THE “GOLDEN” ERA OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

By Mary Jo Forbord

Welcome to the Golden Edition of the CornerPost! Fifty issues have come and gone, each one resonating the thoughts, aspirations, wisdom and debate of the day among the people closest to the land. A milestone like this inevitably has us looking back to see how far we’ve come, and at the same time wonder, “What lies ahead for SFA, and sustainable farming in Minnesota?”

SFA has evolved significantly since the early days, and today, sustainable farming enjoys rapidly escalating recognition and attention. Increasingly, we are viewed as much more than a viable, attractive agricultural alternative for some, but rather as the essential foundation to supplying local and regional food systems, and as an integral part of the growing emphasis on health. As a society, we are moving toward a more expansive understanding of health, one relies on the connections between food, energy, land and people. At the same time, we are witnessing progress in the realization that food and energy security depends on sustainable agriculture, and that true and resilient rural economic development relies on a diverse and sustainable agricultural economy.

All this good news doesn’t mean easy going ahead, not by any means. We all know that farm policy is not aligned for our benefit, and marketing our products is seldom simple, resulting in more work and more time dedicated to maintaining profitability. Sustainable farming requires a daily mega-dose of energy, planning, ingenuity, courage, perseverance and faith. In addition, we are often called upon to explain, demonstrate, assist, mentor, advise, present, collaborate, cooperate or debate with others about what we do, how we do it, and why. More and more people want to know, “Just what is sustainable agriculture?”

Sustainable farmers know that what they do is always a work in progress. We are perpetual keen observers of our land and animals, and the ecosystems that we steward. Re-evaluating and re-balancing progress toward maintaining profitability, achieving a desirable quality of life, caring for...
Publication by Blann Considers Habitat in Ag Landscapes

A new report released by Defenders of Wildlife through The Biodiversity Partnership offers a review of literature on biodiversity status and trends on farmland. The publication, “Habitat in Agricultural Landscapes: How Much Is Enough?” seeks to provide a comprehensive synthesis of current understanding regarding conservation of fish and wildlife habitat and biodiversity in agricultural landscapes, and to establish a framework for setting conservation goals, policy, and future research priorities. The report, which is available for download at www.biodiversitypartners.org/pubs/Ag/index.shtml, notes the biodiversity benefits of a more ecological approach to agriculture and offers guidelines and recommendations for landscape-scale ecological agriculture.

The author is none other than Minnesota’s own Kristen Blann. Blann lives and gardens on eight acres in central Minnesota, where she is actively involved in local foods, sustainable agriculture, and regional conservation initiatives. She is currently studying the impact of agricultural tile drainage on aquatic ecosystems through a post-doc with the U of M Water Resources Center, as well as consulting with The Nature Conservancy as a freshwater ecologist. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology, where she studied landscape-scale influences on coldwater stream fish communities in the Blufflands of the Upper Mississippi River. She also enjoys playing the violin.

“SFA acknowledges and thanks the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mankato, Minnesota Province, for sponsoring the CornerPost. The School Sister of Notre Dame wish to remind us that they continue to encourage and support sustainable farmers in our commitment to farm in ways that reverence the resources of the earth, as well a strengthen our family and community ties.”

More mileage per CornerPost

Before recycling the CornerPost, please leave your copy at your church, in a doctor’s waiting room, your workplace, your co-op, a place of business, or with a friend or relative. Be a part of spreading the good news about sustainable agriculture while helping to conserve our resources. Thank you!

Become a CornerPost Sponsor

Are you interested in strengthening the development of sustainable agriculture in Minnesota? Supporting the SFA’s quarterly newsletter is a way for you, your business or organization to become active in the cause. We will acknowledge your sponsorship in CornerPost by providing description and contact information unless you prefer that your sponsorship remain anonymous - we will honor your wishes. Please call Mary Jo Forbord at (320) 760-8732 to discuss your sponsorship opportunities. Thank you!

Do you need to renew?

Membership in the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota entitles you to receive the CornerPost Newsletter. Use the form on page 8 or go to www.sfa-mn.org and join or renew your membership today!
Meet Jerry Ford & Mariëne Kreitlow

Since 2002, Jerry Ford and Mariëne Kreitlow have lived, farmed, and made music on Living Song Farm, 80-acres in the south half of the northwest corner of Section 14 in Middleville Township. In other words, about 5 miles north of Howard Lake, MN, which is about an hour west of Minneapolis. The farm has been in Mariënne’s family since 1898. The land is hilly and highly erodible, however, thanks to contours, terraces, rotations, and other conservation practices and efforts originally made by Willard Kreitlow, Mariënne’s father, the farm is now a model of soil conservation. Mariënne likes to view their land as highly edible as opposed to highly erodible. Jerry raises several varieties of gourmet garlic and Mariënne is learning how to identify and use the wild edibles that already grow there. They also raise Holstein heifers for a neighbor’s dairy herd.

They are members of the Crow River Chapter of the SFA of MN and Jerry is chapter president. Both are representatives to the State SFA Board. They are also the main organizers behind the first annual “Minnesota Garlic Festival,” happening Saturday, August 12th, in Howard Lake.

Jerry spent most of his adult life in Houston, TX. His family moved around a lot when he was growing up. He lived in both the country and big cities, however, he never really experienced farm life. Mariënne on the other hand grew up on the farm and developed an affinity for animals, fields, and pastures early in life.

In addition to farming, Jerry does a lot of off-farm work in theatre, mostly as a sound technician at the Paramount Theatre in St. Cloud. Prior to his farm career, he taught theatrical design, with an emphasis on sound and lighting. Mariënne is a songwriter, musician, recording artist and playwright. In addition, both have done a lot of work with musical festivals, events and conferences.

