SFA MISSION
The Sustainable Farming Association supports the development and enhancement of sustainable farming systems through innovation, demonstration, education, and farmer-to-farmer networking.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
‘Back to Our Roots’
Feb. 8, 2014
College of Saint Benedict
St. Joseph, Minn.
Register now at sfa-mn.org/conference or mail the enclosed form.

MIDWEST SOIL HEALTH SUMMIT
Feb. 19-20,
Arrowwood Resort, Alexandria
Register now at sfa-mn.org/midwest-soil-health-summit

PUBLISHER
Sustainable Farming Association

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
John Mesko

COMMUNICATIONS/DESIGN
Jason Walker

PRINTING
Print Solutions
21021 Heron Way #101
Lakeville, MN 55044

ABOUT
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Jason Walker
Communications Coordinator
4924 Upton Ave S
Minneapolis, MN 55410
612.605.9269
jason@sfa-mn.org

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SFA: There’s a chapter near you!
SFA chapters are active in interesting events year-round. Call or email the chapter contact (page 4) for more information, or visit www.sfa-mn.org.
Sustainability: Our Only Option

While serving on a conference panel recently, I was asked, “What do you say to encourage young people who want to get started in farming to start farming sustainably?”

My response was that in the future, the only brand of agriculture available will be sustainable agriculture. As I reflected on my answer two expanded thoughts came to mind:

First, if we really believe that sustainable agriculture, the esoteric blend of profitability, environmental stewardship and social sustainability, is truly sustainable, then it will survive. It’s not a passing fad, destined to fade as the demand for food from a growing world population stretches its capacity. It’s a brand of agriculture steeped in an understanding of the earth’s built-in restorative ability. Working with nature to achieve man’s goals rather than viewing nature as simply the raw materials needed to be manipulated and dominated to serve man’s goals.

If we really believe in sustainability, then we should bank on its promise of being able to preserve our existing resource while providing the iterative season-by-season improvements to feed an ever-growing world.

That’s exactly what we are doing at SFA. Our stable of programs is designed to build upon each other in promotion of sustainability.

For example, the Sustainable Food Production program and the Farm Transitions program are all about bringing new farmers into the fold; training them in hands-on, on-farm situations, ensuring a firm grip on reality as they enter farming.

One of the key components of that reality check is the Adjust 2015 Project. We are surveying farmers who’ve had to make adjustments to their original business plan to stay in business. Those results will help us develop a curriculum to help new farmers start out grounded and focused.

A great enterprise for a beginning farmer is grass-fed beef production. Our latest project, Keep Cattle in Minnesota is designed to help both new and experienced farmers transition into grass-fed beef production. Ultimately, the Midwest Soil Health Summit and the soil health initiative SFA is promoting is the ultimate in sustainable farming practices: an agroecology model that builds the soil, increases profitability and makes room for the next generation on tomorrow’s farms.

Secondly, if we really think we are sustainable, we should be doing everything we can to bring our conventional farming friends into our fellowship. We are all farmers, yes, even those who use chemicals, operate feedlots, and plow fencerow to fencerow every fall. SFA is a welcoming, collaborative, strengthening organization building up all aspects of the farming community and agriculture as a whole.

Welcome to sustainable agriculture, the only brand of agriculture that will exist in the future.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ACTING CHAIR
Jim Chamberlin
Central Chapter
Deerwood
218.764.3020
islandlakefarm@brainerd.net

SECRETARY
Libby Wyrum
At Large
St. Paul
612.867.0854
libertywyrum@gmail.com

TREASURER
Josh Reinitz
At Large
Henderson
612.756.3971
josh@easthendersonfarm.com

