Gretchen Boyum Lends Diverse Perspective as SFA's New Volunteer Coordinator for Annual Conference

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

SFA is proud to announce the hiring of a new Volunteer Coordinator for our Annual Conference, Gretchen Boyum. Gretchen and her husband, Pat Crepps, operate Boyum Farms near Battle Lake with children Rorik and Agneta and raise vegetables, specialty items like popcorn and organic hops, and pastured eggs, poultry and pork.

Gretchen comes from a long line of farmers...
and the family is currently operating the homestead that her great-grandparents settled; Crepps is a Fargo native and graduate of the Sustainable Food Production Program now operated under the SFA umbrella.

"After graduating high school, I attended Minnesota State Moorhead where I studied painting and art history," Gretchen said. "I then moved to San Francisco with Pat in 2002. While there we both worked in the food industry and became interested in the the local foods movement, and all the amazing restaurants in the Bay Area – thats where we initially started talking about coming back to the farm."

Gretchen got a graduate degree in Museum Studies and worked at several galleries and museums around the country, but soon decided the pull of family was too great.

"I found a job at an arts nonprofit and we moved back to Battle Lake in 2009," she said. "In 2010, Pat started in the Sustainable Foods Program at M State Fergus Falls. In 2011 we started our farming operation on the family farm, and worked with another SFP alum to start the farmers market in Battle Lake. We are now in our third year of farming and the Battle Lake Farmers Market is starting to take off."

Sue Wika, SFA stalwart member and Sustainable Food Production Program instructor, said Boyum and Crepps filled a vital community need by starting the market in Battle Lake.

"Here come a couple of fresh faces who see the untapped potential of a small resort town and they get a nice market organized in record time," Wika said.

Boyum replaces Karen Couné, the outgoing volunteer coordinator who served SFA well for years. Karen's energy and dedication were a real boon to SFA's Annual Conference, and we wish her all the best. Thanks, Karen.

**SFA Bus Tour Highlights Several Cover-Cropping Farmers**

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications Coordinator

Producers got a glimpse of several farms taking advantage of cover cropping techniques during an SFA bus tour Sept. 7 in Central Minnesota.

The bus tour, held as part of SFA's GrazeFest series of grass-based livestock events, began at Larry Heitkamp's Yellow Rose Organics farm near Sebeka. Heitkamp applies complex cover crop mixes in conjunction with a diverse crop rotation and custom grazing dairy heifers to improve soil health on his farm.

The tour then visited Midd-Minn Dairy owned and operated by Dan and Rosie Middendorf north of Verndale, and the Marcus Edin farm near Staples. At Midd-Minn, Dan Middendorf discussed how he is incorporating cover crops into his forage and cropping system for his organic dairy on both irrigated ground and dry land crop fields. At the Edin farm, the tour viewed both a spring and summer planted cover crop mix.

"My calves are at least 100 pounds ahead of last year," said Edin, crediting his success partially to the spring cover crop mix which he grazed earlier this year. The group was impressed by the growth of the summer mix on a sand loam site, despite dry conditions since planting.

"Cover crops are a tool and not a silver bullet," said Kent Solberg, SFA's Livestock and Grazing Coordinator who organized the bus tour. "Complex cover crop mixes of eight or more species have been highly effective in improving soil health. However, they are not an instant fix. Rebuilding soil health takes time as cover crops work best in conjunction with a diverse crop rotations, minimizing soil disturbance and integration of livestock into the rotation."
"Each field has its own story and must be managed accordingly. It's not a one-size-fits-all program and that's part of the purpose of this project - to demonstrate the application of complex cover crop blends to match the needs of individual producers and fields."

This tour highlighted the first of three years of a Minnesota Department of Agriculture Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant. Funding for the project and the field day is also provided through MDA's Minnesota Dairy Initiative program, the National Wildlife Federation, and in cooperation with NRCS. Additional tours are planned for 2014 and 2015.

"Soil health is about stronger profits for your farm." Solberg said. "We've been trained to believe what the crop looks like above ground is important. But what is going on at or below the soil surface is where there is money to be made. By improving soil health and being able to reduce inputs, farmers can keep more money in their pockets. The potential for individual farm profitability and the ability of this agronomic model to improve life and water quality downstream from our farms is why I'm excited about soil health."

Learn more from Solberg and other soil health rock stars at SFA's [Midwest Soil Health Summit](#) on Feb. 19-20 in Alexandria.

### 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.

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](#).
Executive Director’s Note

One of the topics being suggested for our 2014 Annual Conference is Preparations for Climate Change in Agriculture, and I’d like to hear from you.

A major international report on climate science will be published this coming Friday morning, September 27th, and leading experts on climate change will gather in Dublin, Ireland later that day to give their reaction to the report and discuss its implications for Ireland. The fifth report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the UN body for the assessment of climate change – will be the most comprehensive report on climate science published in recent years. A summary of the report will be released by the IPCC at an event in Stockholm, Sweden, on Friday at 9am.

Speaking in advance of Friday’s event, Professor John Sweeney, one of Ireland’s leading climate scientists said: “The new IPCC report will provide much greater regional detail on climate change impacts than we have had in the past. It will have dedicated chapters on sea level changes, the carbon cycle, and climate phenomena such as monsoons and El Niño. “Its publication is long-awaited: it has been seven years since the IPCC published their last report. This new report is expected to provide more concrete scientific evidence than ever before that the climate is changing under human influence.”