Mariënne and Jerry work to combine their musical and theatrical talents with their love for the land and their spiritual mission. They have two motivations for the work they do on their farm and with SFA. The first is spiritual: for them it is a God given mission to be good stewards of the land, and they are grateful for the opportunity. Jerry’s rather altruistic dream is that seven generations from now there will be a healthy, happy family living on this very farm, surrounded by the beauty of the Earth. However, he feels his second motivation is entirely selfish. They loves living there, and they wants to protect that way of life.

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the environment, and working toward social justice are all ongoing considerations. Sustainable agriculture will forever defy neat enclosure within a short and unchanging “one-size-and-type-fits-all” definition that leads effortlessly to an “ah-ha” understanding for the many people who are now genuinely interested, but largely uninformed about what we do. This is perhaps why sustainable farmers readily invite people in to tour their farms for first-hand experience within the working system.

The complexity and inadequacy of words to define and explain, seems to fade away when we walk our land with others, pointing out the decisions, practices, and responses of nature that are at work, moving our farm closer to our evolving understanding of how sustainable farming looks on this farm, at this time. Farming within a unique natural system becomes more comprehensible, and reinforces to each one us our dependence on the land and interdependence on each other.

SFA members, if indeed we are entering the golden era of sustainable farming, you are the people who have made it so. Thank you for serving as the “front door” to agriculture, where our neighbors are invited in to rediscover, or even experience for the first time, our essential connection to the land.
Hit by a Farm:
How I learned to stop worrying and love the barn

by Catherine Friend
Marlowe & Company, New York, 2006, $14.95

Reviewed by Anne Borgendale

A book about two lesbian sheep farmers in southeastern Minnesota, sounds as though it would have a limited audience, however Hit by a farm: How I learned to stop worrying and love the barn by Catherine Friend, is about much more than this. It hits us all by looking at relationships, love, dreams, goals, nature, and farms. Friend writes in a way that makes you laugh and cry, but you are always cheering for her, Melissa, her farm and life partner, and the farm.

When I first saw this book on the shelf at a Borders Bookstore I was skeptical. I was afraid that it would be one of those books that romanticize farm life. Having grown up on a dairy farm I know that there are many wonderful aspects that come with farm life, but there are also sacrifices and many things to gross you out. However, Friend experiences and describes the ‘real side’ of farm life – anxiety, strained relationships, the loss of her own identity to the farm, the constant presence of death, maggots, manure, and all of those other things you don’t really want to deal with, along with the good things. Friend knows that, “Writing about only the lovely side of nature, or the romantic side of farming, or the joys of country living feels disrespectful.” She acknowledges that while many things are gained when you farm, you also give things up. The question she really tackles is, “What do you give up and to what degree?”

Hit by a Farm has mass appeal for farmers and non-farmers. However, I would especially recommend the book for anyone who is thinking about starting a farm or if you are dating or married to anyone who is thinking about becoming a farmer.

Think of it as part of the “Whole Farm Planning” process, a way to jump-start the discussion about each person’s future role with the farm. Hopefully, it will lead to a more sustainable farm and a happier farm family. As Friend writes on page one, “Farms have fences. People have boundaries.” But as most farmers know, livestock have a way of getting through fences, weeds always pop up, and farming is more than a job, it is a lifestyle.

Friend and her partner Melissa are also longtime members of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota. On their farm, Rising Moon Farm near Zumbrota, MN, they work towards the goal of sustainability. On this rolling 53-acre spread are grassy paddocks and fields for sheep and lambs to live, give birth, graze, and frolic in. There are also ducks, laying hens, goats, llamas, dogs, and a 1-acre vineyard. They generally direct market their lamb in halves and quarters, sell wool bedding material, and eggs from free-range hens. Their farm is also part of the Minnesota Grown Network. You can find out more at: www.risingmoonfarm.com.

The theme of sustainability that is woven into their farm is also woven throughout Hit by a Farm – their care and concern for the environment, ways to make their farm more economically viable, and especially, how the farm could let Friend and Melissa both have the lifestyle they wanted and needed. As the summer season rolls on, Hit by a Farm is a great book to sit down and read when you have a chance. Then you too can laugh and commiserate with Friend about the joys and pains of farming.

The Grassfed Gourmet available from SFA

The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook is the first-ever guide to finding, preparing, and enjoying pasture-raised meat and dairy products. Written by pasture-based farmer and epicurean Shannon Hayes, The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook explores the unique flavors and distinct characteristics of foods that come from animals raised on pasture. It features more than 120 recipes from pasture-based farmers in the United States and Canada along with farmer profiles and explanations of the health, environmental, and animal- and human-welfare benefits of grass-fed and pasture-raised foods.

The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook is a great tool for direct marketers because it contains a section to advise your customer on how to buy grassfed products, and answers some of the most common and repetitive questions that your customers have. It’s a time saver and a great ‘thank you’ gift for customers. In addition, the book helps to assure that your great product will be prepared in ways that make for great eating experiences, resulting in repeat sales and loyal customers.

The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook is available from SFA for $26.00 per copy (tax, shipping and handling included). Please send your check to SFA at 29731 302 Street, Starbuck, MN 56381. A portion of the proceeds will benefit SFA, a nonprofit organization.
Chapter Updates

Crow River Chapter

By Greg Reynolds

Welcome to summer. It has been hot and dry here. A couple of weeks ago we got an inch of welcome rain over two days, while the folks in the Twin Cities got gale force winds, torrential rain, and twenty minutes of nickel to quarter sized hail. We were lucky.