COTEAU RIDGE
Don DeWeerd
Pipestone
507.825.2077
dondeweerd@earthlink.net

CROW RIVER
Mike Lilja
Dayton
763.712.5506
mlilja@usinternet.com

LAKE AGASSIZ
Marie Petry
Wolverton
218.995.2002
grass@wtc-mail.net

LAKE SUPERIOR
Jean Sramek
Duluth
218.393.3276
info@lakesuperiorfarming.org

SOUTH CENTRAL
Tom Ehrhardt
Albert Lea
507.373.3161
tome@alseed.com

SOUTHEAST
Edgar Hansgen
St. Charles
507.932.4219
ejhansgen@hotmail.com

WESTERN
Richard Handeen
Montevideo
320.269.8971
rhandeen@hotmail.com

AT LARGE
Chris Kudrna
St. Cloud
320.202.1708
ckudrna@charter.net

Dale Woodbeck
Excelsior
952.512.2101
DaleW@lakewinds.com

Betsy Wieland
Stillwater
612.596.1175
eliza003@umn.edu

Liz Morris Otto
Delano
612.338.3900
morrisotto.liz@gmail.com

STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
John Mesko
Box 192
Princeton
763.260.0209
john@sfa-mn.org

NETWORK COORDINATOR
Jerry Ford
Howard Lake
320.543.3394
jerry@sfa-mn.org

LIVESTOCK & GRAZING SPECIALIST
Kent Solberg
Verndale
218.445.7580
kent@sfa-mn.org

COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR
Jason Walker
Minneapolis
612.605.9269
jason@sfa-mn.org

WEBMASTER
Laura Borgendale
Minneapolis
320.226.4157
laura@sfa-mn.org
lacquiparledesign.com

CHAPTER COORDINATORS

CANNON RIVER
Kathy Zeman
Nerstrand
507.664.9446
kzeman@kmwb.net

CENTRAL
Lisa Baker
Cold Spring
320.309.0746
lisa@bakersacresfarm.com

COTEAU RIDGE
Don DeWeerd
Pipestone
507.825.2077
dondeweerd@earthlink.net

CROW RIVER
Jerry Ford
Howard Lake
320.543.3394
jerry@sfa-mn.org

LAKE AGASSIZ
Marie Petry
Wolverton
218.995.2002
grass@wtc-mail.net

LAKE SUPERIOR
Jean Sramek
Duluth
218.393.3276
info@lakesuperiorfarming.org

SOUTH CENTRAL
Linda Meschke
Fairmont
507.238.5449
linda@ruraladvantage.org

SOUTHEAST
Jerry Ford (pro tem)
Howard Lake
320.543.3394
jerry@sfa-mn.org

WESTERN
LeeAnn VanDerPol
Kerkhoven
320.367.2061
grassroots@pasturesaplenty.com
One of the strengths and defining characteristics of SFA is that we are a grassroots, chapter-based organization. Our chapters strive to build strong farm communities, to care for the land, and to draw from the wisdom of the group to make their farms more resilient and profitable. And these chapters have chosen to band together in an association that uses our collective resources to further the mission of sustainable farming education and development statewide.

The goal of the Network Development Program is to strengthen chapters, and I’m very pleased to have been chosen to lead it. Along with the SFA staff, association board, chapter leaders and individual members, it’s my hope that the resources and infrastructure in this program will provide real-world solutions both at the chapter level and statewide.

**By Jerry Ford**

SFA Network Development Coordinator • jerry@sfa-mn.org

by developing an easily-accessible printed handbook and online publication called “Chapter Resources & Guidelines.” I’ll also offer training sessions for chapters based on it. Here’s what it will include:

*Membership management* tools, with a simple and direct interface for accessing and maintaining your member roster.

*A calendar* of important chapter and association dates, such as when to renew your Chapter Charter, when to submit your membership roles, recommended dates for Chapter Annual Meetings, and so on.

*Revenue information*, including your chapter’s current financial statement, as well as the procedures for requesting checks and making deposits.

Quick and easy access to documents like your *Chapter Charter* and *Chapter Governance* policies, plus *bylaws* and *procedures* pertinent to chapters.

*An event planning* guide, including help available from the association, like event insurance.

