SFA Annual Conference Registration Now Open

Get your winter planning off to a sustainable start: Registration is NOW OPEN for the SFA Annual Conference, Minnesota's farmer networking showcase set for Feb. 14, 2015, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph.

A founding concept of SFA is that there is wisdom in our farming community. So, just like last year, 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 chose session topics; we will analyze the data and create the schedule around your wishes. Vote on our AC homepage and view the leading session topics.

Again on Saturday morning will be our yearly Leaders Breakfast and SFA Awards ceremony at 7:30 a.m. This event costs just $15 and includes breakfast, a special "State of SFA" address, and the awards ceremony. This is a separately ticketed event from the Annual Conference.

New this year is a special day-before workshop on Deep Winter Greenhouses, from 3 to 5 p.m. Feb. 13, 2015, at Paradox Farm, 11643 State Highway 78, Ashby, MN 56309. Space is capped at 10 registrants for this innovative workshop at Sue Wika and Tom Prieve's farm; the Annual Conference will also include a follow-up session on Deep Winter Greenhouses on Saturday at St. Ben's. There is no discounted registration available for this workshop, which may only be purchased in addition to the SFA Annual Conference. This workshop will definitely sell out, so sign up ASAP.

Also, family programming is returning – admission for children ages 3-12 is just $10 and includes separate programming from Budding Farmers. Children 2 and under are free but will be the responsibility of their parents.

Of course, everything you expect from the SFA Annual Conference will return as well – culinary demonstrations from Mary Jane Miller; a trade show; the end-of-day local food, wine and beer reception; plus plenty of networking, fun and fellowship.

The venue at St. Ben's is a familiar, centrally located one that's easily accessible. Lunch is not included with registration; instead, you'll enjoy a lengthy break, during which, you may eat at St. Ben's, walk to one of the local-foods restaurants in St. Joe, or bring a sack lunch. The idea is to give you the freedom to network at your own pace, and to take advantage of the quaint surroundings.
Register through Sept. 30 at the Early Bird rate of $35/members and $45/nonmembers. SFA members will receive a separate email with discount registration instructions. Only SFA members will receive this separate email.

Vendor/Exhibitor Registration is open as well. Visit our Annual Conference homepage to download the proper form.

See you there!

Executive Director's Note

I’ve been doing a lot of thinking lately on the current state of affairs in Sustainable Agriculture. By some measures, the modern movement is about 25-30 years old. Adulthood by all respects. We’ve come a long way to get to this point. Of course there has always been those farmers who practice sustainability and have been organic since organic was the only way to farm. However, the term “sustainable” and along with it, “sustainable agriculture” have become a part of most people’s every day language. To many, those terms are only slightly more specific in meaning than they were at the outset of our movement.

However, I think most of us can say we “know it when we see it.” Sustainable agriculture is a mindset, its an approach. Admittedly, true sustainability is a near-impossibility to achieve. We all want to see the environment, farm businesses, farm families and our rural communities become more resilient, more productive, and in general, improve over time. By focusing on the principles of sustainability, we can move all of these forward.

SFA, through its members, chapters and collective work has been able to make such an impact in agriculture and in rural communities over the years. We’ve all seen the rapid expansion of farmer’s markets over the last 10 - 15 years. Do more farmer’s markets mean we’ve achieved sustainability? No, not really, but they are an exciting piece to the picture of the future. 25 years ago, no-till corn and soybean production models were in their infancy. In part, through SFAs Farmer to Farmer Network of educational events, no-till agriculture has become commonplace; and improvements to the environment can be evaluated.

Now, we are in the midst of another mass migration “back to the land.” The jury is still out on the relative merits of this latest move. However, with more new and beginning farmers starting sustainably-minded farms, the future bodes well for sustainable agriculture.

In the coming weeks, I hope to explore more aspects of the state of sustainable agriculture. If you have any thoughts, let me know. I’d like to hear lots of perspectives. You can reach me at john@sfa-mn.org.

Thanks

Chapter Update: Lake Agassiz

By Marie Petry • Lake Agassiz Chapter Coordinator
We are moving ahead. On June 18, a couple of Lake Agassiz chapter members met with Jerry Ford, SFA Network Coordinator, to establish our Chapter Organizing Committee. This is the first formal step towards an Annual Meeting next year and voting in a new Board of Directors.