Things are growing like mad. Greens and radishes are maturing in about two-thirds the usual time. The tomatoes look great. The neighbors’ corn seems to be growing a foot a week. I notice that the Round-up Ready beans have some weeds (looks like lambsquarters) that are 18 inches to 24 inches tall. They must be selecting for early maturity.

On April 8th, we toured Dan and Becky’s Market in Cokato, MN. The Market is in a converted outbuilding in their farmyard. It is small. They have made a real effort to buy local, organic, natural, grass fed, or otherwise wholesome food and sell it in a conservative community that really needs it. They probably have the best selection of good food between Minnetonka and Litchfield. Dan says that they have been keeping busy and are seeing new people continue to stop in. Look for them east of Cokato on U.S. Highway 12, halfway between the new railroad bridge and the John Deere dealer.

On June 3rd, we had a tour of Brad and Leanne Donnay’s organic farmstead goat cheese dairy in Kimball, MN. The tour was co-sponsored by Wright County Extension and was limited to 30 people. Extension had to turn people away for days leading up to the event. A Cedar Summit ice cream social was provided by MDI. The Donnays have won awards for their cheese, and it is great.

On July 1st, there was a farm tour of Senator Steve Dille’s sheep operation in Dassel, MN. For more information read the fall edition of the CornerPost. You may have heard that Sen. Dille and Land Stewardship Project have had disagreements in the past. He and I might not see eye to eye on everything, but I do think that he has the desire to see agriculture thrive in Minnesota. I also believe that he is open to the idea that all farms ought to be treated equally.

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majority of farms in Minnesota are small farms and he might
need to be persuaded that if the big guys can’t make it on
their own, without state help, than that is just too bad.

The First Annual Minnesota Garlic Festival is coming
up August 12th in Howard Lake, MN. We are actively
seeking local artisans, venders selling local food, along with
people and organizations that have a sustainable product
or message and want to be a part of the event. Papa John
Kolstad & the Hot Club of East Lake will headline the
musical entertainment. Papa John Kolstad has been around
the Minneapolis folk scene for about 25 years. He plays a hot
mix of blues, jazz, and swing. Contact Jerry Ford at (320)
543-3394 or jerry@marienne.com for more details about the
Minnesota Garlic Festival. Sponsorship opportunities still
exist.

**South Central Chapter**

By Julie Ackland and Jim Tjepkema

At our last annual meeting we were treated to a
presentation by Eldon Gilbertson, who provided us with
information about growing grapes. His talk was based on
his experiences producing grapes that he sells to Minnesota
wineries. He provided us with a good overview of small-
scale commercial grape production methods and other
information that is useful to anyone who is interested in
producing grapes, either on a commercial scale or just for
their own use. Eldon even brought some grape cuttings,
which he gave away along with instructions on how to start
new grape plants from the cuttings.

Everyone in attendance seemed to appreciate Eldon’s
willingness to share his experiences and the “down to earth”
way he presented the information. Eldon covered the basic
information on how to grow and harvest grapes and he
mentioned some problems he’s encounter, including the extra
work needed to shake Asian Lady Bugs out of the grape
clusters when harvesting. He told us that grapes for wine
production should be harvested when they are at just the
right stage and that it is important to round up a good sized
crew to get the grapes picked in a timely manner. Eldon
likes to reward his crew by serving them wine, but said that
he keeps the wine out of reach until the harvest is done.

Eldon is a member of the Minnesota Grape Grower’s
Association, which has been very active in promoting and
supporting efforts to increase grape production in Minnesota.
Minnesota grape growers cannot grow some of the well-
known varieties of grapes found in warmer climates,
although there are some good varieties that are adapted to
our northern climate. The University of Minnesota has a
grape breeding program, which is developing new varieties
for use here and the University is also doing research on
wine production methods. More information on growing
grapes is available from the Minnesota Grape Growers
Association (Paul Neyers, MGGA Sec., 3725 14th St. S.,
Minneapolis, MN 55407) and I think that Eldon could be
persuaded to come out to speak to other groups of people
who would like to know more about growing grapes.

In other news, the South Central Chapter will have our
annual fall potluck dinner at the home of Wally Dunn (74985
240th St., Albert Lea, MN) on Thursday, September 14th.
Social time will begin at 5:00 pm and dinner will be served
at 6:00 pm. Anyone that is interested in learning more about
the organization is welcome to attend. For more information
contact Julie Ackland at ackland@deskmedia.com or 507-
826-3358.

**Southeast Chapter**

By Edgar Hansgen

Greetings from “Sleepy Hollow,” I’m afraid if our
membership knew my true identity (Rip van Winkle), I
would be impeached!! It seems like it was just yesterday that
I sent in our last report.

Our membership has not been sleeping, and with the
early spring, work in the fields and gardens, the season has
progressed at a very rapid pace.

Generally, our countryside looks like the “Garden of
Eden,” even the weeds. Hopefully, it continues this way, and
there is a very bountiful harvest.

The farmers markets are up and running with excellent
consumer interest. We are seeing these markets opening in
our smaller “farmer towns.” It is really very encouraging to
see this movement happening.

Other organizations in the region have been sponsoring
programs that “fit” with us. We are not involved in
the planning, but our members do have access to that
information.

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Mary Hanks: Distinguished in every way

By Anne Borgendale

She doesn’t farm, but that does not diminish her dedication to advancement of sustainable agriculture in Minnesota. Instead, Mary Hanks, the 2005 winner of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Distinguished Service Award, works behind the scenes at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and on numerous boards to make sure that the resources sustainable farmers need are available to them.

Mary is the sustainable agriculture program director at the MDA. She is also SFA of MN state board secretary and is on the board of other non-profit organizations. Through these positions she is able to promote the concept and practice of sustainable agriculture. She also lives what she preaches, purchasing as much food as she can directly from farmers, at farmers markets, and at local food co-ops.