Guidelines and advice on *volunteers* and *staff*, and resources to develop a *youth component* within your chapter.

Information on *grant writing*, effective use of the SFA logo and *branding*, and resources for holding effective board meetings.

We also want to raise the visibility of our chapters and help them to make even greater connections with each other. In keeping with this, Central Chapter is sponsoring a couple of features at the Annual Conference (see sidebar on next page). In the next several months, I’ll be helping to establish at least two more “signature events” in chapters along the lines of the Garlic Festival in Crow River Chapter and Harvest Festival in Lake Superior Chapter. Annual events like these can be rallying points to bring your members together in working toward a common and very tangible goal.

These can be “stand-alone” events, or could tie into existing programs like Festival of Farms. So, if your chapter has an idea for, say, the “Minnesota Grassfed Groundcherry and Craft Schnapps Festival,” let me know, and I’ll help you get it off the ground.

Another way in which the Network Development Program will help chapters coordinate with each other is through a *shared calendar*. This and many of the other features of the project will be housed at a chapter intranet site that will be accessible to all who are interested. Not only will the shared calendar help us to keep up with what other chapters are doing – and possibly collaborate with them – be it’s also a way to be sure we don’t book events on top of each other.

**A New Network: To Next Page**
Finally, with regard to chapter-specific resources, I am now the “Point of Contact” for all chapter relations. So, if you have questions, comments or suggestions, if you’re ready to bring me in for a training session, or you want to get started on a new event, please get in touch at 763.244.6659 or jerry@sfa-mn.org

WHAT WILL THE NETWORK DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM DO FOR THE ASSOCIATION?

In addition to the resources for chapters, the Network Development Program will strengthen the mission of SFA statewide through a series of features including:

An association-based volunteer and intern program that will provide a model for chapters that want to increase their level of volunteer involvement or implement a chapter-level intern program. There will also be guidelines and policies forthcoming to help us better manage our volunteers and interns. The first new statewide intern program is in place: the Winter Conference Internship is filled and already working on Annual Conference and Midwest Soil Health Summit.

Individual membership: I will be actively working with Chapters to bring in new members and retain the ones we have.

In addition, you’re probably already aware of the new Business & Organization Membership categories we’ve added. This is a great way to promote your business, farm or nonprofit organization directly to SFA members, and it comes with a wagonload of perks, like discounted (or sometimes free) exhibitor space and advertising. Chapters: 20 percent of the membership fee goes to you when the business or organization designates your chapter – so we appreciate you helping us recruit in your area.

Finally, we’re well underway on an intranet site for Association Board Members and Staff, with all the bylaws, policies, procedures and resources they need to do their work effectively.

EVENT MANAGEMENT

I’m very pleased to report that this new position – Network Coordinator – also incorporates my first love: event management. I’ll still be in charge of the SFA Annual Conference, and am excited about the new Midwest Soil Health Summit. (Plus Crow River Chapter still lets me direct the Garlic Festival, which is more fun than eating MN-grown pesto without a spoon.)

I’m looking forward to working with all of you, and I welcome your comments and suggestions. Together, we’re embarking on a new and exciting chapter for SFA and our members.

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How do you connect new members into your SFA chapter? How do you find new members? Here are two ways to help your chapter solve these questions in preparation for the Annual Conference.

First, chapters are invited to present a one-minute introduction about their chapter during the Annual Conference opening session, stating what makes your chapter appealing to members, including the chapter’s vision, what makes them unique, and an overview of the activities they’ve hosted in the past year.

Secondly, each chapter is encouraged to create a tri-fold display showcasing information that will help conference attendees (or other event participants throughout the year) understand that SFA is a chapter-led organization which spurs local activities to connect farmers and supporters at the grassroots level. Content should include:

- The chapter’s mission and activities
- Needs for volunteers/members/activities/etc.
- Vision for where the chapter will impact sustainable agriculture to rally future activity
- Products, farming practices and history highlights, as well as landscape features that make the chapter’s region unique
- Official SFA logo & graphics

Jason Walker, SFA Communications Coordinator, is available to help you design and create your tri-fold display: jason@sfa-mn.org or 612.605.9269.