Plans are in the works for a Fall Event in the northern part of Lake Agassiz territory. More information will be coming on this as details are finalized. This will be a great time to connect with fellow sustainable farming neighbors and to lend your voice to our growing chapter.

SFA Chapters: Comment on New Resource Portal

SFA has created a Chapter Resource Portal for chapter coordinators and leaders: Learn how to properly represent the Association in your communications, read our Chapter Resource Guide, download appropriate logos and templates, view your chapter charter and other official SFA documents, and more.

We hope you find this useful and would love to hear your feedback. Check it out, make suggestions and email them to Jerry Ford by Oct. 1 so we can take your suggestions and improve the Portal before your annual chapter meeting.

Students: SFA Scholarships, Internships Available

By Jason Walker • SFA Communications & Membership Coordinator

Thanks to our new SFA Connect subscribers who signed up Aug. 29 at the Sustainability Action! Open House at the University of Minnesota. Kent Solberg and I had a great time meeting scores of students who were interested in sustainability and SFA as well as our Sustainable Food Production Program.

Good luck to all of you in your classes this semester and beyond, and we hope to see you at the SFA Annual Conference in February! Scholarships to attend the conference are available for current students and require a volunteer commitment; for more information email Jerry Ford at jerry@sfa-mn.org.

Also, SFA is accepting applications for Sustainability Conference Internships. These hands-on internships are for late fall and winter 2014/15 and require attendance at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 14 as well as the Midwest Soil Health Summit on Feb. 18-19. Those interested in an application should contact SFA Network Coordinator Jerry Ford at jerry@sfa-mn.org.

Click here to learn more at our internships homepage.

Check This Out

A new SFA Connect feature, “Check This Out” is a section of links to articles and videos chosen by SFA staff that you might enjoy. Consider:

From the National Wildlife Federation, a "New Report: Sustainable Agriculture is a Gold Mine for Rural Entrepreneurs. By reviving an ancient practice—cover crops—American farmers are creating a niche market in Rural America." Click here to read the report.

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2014 Annual Conference, held Feb. 8, 2014, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. To learn more about Crystal, visit her website.
Organic Potato Farm Tour Near Sebeka

Join Larry Heitkamp, Kent Solberg, and the Toxic Taters Coalition for a free organic potato farm tour from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. this Saturday, Sept. 13, at Heitkamp's Yellow Rose Organic Farm.

There are 50,000 acres of potatoes planted in Minnesota every year. And while conventional, chemical-intensive production is the norm on many of these acres, it's not the only way that potatoes can be produced. Organic and sustainable potato production is possible; in fact, Minnesota farmers are already doing it.

Please join the Toxic Taters Coalition to learn more about organic potato production. Heitkamp and Solberg, SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist, will give a tour of an organic potato farm and share information about cover cropping, soil health, insect and disease management, and their efforts to move toward no-till practices. Over lunch, members of the Toxic Taters Coalition will share information about their campaign to protect local communities from pesticide drift from RD Offutt's potato fields.

Directions: From Sebeka, MN, take Hwy 12 East for 7 miles. Turn right (south) on 201st Ave (a dirt road). Go 1/4 mile and take a left into the potato field. We'll have signs up on the road to help you find the right place.

The event is free and lunch is included. Please RSVP to Lex Horan at lex@panna.org or 651.245.1733.

Sheep and Fiber Farm Tour is Oct. 11-12

The Four Annual Sheep & Fiber Farm Tour is set for Oct. 11-12 at five farms as well as Faribault Woolen Mills and two art centers in Southeast Minnesota.

The two-day event will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day and will showcase sustainable natural fibers as well as the animals and farmers who provide it. Sheep, yaks, alpacas, llamas, angora rabbits and goats will be on the tour. Yarn, roving, felt and other fiber products from these animals will be for sale as well as the famous natural fibers products of the Faribault Woolen Mill. Presentations will include natural dying, spinning, weaving, felt machine and needle felting during ongoing demonstrations at the different farms.

Also on the tour will be Janice Arnold, a well-known felt artist who has exhibited her natural fiber work at Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt Museum.
Admission to the farms, mill, presentation and reception is free; there is a fee only for the Janice Arnold workshop.

Register and learn more at www.fiberfarmtour.com.