According to Mary, what has keep her engaged in sustainable agriculture over the years is the people she has come to know -- “You have to work for farmers who believe so deeply in the stewardship they espouse through their actions, their sense of community (helping each other rather than competing), their dedication to leaving the soil and their communities better than they found them.” She also continues to dedicate herself to sustainable agriculture, “because I want to eat local food, have a thriving community around me, and air, water, and soil that will support by sons and their future children.” She also feels that there is no quick fix to the problems plaguing agriculture today and she uses this guideline when looking at what has been accomplished so far. She commented, “I’m more of the ‘slow, steady, incremental improvement’ type of achiever. It’s hard to see what’s happened unless you look back over 10 years or so.”

Even though she’s had a hand in sustaining the network of sustainable farmers and the information and resources available to them, she doesn’t think she’s cut out to be one of them. Mary explained, “I thought I wanted to be a grazier for a few years. I was hanging out a lot with Dan French, Ralph Lentz, and Dave and Florence Minar, excellent role models. I was also enrolled in Holistic Management at the time and grazing livestock seemed to be the best thing I could do on the 32-acres my husband and I live on and currently rent to a neighbor. Everybody told me how easy it was to raise cattle, but I thought we (my husband and three young sons at that time) would try chickens first - if you end up killing a few, no big monetary loss. Well, we killed a lot of chickens through bad luck - a huge rainstorm that caused the birds to smother each other in the mobile cage in the pasture -- and some inattention -- a waterer in the brood area sticking on and drowning a bunch of ‘almost ready to go outside’ chicks. We got discouraged. I guess I don’t have the right attitude or I’m just not enough of a risk taker to take up farming.”

In the spring of 1991, shortly after she started working at the MDA, a Land Stewardship Staff member and coordinator of the Cannon River SFA of MN chapter, invited her to a house meeting about SFA. Mary went and has been with the SFA of MN ever since. In the beginning, one of her reasons for joining was to get to know the people she was supposed to be supporting through her new job at the MDA. Those same people are her reason for sticking around for the past 15 years.

Contrary to popular opinion, Mary thinks that the next generation of farmers has the will to enter farming. However, their farms will be mostly smaller and medium sized operations with value-added ventures and will incorporate direct marketing. For these young farmers, Mary sees hurdles associated with the rising land prices and cash flow. She commented, “How do you find the capital and operating funds to get started, especially to buy land?” However, for sustainable agriculture in general, she feels that the demand for locally produced and organic food will pull the supply, “This is a 180-degree turn from the past where the supply was always trying to push the demand. In the current farming climate, sustainable agriculture has more than before; more information, research, and networking opportunities for people who are farming or who want to farm in an environmentally, economically and socially responsible ways than ever before.”

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www.sfa-mn.org/pages/garlicfest.index.html or contact Jerry Ford, at (320) 543-3394 or jerry@marinne.com.

Limited space is still available for vendors, artists, restaurants, chefs environmental/conservation groups, and community organizations. Contact Mary Schmidt, 320-485-3562, saam@tds.net.
Wow!
Since January 1, more than 60 Minnesota organic producers have signed up for the new Organic Farm Business Management Program, and we still have room for a few more.

80% tuition cost share for certified Minnesota growers, and a program individually tailored to your farm's goals and resources.

90 instructors statewide!

These organizations are equal-opportunity providers.

1) Northwest
Ron Dvergsten
Northland Community & Technical College
(218) 681-0797

2) Northeast/East Central
DelRay Leczy
Central Lakes College
(218) 894-5164

3) West Central
Jim Molenaar
Ridgewater Community & Technical College
(320) 231-7671

4) Southwest
Al Brudelie
Minnesota West Community & Technical College
(507) 847-3320 Ext 118
or Jim Kurtz
Southwest Farm Business Management Association
(507) 372-3904

5) South Central
Al Brudelie
South Central College
(507) 389-7264

6) Southeast
Peter Scheffert
Riverland Community College
(507) 433-0614
or Lorin Westman
Southeast Farm Business Management Association
(507) 280-2868

Intern Andrew Helling helps out SFA with survey

By Anne Borgendale

Have you received a call from Andrew? If not, you probably will soon. Andrew Helling is a current Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota intern, who is performing the SFA of MN membership survey. He is a 2006 graduate of Hamline University in St. Paul, MN with degrees in environmental studies and anthropology. One of the requirements for him to graduate was for him to complete an internship in the area of his major. After searching for non-profit organizations specializing in sustainable agriculture, he found the SFA of MN and the SFA of MN needed some help. Thus, a match was made.

Andrew is a native of Brookings, SD, where he grew up with his mom, dad, an older sister, twin brother, and a younger brother. Every summer he helped his dad with the family’s market garden. It was there where he developed his interest in sustainable agriculture. He also cultivated this interest by reading such authors as Wendell Barry. In college he worked on a project concerning the health impacts of confinement feeding operations, especially those relating to air pollution.

When he isn’t immersed in sustainable agriculture and environmental issues, he’s pursuing his other passion: soccer. He actually chose Hamline University because he was able to mix these two interests. He played soccer all four years of college and he recently traveled to Germany to take in the World Cup.

The purpose of the SFA membership survey that Andrew is completing, is to get a feel for what the SFA membership is thinking, what they want and need. The results will help the SFA better communicate with its members and provide them with the services, education, and events they most want. The survey results will also help the SFA State Board with strategic planning as the SFA moves ahead to meet the current and future challenges of farming.
For more details on sustainable farming and living events visit: www.sfa-mn.org/calendar

If you would like to add an event to the SFA of MN calendar contact Anne at communications@sfa-mn.org

July 12  Crops and Soils Day – Northwest Research and Outreach Center, Crookston, MN For info contact Dr. Jochum Wiersma at 218 281-8629 or visit: www.nwroc.umn.edu.