Through these two activities, your chapter can help new members find your chapter, know what to expect when they join, and get excited about how they can get involved right away.

For questions, contact me at sfaofcentralminnesota@gmail.com or 218.296.6732.
Wanted: The Next Generation of Food Farmers

Half of American farmers have reached retirement age, and the USDA is calling for one million new farmers and ranchers in the next 10 years to fill the coming gap.

The Sustainable Farming Association is committed to providing a foundational education for those heeding the call to re-populate farm country with farmers. SFA’s Sustainable Food Production program provides that education. 2014 marks several opportunities for potential and budding farmers to enroll in SFA’s farmer education program.

“We’re awfully excited to offer a diverse array of both workshops and longer-term sustainable farming courses,” said John Mesko, SFA Executive Director.

Short-course topics planned for 2014 are deep winter greens and livestock fodder production utilizing a passive solar structure; an introduction to the care and management of small ruminants; an introduction to raising pigs on pasture; and an invitation to women to explore the realities of a life on the land.

For those who want a more comprehensive farm education experience that is taught as a learning community and features intensive skills-building sessions, a comprehensive program of courses will be offered late summer-fall 2014. This program features guided coursework on farm ecology, holistic management, artisan-food and value-added agriculture, grass-based livestock systems, and farm marketing and management. The program will also feature on-the-farm and in-the-kitchen sessions that emphasize skills development.

Visit www.sfa-mn.org for more specific course information and schedule.

“The SFP program is based on the principles of natural systems agriculture, holistic management and permaculture,” course instructor Tom Prieve said. “In sustainable agriculture we strive to emulate biodiverse natural systems that feature material cycling, run on contemporary solar energy and provide for their own pest control.”

Adapting this thinking to one’s farm provides for “elegant solutions predicated on the uniqueness of place.” (John Todd)

“Education on soil and animal health are paramount in the courses,” said Kent Solberg, SFP course instructor. “SFA is committed to keeping cattle in Minnesota. And the SFP program is unique in its focus on integrated livestock systems. Animals are a key element in soil health management.”

Permaculture adds a unique perspective to the program. Permaculturists are known for thinking out-of-the-box. The ethics of permaculture are earth care, people care, and sharing the abundance. The SFP program includes community in its curriculum. We keep the ‘culture’ in agriculture because we feel this is essential to keeping the next generation on the farm.

The SFP program has helped many students to start careers in food production. In addition to production, students are prepared and excited to become active players in community food systems. Graduates have ranged in ages from 18 to 60 years. New immigrants, veterans, and people from urban areas with little experience in agriculture have all successfully completed the program and begun their personal journeys of food sovereignty.
Minnesota Dairy Initiative (MDI): SFA’s emphasis is on grass-based dairies and new dairy start-ups, most of which are grass-based, sheep, goat or value-added operations. I have been working with several individuals and families exploring the development of new dairy enterprises. Existing producers often have specific questions about their operation including pasture management, breeding, or other operational improvements. Questions about retirement and farm succession are becoming more common, especially with the escalation of land prices and an aging farm population.

A soil health and cover crop workshop was held in Perham in March with Paul Brown from Burleigh County, N.D. as the keynote speaker. Despite the difficult travel conditions, an enthusiastic crowd of farmers went home with much to think about how to apply management practices that can promote soil health and their bottom line. A pasture walk was held in August in Aitkin County in cooperation with the NRCS featuring a fiberglass post energized fence system and a cow-powered watering system developed in Canada. I also participated in the U of M West Central Outreach and Experiment Station Organic Dairy Day, a pasture walk at Jerry Ford’s farm, and the New Crops tour at the Ag. Experiment Station in Staples.

