Meet Our Newest Networking Group: Upper Midwest Garlic Growers

SFA has formed a new networking group, the Upper Midwest Garlic Growers Group, to link garlic growers for networking, education, and fellowship. The nascent group will be led initially by Jerry Ford and Chris Kudrna, but anyone interested in a leadership position should email jerry@sfa-mn.org.

The first action of the group is to publish on the group’s webpage which members still have garlic to sell. Farmers get lots of emails and calls leading up to planting time, and this could be a place to send folks who are looking to buy. If you still have garlic available, send an email to: Jerry Ford, jerry@sfa-mn.org, stating that you still have garlic available, your contact information, and your website if you have one.

Like all SFA networking groups, the Garlic Growers will have the opportunity to present a session at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 13, 2016, in St. Joseph, Minn. If you have suggestions for topics or would be interested in participating, email Jerry at jerry@sfa-mn.org.

For more information, visit the Upper Midwest Garlic Growers homepage.

SFA Welcomes Multimedia Intern Molly Flerlage

SFA is happy to announce the recent addition of our first Multimedia Intern, Molly Flerlage.
Born and raised in northern Michigan, Molly is now a student at Macalester College in St. Paul, where she is studying Environmental Studies with a concentration in Communications and Media and Cultural Studies. Molly said working for SFA blended her passions for the outdoors, environmental advocacy, and visual communications.

For SFA, Molly has been working since June to manage and produce content for our Facebook and Twitter accounts, and this fall will continue with those duties as we enter year-end fundraising efforts. She will also be working with Communications & Membership Coordinator Jason Walker to produce multimedia content and promotional materials in advance of our Annual Conference and Midwest Soil Health Summit.

Help us welcome Molly – interact with her via our SFA Facebook or Twitter accounts.

### Executive Director's Note

In the 1980s and '90s, a confluence of concerns in agriculture over the environment, the economy, and the viability and sustainability of the mid-sized farm created information needs that industry, university and government sectors were not prepared to fill. Nonprofits proliferated widely, seeking to fill this gap. Many farmers found each other as reliable sources of information regarding sustainable production models and the need for farmer to farmer networks became evident. The Sustainable Farming Association, along with others, such as: Practical Farmers of Iowa, The Institute for Ag and Trade Policy, The Minnesota Project, Land Stewardship Project, Minnesota Food Association, Environmental Initiative, Renewing the Countryside, the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, and several other organizations were started during this time.

Just as we celebrate the value and benefits of diverse cropping systems, the tremendous diversity of people and practices within the Sustainable Agriculture Movement should be celebrated as well. We're not fans of monoculture in the field, nor should we be a "monoculture" in our approach to each other.

Agriculture is changing dramatically and, by definition, agriculture's best way forward is not to draw a line in the sand, dividing people and practices. The Sustainable Agriculture Movement should be just that, a movement focused on moving participants down a continuum of

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Joe Mesko
SFA Executive Director

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**SFA EVENTS**

- **Sept. 25:** [Cover Crops & Livestock Integration Field Day, Verndale](#)
- **Oct. 2-4:** [Fosston Fiber Festival](#)
- **Oct 2-3, 9-10, and 17-18:** [Deep Roots Farm Skills 101 Fall Semester](#)
- **Nov. 6:** Soil health webinar with Dr. Allen Williams.
- **Nov. 7:** [Deep Winter Production of Greens and Livestock Fodder Utilizing Passive Solar Energy](#)
- **Nov. 12 – Integrating Cover Crops and Livestock Grazing into Cropping Systems, Redwood Falls**
- **Nov. 13 – Integrating Cover Crops and Livestock Grazing into Cropping Systems, Blue Earth**
- **Feb. 13, 2016:** [SFA Annual Conference](#)
- **Feb. 17-18, 2016:** [Midwest Soil Health Summit](#)
- **July 9, 2016:** [Festival of Farms](#)
sustainability toward higher yields and profits, but also toward quality of life and strength of community.

Our food and agriculture infrastructure, here in the U.S. and globally, is too far developed to undergo the massive overhaul required if our goal were ideological purity. Rather, we must focus our efforts on improving the sustainability and profitability of farms and farming systems while enhancing the environment. In agriculture, more than any other industry I’m aware of, we develop farmers with a very specialized skill set and knowledge base. With a relatively low number of active participants, we need all the farmers we can get. Our goal should not be to replace active farmers with new “sustainable” farmers. Rather, we should be training new farmers in the ways of sustainability, from its foundations into practice. We should also be looking for ways to help existing farmers become more sustainable. Farmer networks, with farmers learning from one another is a great way – possibly the best way – to make this happen.

I don’t know of any farmer who actively seeks to do harm to food or the environment. Let’s give each other the benefit of the doubt and work together to improve our farms and farming practices. At SFA, we do that at our events and conferences, as well as in our Deep Roots Farmer Development Program. Even if you are not a farmer, we’d love to count you as one of us!

Click here to listen to John’s podcast that accompanies this article.