July 12  Midwest Food Processor’s Tour Meeting, Southern Research and Outreach Center, Waseca, MN. For more info visit: http://srocc.coafes.umn.edu or call 507-835-3620.

July 12  Third Crop Walk N’ Talk – Seven Stories Farm, Belle Plaine, MN. For info call (507) 238-5449.


July 14  West Central Research and Outreach Center Tour – Morris, MN For more info call (320) 589-1711 or visit: http://wcroc.coafes.umn.edu/home.html.

July 14  CSP and Future of Farming Field Day, McGregor, IA The field day will highlight the Koether’s use of CSP and farming practices, which includes rotational grazing. For info contact Adam Warthesen at (612-722-6377)


July 15  Forestry for Birds’ Field Day, Rushford, MN. For details, call David Wilson at 608-723-6377.

July 15  Dry Weather Creek Farm and Farm Beginnings Field Day, Milan, MN. Will feature meat and milk goats and flour milling. For more info, contact LSP’s Amy at 320-269-2105, or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org.

July 19  Ag Justice Presentation, Wedge Community Co-op, Minneapolis, MN; To RSVP, or for more info, contact Joe Riemann at 612-465-8810.

July 21-22  Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings Field Day – CSA’s, Rushford, MN For more info contact Karen Stettler, LSP’s Lewiston office at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

July 22  Practical Farmers of Iowa Field Day: Farm Vineyard Workshop and Wine Tasting, Farnhamville, IA. To register, contact Jerry Chizek, (712) 297-8611, jwchizek@iastate.edu. More info: www.pfi.iastate.edu.

July 25  Strip Tillage Expo, Southern Research and Outreach Center, Waseca, MN. For more info visit: www.extension.umn.edu/water/strip tillageexp o.

July 26-29  Windy River Renewable Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Fair, Morrison County Fairgrounds, Little Falls, MN. For more info visit www.windyriver.us.

July 27  Strip Tillage Expo, Southwest Research and Outreach Center, Lamberton, MN. For more info visit: www.extension.umn.edu/water/strip tillageexpo.


Aug 1-2  Farm Fest 2006 - Gilfillan Estate, Redwood County MN

Aug 2  Organic Tree Fruit Grower’s Network Field Day - Decorah, Iowa For more info contact Deirdre Birmingham, 608-967-2632, deirdreb@mindspring.com.

Aug 3  Disease and Insect Field Tour, Southern Research and Outreach Center, Waseca, MN. For more info visit: http://srocc.coafes.umn.edu call 507-835-3620.

Aug 4  Boer Goat Show – Olmsted County Fair, Rochester, MN. For more info contact Brenda Postels at (763) 682-7381 or post0060@umn.edu.

Aug 4  Grazefest Minnesota 2006 – West Central Research and Outreach Center, Morris, MN and Prairie Horizons Farm, Starbuck, MN. For more info contact Mary Jo Forbord at (320) 760-8732 or mforbord@sfa-mn.org or visit www.sfa-mn.org.

Aug 5  Grazefest Minnesota 2006 – Molitor’s Dairy Farm, Rockville, MN. Focusing on organic and grazing dairy. For more info contact Mary Jo Forbord at (320) 760-8732 or mforbord@sfa-mn.org or visit www.sfa-mn.org.

Aug 7-9  Nitrogen Workshop, Southern Research and Outreach Center, Waseca, MN. For more info visit: http://srocc.coafes.umn.edu or call 507-835-3620.


Aug 15-17  SARE National Conference, Oconomowoc, WI. For more info 614-306-6422 or outreach@sare.org or visit www.sare2006.org.

Aug 17  “20th Anniversary of CRP” – Lakeside Ballroom, Glenwood, MN. For more info call Holly Kova rik at (320) 634-5327.

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Will Hedquist Sr.
Quintessential Sustainable Farmer

By Jeremy Lanctot

One of the primary things I like about being involved in sustainable farming circles is getting to know interesting people. Sure it’s nice to learn new things or better methods to farm, but it’s really the people that make this trade engaging.

In March 2006, SFA lost one of its most striking examples of the values we hold dear. Will Hedquist’s passing is a personal loss as well.

I’ve only known the Hedquist family for maybe 4 years, but I always looked to them and especially to Will Sr. as an icon of things to come and a template to follow. I’ve had the pleasure of speaking with them at various events and even on their own farm. I’m reminded of a winter a few years back where I had decided to bring along a few select dairy farmers to visit Hedquists during their off season. At the last minute, my farmers couldn’t make the trip, so despite 20 below zero temperatures, I made the trip myself. The crisp day was offset by the warmth of sitting in their cozy home sipping tea, eating their farmstead cheese with breads and crackers. The one word I use to describe Will and his family is “peace”. Our conversation was unhurried, engaging and enjoyable.

What makes the Hedquist family so special? Yes, they operate an exceptional example of a sustainable dairy farm. I often point dairy industry curmudgeons to the Hedquist farm as an example of the antithesis of modern dairy trends. They’re beyond modern dairy trends. In modern military terms, they’re the swift response special force commando unit versus the aircraft carrier. What really makes this farmstead cheese dairy farm special is relationship. They are the embodiment of relationship-based agriculture.

It started with a vision and calling that God gave to Will many years ago before their dairy farm. It was his calling to return home. I can zero in on this calling since it has been mine for many years. There are businesses and careers that last decades, but the relationships we build last for generations…either good or bad. He wanted to build his family, not just a career or business. THIS is what makes Green Pastures Farmstead Cheese special in the marketplace.