Farm Transitions: In cooperation with Renewing the Countryside (RTC), the past few months have been active with numerous coaching calls, several on-farm coaching visits, and developing and designing a “farm portfolio” with Robyn Ingber of RTC. The farm profile or portfolio is a method of packaging a farm looking to transfer the operation to a non-family successor.

Cover Crops: The first of three cover crop field tours took place on Sept. 7 in cooperation with MDA, NRCS, NWF and MDI. I serve as a Cover Crop Champion through the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and traveled to Indianapolis in July for training. Cover Crop Champions also serves as a support network for those working to promote cover crops and soil health. I joined Minnesota NRCS and U of M Extension personnel on a bus tour to Burleigh Co., N.D. to see first-hand four farms making extensive use of soil health, cover cropping and planned grazing techniques. Burleigh County NRCS Conservationist Jay Furher was our host. Jay is an excellent soil health educator and will be one of the speakers at the Midwest Soil Health Summit in February.

Pasture Project: SFA’s work on the Pasture Project has also gained the attention of the NRCS which has led to the Keep Cattle in Minnesota project.

Keep Cattle in Minnesota: Don Baloun, NRCS State Conservationist, asked SFA to lead an effort to stem the loss of beef and dairy herds in the state. Currently, Minnesota is losing about 200 dairy herds annually, and beef numbers are the lowest since the 1950s. Well-managed pasture-based livestock enterprises are critical to water quality. Efforts to improve profitability and create opportunities for new producers are at the core of KCIM through low cost/low input methods that promote soil health. A series of Farmer-to-Farmer workshops across Minnesota during the next 14 months will be the primary effort of KCIM. Watch for details in upcoming issues of SFA Connect.
Midwest Soil Health Summit (MSHS): The MSHS is part of an effort to bring the highly acclaimed and successful Burleigh Co., N.D. soil health model to other parts of the Upper Midwest. If widely adopted, this model has the potential to resolve many of the water quality issues in the Minnesota, Mississippi and Red River Watersheds, increasing farm profitability, reduce flood intensity, and help restore rural communities in the Midwest without government subsidies.

Research Collaboration: Researchers from the University of Minnesota and North Dakota State University have contacted SFA looking to form partnerships in relevant research concerning sustainable agriculture, indicating that as an organization we are being recognized by the academic community as one of the “go-to” organizations on emerging agricultural issues.

Just like most of the farms our members operate, SFA has many interconnected projects.

UPCOMING SFA EVENTS

- **End-of-Year Fundraising Drive**
  Remember SFA in your year-end giving plans.

- **Minnesota Organic Conference | Jan. 10-11, 2014**
  Stop by the SFA booth and say hello.

- **Keep Cattle in Minnesota farm tour | Jan. 17**
  Attend presentation in Moose Lake and caravan to tour Abe Mach’s farm in Sturgeon Lake. More at sfa-mn.org.

- **SFA ANNUAL CONFERENCE | Feb. 8, 2014**
  “Back to Our Roots” • Register at sfa-mn.org

- **Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council annual meeting**
  A Keep Cattle In Minnesota Event | Feb. 11 | Staples
  The event features Josh Dukart and Ken Miller, district technicians from Burleigh Co., N.D. Register at sfa-mn.org.

- **MIDWEST SOIL HEALTH SUMMIT | Feb. 19-20, 2014**
  Keynote by Gabe Brown • Register at sfa-mn.org

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Sustainable agriculture gives me hope. What gives me hope is the knowledge that much of what ails us and the planet we are part of can be cured by the way we eat.

Real food has the best return on investment when it comes to health care. Not only does it heal us, real food is grown in ways that heal the wounds of our soils and our water. People increasingly are voting to grow and buy real food. This gives me hope for my future and that of my grandchildren’s children.

Sustainable farmers have an undervalued knowledge. This knowledge is hard earned, some through books, but most through sweat. On the backs of heroes; Albrecht, Stout, Howard, Steiner, and Leopold, the sustainable farmer has plowed forward. New-day heroes Coleman, Ingham, Salatin, Brown, and Shepard lead us and push us to break new boundaries. This hard-earned knowledge will only grow in value.

