SFA Harvest Festival Celebrates 19th Year of Connecting Producers & Consumers

By Jean Sramek • Lake Superior Chapter Coordinator

The Harvest Festival, a project of SFA’s Lake Superior Chapter, is the premier event of its kind in the region. The Duluth-Superior area is rich in community events and festivals, but what sets Harvest Fest apart is its focus on sustainable food systems and bringing producers and consumers together. It’s a fun day, but it’s also a chance to learn and connect.

Food vendors use locally sourced and sustainably grown ingredients whenever possible, along with compostable food containers and utensils. Local artisans’ wares are hand-made. The exhibits tent features a wide range of local and regional organizations whose missions are in sync with that of the Harvest Fest and SFA. And, of course, there’s the region’s best and largest farmers’ market, comprised exclusively of SFA member producers. The Market Basket Raffle will feature a bounty of products chosen from the day’s farmers market vendors, along with a $300 gift certificate to the New Scenic Café; tickets are just $3 or 2/$5 and proceeds go to the LS-SFA.

Among the all-day demonstrations of traditional skills at this year’s event will be the Lake Superior Beekeeping Association. They’re working on “legalizing” beekeeping in the city limits of Duluth, including legislation to establish guidelines for best practice beekeeping (www.duluthbees.org); Ray Lopez and others from the Lake Superior Beekeeping Association will answer questions about this project, as well as show off their enclosed demonstration hive. A few years ago, Duluth City Chickens was the key force behind similar legislation for regulating the raising of chickens within the city limits. Harvest Festival will feature area chicken growers and SFA members Theresa Koenig and Linda Porter demonstrating the use of a “chicken tractor” (moveable chicken coop). The Goat Ladies of the North is a group of about 20 women in the region whose goal is to share their goat-raising knowledge and experience, so that people can have happy, healthy and productive goats. Kids (of all ages) can meet these happy goats in person at the Harvest Festival. SFA member and Goat Lady Barb Adams says, “Goats make sweet, wonderful quantities of milk if they are treated right, and we want to elevate the image of the dairy goat to her rightful status: Queen of the Milkstand.”

Getting kids interested in food, farming, and their environment is something the Harvest Festival has always focused on. This year, the Tomato Man project – which introduces kids to gardening by helping them grow and harvest their own plants – will feature displays, a beanbag “tomato toss” game, and a salsa tasting featuring tomatoes and peppers grown by SFA members Lois and Doug Hoffbauer. Kids can learn about river habitat and health by exploring a floor-sized...
map at the St. Louis River Alliance tent; they’ll also get a chance to make their own hats. St. Louis County 4-H will be on hand with more fun for kids and families, and the Kiwanis of Friendly Duluth will hold their annual Kite Fly, with demonstrations and free kites. And no Harvest Festival would be complete without Maypole Dancing with Terrence Smith.

The live music lineup is of stellar quality and variety this year. Put together by local musician and Beaner’s Central proprietor Jason Wussow, it features the Mark Anderson Trio, singer-songwriter Jen West, and talented youngsters Jack Campbell and the Skeleton Keys. Of course, they’re all local – this is Harvest Festival, after all.

It’s a lot to pack into six hours. We encourage all visitors to have fun, relax, eat, and stop by the LS-SFA info booth to say hello or to join SFA!

Visit the [Harvest Festival homepage](#) or our [Facebook event page](#) to learn more.

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**SFA Pasture Profitability Field Day Set for Sept. 29**

Gain expert advice on pasture-based livestock farming and more during a Pasture Profitability Field Day at 8:30 a.m. Sept. 29 near Wadena. [Click this link to visit our registration page](#).

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 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. For more information, contact Kent Solberg at 218.445.7580 or sevenpinesfarmandfence@gmail.com.

This field day is made possible with help from the Grazing Land Conservation Association, Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council, Sustainable Farming Association Central Chapter, and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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**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 founded on farms, farming and most importantly, farmers. Our board is made up of mostly farmers, our staff are mostly farmers, and our programs are primarily led by, taught by, and attended by farmers!

SFA’s Minnesota Dairy Initiative helps existing and beginning farmers develop profitable dairy operations – particularly organic and/or grass-based dairies.

SFA’s Meat Processing Project is focused on increasing the availability of inspected meat processing capacity in Northern Minnesota. This effort is being led by SFA member farmers.

SFA’s Pasture Project is led by SFA farmer members who are actively grazing beef on their respective farms. The project is focused on increasing the profitability of the broader grass-fed beef market.
In conjunction with Renewing the Countryside, SFAs Farm Transitions Project is helping farmers transition into and out of farming, with a goal of keeping more sustainable farms in production – ensuring more of our wonderful, diverse farmland resources are kept under environmentally friendly production methods.

SFA Farmer Members have a wealth of expertise, experience and wisdom to offer other farmers, as well as our culture as a whole. Being a part of the Farmer-to-Farmer Network™ is putting the “culture” back into agriculture.