I can describe Will Sr. in two words: gentle patriarch. Strength of vision, clarity of purpose, strong leader, stands alone in tough circumstances, yet leads by example, and nurtures those he serves and protects. This is what I want for my family.

Will Hedquist Sr. had a vision for his family that included everyone. It wasn’t Will’s farm; it is their farm. Without the next generation, how can we label our farms ‘sustainable’? Will’s children and grandchildren have received this vision, too. This is the trademark of sustainable dairy farming. Their farm is an excellent example of sustainability, namely, a low-input, grass-based, value-added dairy farm of 30 cows that supports father and mother, children and grandchildren. THAT is what this country should be building.

We miss you, Will. Thank you for passing on the vision and purpose to your wife, Ken Marie, your son, Will Jr., and your daughters, Joy and Jennie. You’ll always be with us through them.

As a fellow Christian, I know they take comfort as I do in the resurrection to come. We part for a short time to be reunited in His glory in Heaven. Peace.

Southeast continued from page 4

We do have one ongoing project with which we are very pleased, the Young Farmers Program. These young farmers have created an interesting, educational, and entertaining program. Thanks for your efforts, Kim Olson.

With all the activity, including the upcoming State meeting, the future certainly does seem exciting. Maybe it is time to put on my running shoes.

Central Chapter

By Sue Peterson

The Central Chapter of the SFA of MN is getting ready for the Windy River Fair held in conjunction with the Morrison County Fair held July 26-29. The fair will kick off with a solar workshop on Wednesday and a keynote speech by Ken Pentel, Green Party Gubernatorial Candidate, and other candidates if we can get them.

The “Through the Lens” video project related to sustainable agriculture has been funded and an intern has been hired to start work later this summer. We will be looking for farms willing to be a part of the series.

The Morrison County Permaculture Guild is started and growing, with donations from several SFA members.
**Free MDA publications profiles business options for dairy, poultry and hog producers**

Dairy Your Way is a free book by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) that profiles a variety of dairy housing and production systems suitable for the Upper Midwest. Each chapter profiles a different aspect of dairy production and includes profiles of farmers from all three states who are all dairy farming successfully in different ways. “Minnesota is a great state for all kinds of dairy farms,” said Dairy Your Way editor Meg Moynihan, an agricultural specialist at the MDA.

Dairy Your Way describes the variety of management alternatives available to today’s dairy producers, including tie stall setups, free stall barns and transitional housing options. The book also discusses confinement, grazing and organic management systems as well as custom heifer-raising and value-added production. There is also a chapter dedicated to milking center design and retrofitting options. For farmers at the beginning or the end of their careers, one chapter is devoted to entry and exit strategies. Print copies of Dairy Your Way are available free of charge from the MDA by calling 651-201-6012 or from the Sustainable Farming Association of MN by calling 866-760-8732 or emailing mforbord@sfa-mn.org. An electronic version of the book is available on the MDA web site at www.mda.state.mn.us/mgo.

There are two other titles in the “Your Way” series. Poultry Your Way is available by calling the MDA. Hogs Your Way is available for purchase from the University of Minnesota Extension Distribution Center at (800) 876-8636 or www.extension.umn.edu (type “Hogs Your Way” into the search box). All three books are available online.

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**Calendar continued from page 5**

**Aug 23-25**  *IFOAM Organic Livestock Research Symposium at the University of Minnesota.* For more info contact Jim Riddle at 507-454-8310 or jriddle@hbci.com or visit www.ifoam.org.

**Aug 27**  *Rural Land Opportunities Show,* Nicollet County Fairgrounds, St. Peter, MN. Promotes sustainable rural land use and development through exhibits, interactive clinics, and demonstrations.

**Aug 29**  *Food Alliance Midwest Minnesota Cooks Event at the Minnesota State Fair,* Falcon Heights, MN. For more info contact 651-265-3682 or www.foodalliance.org.

**Sept 9**  *13th Annual Harvest Festival - Bayfront Park,* Duluth, MN. A celebration of the bountiful harvest and of sustainable agriculture along with the culture of farming.

**Sept 9**  *Winter CSA and Farm Beginnings Field Day, Garden Goddess Produce,* Milan, MN. For more info, call Amy at 320-269-2105, or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org.

**Sept 14**  *South Central Chapter of the SFA of MN Annual Fall Potluck Dinner,* Albert Lea. For more info visit www.sfa-mn.org or contact Julie Ackland at ackland@deskmedia.com or 507-826-3358.

**Sept 16**  *Range & Ranch Manager Training Program.* To learn more info about this program and how to enroll at: www.holisticmanagement.org/new_site_05/Farmers/FR4_Enroll_Now.html.

**Grazefest continued from page 7**

Send your check to SFA at 29731 302 St, Starbuck, MN 56381 by August 1st.

On Saturday, August 5th, Grazefest Minnesota will move to the Molitor Farm near Rockville. The Molitors milk 300 cows and recently transitioned to organic production. Starting at 12:30 pm, Joe Molitor will tell the story of the farm’s transition to organic, and lead tours of the operation. Organic dairy refreshments will be served. There is no charge for the Molitor farm tour and registration is not required. For more information, contact Jeremy Lanctot, SFA Minnesota Dairy Initiative Coordinator at 320-980-2333 or mdi@sfa-mn.org.

Sponsors for Grazefest Minnesota include: Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Natural Resources Conservation Service, WCROC, U of M West Central Regional Sustainable Partnership, NCR-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Dairy Initiative, Minnesota Farmers Union, Blue Earth River Basin Initiative, Chippewa River Watershed Project and Clean Up our River Environment. Grazefest™ Minnesota is a trademark of Eating Fresh Publications. Grazefest Minnesota is a proud participant in Grazefest America, a national campaign to promote the multiple benefits of grass-fed and pasture-raised foods. Grazefest America is sponsored by Eating Fresh Publications, Global Resource Action Center for the Environment, the Eat Well Guide, and the Weston A. Price Foundation.
Is it really grassfed? COMMENTS TO USDA NEEDED!