Organic Bean Field Day at Fernholz Farm

The University of Minnesota and partners have been busy conducting research to aid in improving soybean and dry bean varieties for organic systems. On-farm research plots were planted on the farm of SFA member Carmen Fernholz near Madison, Minn., in 2014. Join the research partners from 1 to 3 p.m. Sept. 19 at a workshop to learn more about the research being conducted and to view the on-farm research plots.

All those interested in organic bean production are welcome to attend. The field day will be held rain or shine and will include some walking. Attendees will meet at the Fernholz farm at 2484 Highway 40, Madison, MN 56256. The farm is near the Mile Marker 15 sign approximately two miles East of Madison on the north side of Highway 40.

For more information, contact Jill Sackett, University of Minnesota Extension 507.389.5541 or sacke032@umn.edu.

MOSES Hosting Two Free Farmer Webinars

The Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service is hosting two free webinars that SFA members may want to check out.

The first, "Financial Analysis Using Your Schedule," is set for 7 p.m. Sept. 9. How financially fit is your farm? This webinar will help you determine its financial strength or vulnerability. Paul Dietmann from Badgerland Financial will show you how to use your tax return in combination with an annual balance sheet to analyze your farm’s profitability and cash flow.

The second, "Evaluating Investments and Operational Changes," is 7 p.m. Sept. 16. Want to purchase new equipment? Thinking of expanding your operation? This webinar will show you the tools you need to evaluate your options. Chris Blanchard of Flying Rutabaga Works offers a down-to-earth approach to help you better understand the economic and other impacts of investments and operational changes

Register and learn more at: http://mosesorganic.org/events/webinars/.

Cover Crops & Soil Health Field Day is Sept. 11

The Southwest Research & Outreach Center will host a Cover Crops & Soil Health Field Day this Thursday, Sept. 11. Featured topics include cover crop integration in corn systems, benefits of soil health and advanced nutrient management, programming assistance for adopting cover crops, hands-on field demonstrations of new equipment for seeding cover crops, and question and answer sessions.

Preregistration is not necessary for this field day. There is no registration fee and lunch will be provided.

Field day registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and the day will conclude shortly after 2 p.m. For more information, call SWROC at 507.752.7372.

Cover Crop Demo, Grazing Field Day in New York Mills

A Cover Crop Demonstration and Grazing System Field Day is planned for 2:30-6 p.m. Sept. 17 at the farm of Tim Volkmann, 58891 County Rd 76, New York Mills. Planned is a walk through of cover crop demonstration plots and pollinator seeding, a rainfall simulator demonstration, and a review of Tim’s grazing system with high-tensile fencing and a pipeline watering system.

The farm is about three miles from Bluffton – take Highway 19 north for 2 1/2 miles and then
Highway 76 west for about 3/4 mile.
This event is free and all are welcome.

**Four-Course Slow Food Harvest Farm Dinner**

Attend the fifth annual Slow Food Harvest Farm Dinner, a benefit for Minnesota Food Association and Slow Food Minnesota, at 2 p.m. Sept. 21 at Big River Farms, 14220 Ostlund Trail N, Marine on St. Croix, Minn.

An afternoon of fun, learning and great food is planned to benefit MFA’s organic farming program for new immigrant and refugee farmers as well as the local food education events of Slow Food Minnesota. The harvest dinner, a four-course meal with wine pairings, will be prepared by local chefs Steven Brown, Joe Hatch-Surisook, Thomas Boehmer and Marshall Paulsen.

Tickets are $95 for Slow Food and MFA members and $125 for nonmembers and guests. 15 and under are $45. Register at [slowfoodmn.org/events.html](http://slowfoodmn.org/events.html), or for more information contact Sara Heger at sfheger@gmail.com or 612.239.8918.

**Registration Open for Food Access Summit**

Registration is open for the Food Access Summit 2014: Organize for Equity, set for Oct. 28-30 at Duluth Entertainment Convention Center.

The Summit will highlight efforts that improve access to healthy food for Minnesotans with limited financial resources and launch the Minnesota Food Charter. In addition, it will provide social policy tools, training and action-oriented ideas to educate and organize participants to support local, state and national efforts to make the food system equitable for all.

Register and learn more at [www.foodaccesssummit.com](http://www.foodaccesssummit.com) or 651-214-2498
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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