Cover Crops & Livestock Integration Field Day is Friday

About 20 people attended SFA’s recent field day, “Fencing Innovations, Livestock & Cover Crops,” at the Allen Duetz farm in Marshall. The event included a free cover crop discussion, lunch and hands-on fence-building demonstration, led by SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist Kent Solberg (at right in photo above). Thanks to The Pasture Project for its support of this workshop. To read more, visit our Grazing & Soil Health Events Archive.

Up next is a tour of four farms THIS FRIDAY in the Verndale area, focusing on cover crops and livestock integration. There is still time to register for this workshop – click here to learn more.

SFA Now Accepting Winter Internship Applications

SFA is offering internship positions for winter, 2015-16, in conjunction with our two February events: The SFA Annual Conference and the Midwest Soil Health Summit. These internships will involve at-home, non-residency work collaborating with one of the event coordinators, plus onsite work at both conferences. Interns will learn the finer details of nonprofit sustainability event production, and will have the opportunity to attend conference sessions on a wide variety of topics, as well as meeting leaders in the sustainable agriculture movement.
Vote Now for 2016 Annual Conference Session Topics

A founding concept of SFA is that there is wisdom in the community, so 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 choose session topics; we will analyze the data and create the schedule around your wishes.

Over 3,500 votes have already been cast! To enter your topic ideas and vote using our system, visit our Annual Conference homepage.

Here are the current leading vote-getters:

- Farm Power Primer: Machinery Options, Operation and Maintenance
- Growing Fruits Organically in a Northern Climate
- Beyond the Farmer's Market: Marketing Alternatives for the Small and Mid-Sized Producer
- Know Before You Buy: What to Look/Out for When Considering a Property for a New Farm Project
- The Art of Stacking: Add Revenue Without More Acres
- Basics of Farm-Scale Permaculture
- Fruit Farming in Minnesota
- Maintaining a Forage Chain - Full Season
- The New Cottage Food Law
- Design and Equipment for Better Animal Handling Systems

Register by Nov. 1 for Early Bird Conference Pricing

The SFA Annual Conference is set for Feb. 13, 2016, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. Register NOW to get the cheapest early bird rate. Members can register for just $35; children 3-12 are just $10; and our Leaders Breakfast will return, too!

Click here to register for the SFA Annual Conference.

Registration is also open for our third annual Midwest Soil Health Summit, set for Feb. 17-18 at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minn. Members save $50, and registering by Nov. 1 guarantees an additional early bird discount. Come find out why the MSHS is often described by attendees as “the best conference I’ve attended” and why twice-keynote Gabe Brown said, “That's why I love coming to this conference, it's all about farmer-to-farmer networking.”

Click here to register for the SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit.

Blueberry and High Tunnel Production Tour

SFA Central Chapter is sponsoring a Blueberry and High Tunnel Production Tour from 9 to 11 a.m. Oct. 16 at Redfern Gardens Produce, 18298 270th St, Sebeka.

Join us for an educational tour of Red fern Gardens Produce with Kathy Connell and learn about a 3-year project studying the effect of mulches and soil amendments on blueberry production as part of a Greenbook and MDA Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant project. Learn what worked and didn't work. The event will also look at high tunnel production for in-ground lettuce and peas, sharing time-saving tips and best practices learned over 30 years of experience growing vegetables.

Registration begins Sept. 29 at www.sfa-mn.org/central; check-in begins at 8:45 a.m. Oct. 16.
Deep Roots Deep Winter Greenhouse Course Sold Out


But if you were hoping to register and missed out this time, don’t worry – we will announce more classes as soon as the details are available. Keep watching SFA Connect and our Deep Roots homepage for details on this and all our short courses, as well as an upcoming announcement on the Spring 2016 semester of Farm Skills 101.

Minnesota Farm Link Connects Generations in Farming

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has created Minnesota Farm Link, a web tool designed to link farmers and farmland. Minnesota Farm Link includes all types of farming, from small fruit and vegetable farms, to large grain and livestock operations. Whether it’s helping someone find a farm, matching an experienced or retiring farmer with a beginning farmer, or exploring mentoring opportunities, the goal is to connect people.

The MDA’s website also features a directory of Beginning and Transitioning Farmer Information, a clearinghouse of programs and services for all types of farmers: farms seeking land, financial assistance and loans; farmer education; legal services; multi-cultural programs; networking, mentoring and transitioning; and succession planning.

Information about Minnesota Farm Link: Jim Ostlie at 320.842.6910 or jim.ostlie@state.mn.us. To learn about other beginning farmer resources, contact Becky Balk at 651.201.6369 or becky.balk@state.mn.us.

Check This Out

- SFA is constantly focused on soil health education and programming, because we know what a negative effect poor soil conditions can have on our watersheds. To wit: Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium recently released its results of the 2015 survey on the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. To read the report, click here.

- USDA NRCS has begun producing a collection of short podcasts called “Soil Health To Go” that talks to farmers around the country who are building more sustainable, regenerative farm systems through soil health. To listen to the podcasts, click here.

- Think you know what it takes to achieve good soil health? Take this quiz to “Find Out Your Soil Health IQ.”

Annual Conference Photo Feature

Photographer extraordinaire Crystal Liepa once again documented our 2015 Annual Conference, held Feb. 14, 2015, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. To learn more about Crystal, visit her website.
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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