By Terry VanDerPol

Are you a farmer who raises grassfed beef or lamb? Or, perhaps you are a consumer who values your ability to choose healthy and delicious grassfed meat. USDA needs to hear from you!

After three years of intensive consultation with a wide array of sustainable agriculture interests including Moonstone Farm’s Audrey Arner and Terry VanDerPol of Land Stewardship Project, USDA’s Agriculture Marketing Service has released a revised proposal for a grass fed meat label claim. The standard applies to ruminant livestock and requires that meat labeled as “grass fed” receive at least 99% of their lifetime energy from grass or forage. “When our customers are looking for grassfed meat, they want a strong standard that meets their expectations. This is a standard with integrity and it affirms those of us who have been producing animals wholly on grass for years,” says Audrey Arner.

LSP, in collaboration with the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition in Washington DC, has been working since 2002 on getting a strong, honest label standard from USDA on grass fed meat, as well as label claims on antibiotic use, hormone use and free range claims. The standard originally proposed by USDA standard in 2002 required only 80% grass fed, a standard nearly any feedlot animal could measure up to. We got them to pull that standard and take a hard second look on what that label should mean.

USDA is taking comments from the public on the proposed standard until August 10, 2006 and it is critical that they hear from all of us. There’s a great deal of enthusiasm about grass fed, right now. And those interests who would like to label their feedlot beef “grass fed” will surely be weighing in with USDA on this standard.

Please contact Terry VanDerPol by telephone or e-mail. She’ll send a one page sheet with the proposed standard and all the necessary information for you to comment by mail or electronically. You can contact Terry by e-mail tvdp@landstewardshipproject.org, by telephone, (320) 269-2105.

Study Confirms Health Benefits of Grass Fed Meat

Kate Clancy, with the Union Of Concerned Scientists, recently published the first comprehensive study that confirms that beef and milk from animals raised entirely on pasture have higher levels than conventionally raised beef and dairy cattle of beneficial fats that may prevent heart disease and strengthen the immune system. The study also shows that grass-fed meat is often leaner than most supermarket beef, and raising cattle on grass can reduce water pollution and the risk of antibiotic-resistant diseases.

“When you eat grass-fed meat, you’re getting beef with benefits,” said report author Dr. Kate Clancy, a nutritionist and senior scientist in the Food and Environment Program at UCS.

JOIN US AT THE FIRST ANNUAL MINNESOTA GARLIC FESTIVAL!

Come to farm country and taste the bounty! The first annual Minnesota Garlic Festival, taking place on Saturday, August 12th, is the premiere event for lovers of garlic. This family-friendly festival features local foods, chefs, music, artisans, games, and competitions - all in support of a healthy environment, family farms and vital rural communities in Minnesota. According to Jerry Ford, President of the Crow River Chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota and Garlic Festival organizer, “Our official reason for starting Minnesota Garlic Festival is to promote our state’s wonderful gourmet garlic, to let people know about the great sustainable farmers we have here, and to support our rural communities. We’re going to do all that, but people are going to come away remembering that they had a lot of fun!”

With over 100 varieties of gourmet garlic grown right here in Minnesota, all planted in October and harvested in July, growers will introduce their fresh 2006 garlic at this event. As well as being wonderfully tasty, garlic is documented as one of the healthiest foods you can eat.

All day entertainment features kid’s musician Will Hale; the Garlic Diva, Kitty Karn; The Mu Community Taiko Drummers with powerful Japanese percussion; Bella Voce, performing medieval music with a twist; Mariënne Kreitlow, composer of the top ten garlic hits “I Like Garlic”, “The Vampire Song” and “The Stinking Rose”, and headliners Papa John Kolstad and the Hot Club of East Lake. Ford said, “The Minnesota Garlic Festival is to festivals what garlic is to food: a little funky, a bit spicy, and really good for you. The same goes for the entertainment - from tongue-in-cheek operatic to vintage jazzy blues to Japanese drumming to hysterical kid’s songs, with a dragon and a vampire thrown in for fun.”

The festivities start at 11:00 am and run until 9:00 pm at the Wright County Fairgrounds in Howard Lake, MN. The admission is $5 for adults and $3 for children under 12 and there is free on-site parking. For more information visit Garlic Fest continued on page 13

Registration Form for Grazefest Minnesota 2006!

*You can also register for Grazefest Minnesota 2006 at the SFA of MN website: www.sfa-mn.org! Registration is only required for Friday, August 4th at WCROC, Morris, MN and Prairie Horizons Farm, rural Starbuck, MN. The events on Saturday, August 5th at the Molitor Dairy Farm are FREE and open to all.

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Total $$ Enclosed:

Lunch and snacks are included in the price of registration

Please send a check payable to: SFA of MN, 29731 302 Street Starbuck, MN 56381

Name(s): ____________________________________________________________

I am a Farmer or Grazier: **yes**  no

Address: ____________________________  City: _______________________  State: ______  Zip: _________

Phone: _______________________________  Email: ______________________________________________

*To request a scholarship please call or email Mary Jo for availability: mforbord@sfa-mn.org or (866) 760-8732.
The hot news lately has been the differential in pay prices between conventional and organic milk. In some cases, the price paid to farmers for organic milk has been as much as triple the price of conventional. The demand is strong and the competition among organic processors has been stiff. The organic dairy farmer has something to smile about.