I’d like to hear from you regarding your views of climate change and global warming. Will you please consider taking a very short survey? It will help us better understand your needs and interests.

We do ask you opinion here once in a while, and it is very helpful! Our last survey was about the use of smart phones and other mobile devices at the SFA Annual Conference. You can see those results here, and thanks!

SFA Conference: Register Now, Topics Tally Update

Registration is open for the 2014 SFA Annual Conference, to be held Feb. 8 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn., 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-to-farmer showcase. Admission for children ages 3-12 is just $10, while kids under 3 are free.

Using this online voting system, SFA members can vote on session topics; we’ll analyze the data and adjust parts of the schedule around your wishes. Voting is unlimited – the more votes, the better we can tailor the sessions. You can also vote on our Annual Conference homepage.

As of Sept. 19, the top vote-getting topics are:

- Root cellars
- Integrating crop and livestock production
- Weed control strategies
- Fences - building, maintaining
- How do we make small scale, diversified pork production sustainable?
- Easy pig handling procedures/equipment
Innovative cover cropping  
Farm-scale permaculture  
Adapting our farms to the changing climate  
Garlic disease and issues updates

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 Arrowood 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.

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.

Information will come soon on how to be a vendor or exhibitor at this premier conference for farmers and producers across the spectrum - conventional, sustainable, organic. If you would like more information or to reserve a spot in advance, please contact Jerry Ford, jerry@sfa-mn.org.

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.

Bee Expert Dr. Marla Spivak Leads SFA Crow River Event

SFA Crow River Chapter is hosting a free event, "Bees and Pollinators," with Dr. Marla Spivak at 7 p.m. Sept. 28 at Buffalo United Methodist Church, 609 8th St NW, Buffalo.

Co-author of six books on bees and pollinators, including the definitive "Beekeeping in Northern Climates", Dr. Spivak (right) is an entertaining and outspoken advocate for honey bees, native bees and bumblebees. If you’re not already convinced that these insects are of great importance, you will be by the end of this colorful and moving presentation.

After Dr. Spivak's presentation, attendees will enjoy a period of social time with local foods.

This event is an SFA collaboration with Local Roots Food Co-op and Saturday Awakenings Concert Series.

SFA Supporting Sustainable Food Production Program

SFA has stepped forward to support an award-winning beginning farmer educational program, Sustainable Food Production, which formerly was a part of M State Fergus Falls. The Sustainable Food Production program will continue as a program under the SFA umbrella.
Sustainable Food Production is a much-needed beginning-farmer curriculum that emphasizes all three tenets of sustainability, plus provides extensive skills training. A unique aspect of SFP is its commitment to community development and mentoring, a perfect fit with SFA's Farmer-to-Farmer Network.

Instructors are all farmer-educators: Dr. Sue Wika, Tom Prieve, and Kent Solberg. Each possesses both real-world experience and the educational background to provide comprehensive sustainable food production education.

If you are interested in this program, visit our Sustainable Food Production homepage, fill out the form and an instructor will contact you.

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.

Enter SFA Photo Contest for Chance at Free 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 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.

August's winner was this tranquil shot from Georgette Gunderson of Waconia:
Don’t Miss the Urban Agriculture Bus Tour

Register now for the fifth Urban Agriculture Bus Tour, which will be held Friday, Sept. 27 in Minneapolis. The tour will be from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and begin and end at Harriet Brewing, 3036 Minnehaha Ave. Cost is $15 and includes lunch.

The theme, "What happens because of urban agriculture activities," will explore what changes happen in a community where urban agriculture activities occur. The tour stops have seen changes in employment, nutrient flow, policy, physical activity, eating habits, community engagement and much more. The tour will focus on urban agriculture sites in Minneapolis like Beez Kneez Honey House, McKinley Community CSA, California St Farm, Project Sweetie Pie, Gandhi Mahal restaurant and urban farming project, and YEA Corps headquarters.

To register, click here. Tour will occur rain or shine, so please dress according to the weather. Contact Betsy Wieland with questions at 612-624-7119 or eliza003@umn.edu.

Mindful Generations Presenting Permaculture 101 Class

Mindful Generations, a nonprofit group of educators who bring practical skills and appropriate technology to farmers in developing countries, is hosting an intensive class, Permaculture 101, specially designed for the people who want to learn and practice permaculture and still work their regular jobs. The class is taught by experienced permaculturists that teach both locally and abroad.

Students will gain insight to a new perspective, new vision, empowering you to form better solutions and create a better, holistic plans for the near future for generations to come.

Classes begin in Minneapolis, off Portland Ave. weekdays, and move to SFA member Catherine Rose's Nature's Nest Farm, located just outside of Delano on the weekend. It is a hands-on course with many practical demonstrations.

The class runs Oct. 3-9 and Dec. 8-14. Educators are Victor Suarez, Rose, Dan Peterson and Andrea Holker, along with guest speakers. All proceeds go toward bringing permaculture to teach farmers around the world.

For more information or to register, visit www.mindgens.org, email membership@mindgens.org or call 612.759.1478.
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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