these items and are happy to negotiate a reasonable arrangement for both grower and buyer.

Please contact Libby Wyrum at 612.867.0854 or via email at libertywyrum@gmail.com.

Bossy Acres Seeking Land Rental Agreement

Bossy Acres is a USDA Certified Organic diversified vegetable farm operation run by SFA members Karla Pankow and Elizabeth Millard that will be in its second season for 2013. The farm runs a 50-member CSA program and sells through various channels such as farmers markets, co-ops, and small cafes/restaurants.

We are seeking a land rental agreement for 2-3 tillable acres that are either certified organic or have not been sprayed for a minimum of 3 years.

Optimally, we are interested in serving as an incubator farm on an established organic vegetable farm with access to greenhouse space, irrigation, plowing/cultivating equipment, cooler space, etc. This will allow us, as beginning farmers, to establish further experience and education as we continue to save for our own equipment and farm.

We are also open to renting out an entire farm unit so we welcome transitioning farmer situations, as well.

Contact bossy-acres@hotmail.com for more information.

Improving Soil Health Focus of Upcoming Conference

Improving soil health for greater profitability is the focus of a special video conference scheduled next month at seven locations around Minnesota. Farmers, certified crop advisers, natural resource professionals and others involved in production agriculture are encouraged to attend “Restoring the Soil Resource: Insuring for Resiliency and Profits” and learn how to build soil health for greater profits and long term resiliency.

The conference will be from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sept. 21 as state-of-the-art video conferencing technology will connect panelists, speakers and participants who attend the workshop at locations in Morris, Rochester, St. Paul, Lamberton, Staples, Crookston and Cloquet.

Registration deadline is Sept. 18. The fee is $45 and includes lunch and handout materials. An early registration savings of $10 applies to those who register by Sept. 7. To register, click here or contact Julia Ahlers Ness at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

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 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 can contact Joan Benjamin, Associate Regional Coordinator and Farmer Rancher Grant Program Coordinator, at jbenjami@umn.edu or 573-681-5545 or 800-529-1342.

'Farmers' Guide to Organic Contracts' Now Available

Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG) is pleased to announce the release of a comprehensive and much-anticipated publication, the Farmers' Guide to Organic Contracts, written to help farmers make informed decisions at every stage of the contract relationship (available for free download at www.flaginc.org).

The organic sector uses written contracts at a much higher rate than the conventional agricultural sector. However, until now, organic farmers had little independent, reliable legal information available to them when presented with - or when proposing - a marketing contract for organic crops, dairy, livestock, or other organic farm products.

This new resource for the organic community can help organic farmers evaluate, negotiate, and manage contract agreements with buyers of organic farm products.

The Farmers' Guide to Organic Contracts is accessible on FLAG's website and can be downloaded free of charge. Hard copies can be ordered here.

Fiber Farm Tour to Celebrate Sustainable Fiber, Animals

Dedicated to the promotion of sustainable fiber, fiber animals, and fiber art and artists, a Sheep & Fiber Farm Tour event is set from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on both Oct. 6 and 7 in southeast Minnesota. The tour, which spans Winona, Fillmore and Olmsted counties, includes four farms that will have Heritage-breed wool sheep of Shetland, Gotland, Lincoln, Leister Longwools, Romney, Merino and CVM. Also on the tour are Angora rabbits, Alpacas, llamas, and Angora goats. Discussions will be held on raising Heritage breeds and other fiber animals. Other demonstrations include weaving, spinning, felting, carding and other fiber uses.

Admission is free. For information, visit www.fiberfarmtour.com, email muellers@acegroup.cc or call 507.896.2354.

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 or 651-201-6012.

Produce Growers: “Pack ‘N Cool” Mobile Refrigeration

N.C. State University's Plants for Human Health Institute (PHHI) has developed a new mobile cooling unit for farmers. The 40-square-foot refrigerated trailer – called the “Pack ‘N Cool” – is designed to keep fruits and vegetables at ideal temperatures during transport to and from...
farmers markets or as they’re harvested in farm fields. The Pack ‘N Cool unit combines the mobility of a cargo trailer with the refrigeration capabilities of a commercial cooler.

The model unit cost around $3,400 to construct, including a new cargo trailer priced at $1,500 (a pre-owned trailer can reduce costs). Construction guidelines, step-by-step photos and a sample budget are available for free on the Plants for Human Health Institute website.

Organic Farm Report Shows Fairly Strong Performance

A new report issued by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) shows that 2011 was generally a good year for certified organic crop producers in the state and somewhat challenging for organic dairy farms, although there was a high degree of variability across farm types and sizes. The 2011 Minnesota Organic Farm Performance report summarizes financial data reported by 61 certified organic farmers, for both whole farm and for individual cropping and dairy enterprises. It also includes historical data for the four previous years.

For key financial measures, such as rate of return on assets, rate of return on equity, and liquidity, organic farms performed, on average, in the acceptable to strong range. Average and median net farm income were higher for crop farms in 2011 compared to 2010, but dairy profits declined, likely due in large part to feed and forage prices that climbed throughout the year. The 45-page report can be viewed here.

AWA Calls for 2012-2013 Good Husbandry Grant Proposals

Animal Welfare Approved, the only certification program and food label for pasture-raised meat, dairy and eggs, is announcing a call for proposals for its 2012-2013 Good Husbandry Grants. Now in its fifth year, the Good Husbandry Grants program has funded over one hundred projects across the country to improve farm animal welfare. Certified farmers and those who have submitted an application for AWA certification may apply for up to $5,000 towards projects such as mobile housing, breeding stock, and on-farm processing equipment. Slaughter plants working with or seeking to work with AWA farmers are also eligible for funding.

The funding priorities for this year’s cycle include improved genetics, increased outdoor access, welfare improvements in the slaughter process and non-lethal predator control. As pasture- and range-based management is a fundamental requirement of AWA certification, a primary goal of this grant program is to facilitate the growth and success of high-welfare, pasture-based systems.

Farmers and slaughter plants interested in applying should click here for Guidelines, FAQ and an application. Contact Grants Coordinator Emily Lancaster at Emily@AnimalWelfareApproved.org or (202) 618-4497 with any questions.

MDA Has $1 Million in Funds for State’s 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 operations.

Qualifying producers would be reimbursed ten percent of the first $500,000 of investment, with a minimum investment of $4,000. Qualifying expenditures include the purchase, construction, or improvement of buildings or facilities for the production of livestock, and the purchase of fencing as well as feeding and waste management equipment. Producers who suffered a loss due to a natural disaster or unintended consequence may also apply. The grant will not pay for livestock or land purchases or for the cost of debt refinancing.

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.