**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.

**New Contest: Send Photo for Chance to Win SFA T-shirt**

Who doesn't want to win a free T-shirt, let alone a cool SFA one? Here’s your chance. We’re starting a new contest: Send communications coordinator Jason Walker your photos, and the best each month, chosen by Jason’s eagle eye, gets an SFA T-shirt. As of this writing, I have a few great ones from August, and the winner will be in the next edition of SFA Connect.
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.

Celebrate Summer's End at York Farm's 'Hoe Down 2012'

Come mark the end of the season by putting our “hoes down” at a potluck dinner, barn dance and square dance starting at 6 p.m. Sept. 15 at SFA member Irene Genelin's York Farm, 21161 York Rd, Hutchinson. Enjoy dance calling by Shake These Bones + Guests, polka dance lessons, a bonfire, and lots of friendship.

Bring a potluck dish and beverage of choice, plate, silverware, cup, swimsuit, money for the band, s’more makings, and a tent if you wish to spend the night. Parking is limited, carpooling is encouraged.

RSVP to Irene at igenelin@gmail.com or 612-968-6498. The event is made possible by Natural Foods Co-op of Litchfield, Prairie Drifter Farm, Loon Organics, The Lamb Shoppe, Kalliroe Farm, and Norton Design Studio.

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.

LSP Seeks to Hire Solutions Outreach Specialist

Land Stewardship Project is accepting applications for a full-time salaried position with benefits as part of the Chippewa 10% Project, a joint watershed improvement initiative with the Chippewa River Watershed Project, Pope County SWCD and other project partners. The person filling the "Ag Lands Solutions" position will reach out to farmers and agricultural landowners within the Chippewa River watershed to help them plan the right mix of conservation incentives, production practices and market-based farming enterprises and/or strategies to enhance land stewardship and farm profitability and mitigate environmental and production risks.

An ability to identify resources and connect farmers to existing technical assistance is a key to success in this position. Download the full job description here.

The application deadline for this position is Sept. 7. To apply, please submit a cover letter and resume to: Julia Ahlers Ness Chippewa 10% Project Coordinator Land Stewardship Project 301 State Road, Suite 2, Montevideo, MN 56265 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org.

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.

Public Tour Set at Prairie Horizons Farm

Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings will be hosting a free public farm tour from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sept. 8 at Prairie Horizons Farm near Starbuck. Hosting the tour will be farm owners Mary Jo and Luverne Forbord, who have transitioned from being a conventional dairy farm to a pasture-based beef cattle operation. The Forbords will show firsthand how they are integrating perennial plant systems such as grass and trees into their operation. They will also discuss their establishment of other perennials as well as vegetables.

For more information and to reserve a spot, contact LSP’s Nick Olson at 320-269-1057 or nicko@landstewardshipproject.org.

Saving Your Hometown Grocery Store Workshop

For many rural towns, a locally-owned grocery store or co-op can be an economic mainstay. All too often, these hometown hubs disappear with little fanfare but the effects are widespread. Their absence often forces residents to travel further and leaves fewer options for healthy, locally-grown food.

How can local leaders in rural Minnesota towns keep or attract food retail stores? An upcoming workshop, Saving Your Hometown Grocery Store, will outline sustainable business models for rural grocery stores (including cooperative ownership structures) and help identify a number of financing resources.

The event is 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Sept. 12 at the Initiative Foundation, 405 First St SE, Little Falls. Registration is $25 per person and includes lunch and materials. To register, click here or contact Sharon Gottwalt (320.632.9255, sgottwalt@ifound.org) by Sept. 4.

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.

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.

Elm Creek Stream and Floodplain Research Walk-n-Talk Set

Join Rural Advantage, University of Minnesota, and partners for a 3rd crop walk-n-talk field day from 3 to 5 p.m. Sept. 13 along Elm Creek west of Winnebago. The walk-n-talk will be focusing on research and implementation projects that have occurred along Elm Creek at the Mair Site in Center Creek Township. Attendees will learn about the oxbow re-connection, bank stabilization with the use of wooden logs and perennial plantings, bluff bench construction, cattle/grazing management, and how these practices have increased the plant and animal life in that stretch of Elm Creek. Information: Jill Sackett, UMN Extension/Rural Advantage, 507-238-5449 or sacke032@umn.edu.

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.

Rural Advantage to Hire Local Foods Program Manager

Rural Advantage, a Fairmont-based nonprofit formed in 2003 to promote the connections between agriculture, the environment and rural communities in order to improve ecological health, economic viability and rural vitality, seeks to hire a full-time Local Foods Program Manager.

The primary role will be to help us grow our local foods programming activities in rural south central Minnesota and develop local food systems that include growers through to cafeterias, marketing and enterprise development. This position will manage multiple projects, funded through grants, and coordinate with staff and project partners to meet project goals and Rural Advantage’s nonprofit mission.

Please email cover letter, resume and three references to Linda Meschke, President of Rural Advantage at: linda@ruraladvantage.org or send a hard copy in the mail to Linda Meschke, Rural Advantage, 1243 Lake Avenue, Suite 222, Fairmont, MN 56031. Position is open until filled.

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.

SFA Connect is your bi-weekly link to the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota

The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota 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 of Minnesota (SFA)
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