As a result of this situation, I have seen active interest in transitioning to organic production. Some producers have been speculating in this market by buying second farms for the sole purpose of starting up an organic dairy. Essentially, they are trying to buy their way into this market to speed up the three to four year transition period. It is exciting to see the shifts taking place in the market and we’re in for a thrilling ride. Many of these wanna-be organic producers do not have the knowledge and experience background needed to operate a successful organic dairy. The subsequent burden of support for these operations falls on the regional infrastructure personnel. Most times, each region does not have the people to do this support and/or they do not have the breadth of knowledge to handle the questions that inevitably arise as a transition is taking place.

The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota is in a strategic position of helping both the producers and the industry support people who are waging a valiant effort to meet this looming behemoth’s (organic demand’s) needs. “Overwhelmed” might be the word that describes the status of most involved in this market.

Yes, it is fun to be involved at this time. Unfortunately, SFA does not have a budget to match the burgeoning needs. Presently, we are developing a strategy to accommodate the many needs on many fronts. For the producer, we have access to some modest grant monies to help with business planning.

As the SFA-MDI Coordinator, I’m also available to help farmers figure out how to make changes and who should be included in these changes. If a transitioning dairy needs help with nutrition, I seek out several individuals who specialize in that and involve them with the farm. In some cases, I have sat down with the farmer and helped them through the mound of paperwork required to develop an organic plan. Each farm is unique and we run into questions we’ve never had to answer before. This makes the work interesting and engaging. I enjoy this part.

Another resource for producers is our mentor network. This is a very loose-knit group of farmers who are willing to field a phone call or a farm visit to help another farmer make changes to his/her operation. This is probably the most powerful and effective tool in our grip. I’ve watched this in action repeatedly. I get a call from a producer looking to solve a problem. I scan our list of fellow farmers who may have some background in this practice and make the hand-off. Sometimes it’s a phone call, other times it’s a personal visit between these farmers. I just stand back and watch the information fly. I’ve used this for my own organic farm. My farm has been aided immeasurably by other producers who were willing to share their successes and failures with me.

The next major problem we’ve been working to solve is the myriad of needs in our fledgling organic dairy infrastructure. Our state’s University Extension system has been pared down to a skeletal minimum. Each of these people has specializations, and inevitably, they run into problems pertaining to organic transition that they simply don’t know the answer to. In many cases, SFA doesn’t have the answers either. I know I don’t. But, by working as a team with many individuals and organizations, we can network and find the resources to meet that problem. Sometimes this requires a nationwide search.

Recently, we’ve had interest from over 30 farms in the western half of Minnesota in transitioning to organic milk production. We’ve started coordinating with regional support people to figure out how to help these farms successfully accomplish this. SFA has several events in the works for dairy producers of all types. Here’s a shortlist of some of the events we’re promoting. On July 15th, there is a tour of Mark and Wendy Lange’s new goat dairy near Montevideo. On August 4th, is GrazeFest Minnesota at Mary Jo and Luverne Forbord’s farm between Starbuck and Benson and West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris. On August 5th, Joe and Tom Molitor are hosting a tour of their recently certified organic dairy near Rockville. They milk over 300 cows and have over 80 land-adjointing neighbors. How do they do this and rotational graze? Come and find out.

We are developing a tour of low cost milking parlors on Kent Solberg’s and Dan Middendorf’s farms north of Verndale. This will most likely be the last week of August.

Please, check our website for details of these events at www.sfa-mn.org or call SFA if you don’t have web access. I can be contacted by email at mdi@sfa-mn.org and by cell phone via 320-980-2333.
The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota is expanding Grazefest™ Minnesota to feature state-of-the-art grazing information for both beef and dairy. Grazefest Minnesota is an interactive, educational grazing event that includes pasture walks, speakers, demonstrations, and delectable locally produced, pasture-raised foods.

On Friday morning, August 4th, Dr. Alejandro La Manna, Dairy Grazing Specialist with the National Agricultural Research Institute of Uruguay, will keynote at University of Minnesota West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) near Morris. He will address the economics of several different extended crop rotations with forage and grain crops. Dr. Dennis Johnson will guide tours of WCROC’s dairy rotational grazing system. For lunch and the afternoon activities Grazefest will move to Prairie Horizons Farm near Starbuck, hosted by owner/operators Luverne and Mary Jo Forbord. Gearld Fry, a Grass-fed Genetics Consultant and founder of Bovine Engineering and Consulting, will deliver the keynote speech on “Beyond Seeing: Develop your Sixth Sense for Top Grass-fed Genetics,” followed by a demonstration on scrutinizing cattle to predict optimal success on grass. An in-depth tour of the Prairie Horizons rotational grazing operation will feature the Forbord’s new pipeline watering system that delivers fresh water to every paddock, and a variety of grazing options at work on the farm, including native prairie, established warm and cool season native prairie grasses, fencing options, and Forbord’s experience grazing Lowline Angus. Other highlights include a presentation by NRCS grazing specialist Howard Moechnig, and a 2 acre demonstration plot featuring 15 woody crops and native grasses, and delectable pasture-raised and locally grown foods. Grazing specialists will be on hand from NRCS, MN Department of Agriculture, as well as representatives from wildlife and conservation organizations.

Friday’s registration fee is $45 per person and includes a locally produced lunch featuring pasture-raised foods. Pre-registration is required. Farmers and farm families may apply for a scholarship to cover the cost of registration. For scholarship, sponsorship and exhibit information, contact Mary Jo Forbord at (866) 760-8732 or mforbord@sfa-mn.org. Check www.sfa-mn.org for updates and to register online, or Grazefest continued on page 11
Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota

29731 302nd Street
Starbuck, MN 56381

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