“But you can never change the system,” I often hear. “Maybe not,” I say, “but if we can, it will be done one farmer at a time, farmer to farmer.”

Thank you for your support of the Sustainable Farming Association. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have ideas, concerns, or comments in regards to SFA.

By Jim Chamberlin
SFA Acting Board President
jchamberlin@hugllc.com

Volunteer at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 8, 2014 – Be a part of what makes the SFA Annual Conference great: Volunteer for a couple of hours and contribute to the energy and excitement of the conference. All volunteers will get a way-cool T-shirt. Contact Volunteer Coordinator Gretchen Boyum at boyumfarms@gmail.com or 218.535.1567.
At its meeting Oct. 26 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Acting President Jim Chamberlin and the SFA state Board of Directors elected three new at-large board members and welcomed a new South Central Chapter representative.

Elected to the three at-large positions were Liz Morris Otto, Betsy Wieland and Dale Woodbeck. The new South Central Chapter representative is Tom Ehrhardt.

The new board members bring a diverse mix of experience, influence and expertise.

“SFA has grown as an organization in recent years,” said SFA Executive Director John Mesko. “In its wisdom, the Board of Directors has realized the need for a broader set of connections and skills, and has added three new at-large positions. The people the board has filled these positions with are going to be great assets to our organization and to sustainable agriculture.”

Tom Ehrhardt and his brother Mac own and operate Albert Lea Seed. His focus is actively working with growers of native grass and forb seed for conservation projects along with marketing farm and field seeds throughout the Upper Midwest. Tom is in the process of restoring 10 acres to native habitat and is an active bee keeper.

Liz Morris Otto is currently Chief Garden Officer for Haberman, a Minneapolis-based integrated marketing agency that tells the stories of pioneers who make a difference in the world. As CGO, Liz oversees the management of Haberman’s employer-sponsored garden on her farm in Delano. By design, the garden promotes an appreciation for rural farmers and organic, locally produced food among Haberman’s 40 urban professionals. Liz’s role is an outgrowth of her tenure with Haberman. In myriad of positions – from account executive to partner – she’s told stories of brands that connect with her own passions, including Organic Valley, Lundberg Family Farms, Annie’s Homegrown, Volvo Cars of North America, and polar explorers Ann Bancroft and Liv Arnesen. She is passionate about supporting her local community, helping to lead a local 4-H club, the Crow River Connect the Dots group, and marketing/fundraising initiatives at her children’s school.

Betsy Wieland is Center Program Manager for University of Minnesota Extension’s Center for Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Sciences, providing resources and leadership to Extension faculty across the state. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in Animal Science at University of Wisconsin, and Master’s degree in Agronomy at the University of Minnesota. She was a county agriculture extension educator for nine years, working with farms of all types. At home in Stillwater she enjoys her vegetable garden, horses, quilting, spending time with her husband (Paul) and toddler son (Toby), and daydreaming of quitting her job to farm.

Woodbeck is general manager of Lakewinds Co-op and is Board Chair at MISA. He is also a board member at the Organic Processing Institute and a lifetime SFA member.
Chapter Updates

Central

By Lisa Baker
Chapter Coordinator

It’s been a great year in the Central Chapter. We’ve been busy organizing farmer-to-farmer networking events across our region for members and supporters like you! Here is a glimpse into the chapter’s activities and a look into some future plans.

Something new is coming to your Chapter Update Newsletters. In the monthly e-newsletter, we will feature bios and interviews of members and storytelling about members’ farms and experiences. If you’d like to be featured, contact us!

Approximately once per month, the chapter’s board of directors meets at a location that supports sustainable agriculture. Members are welcome to participate—we welcome involved members and ideas and questions. Also, if you’re interested in joining our board of directors, please contact us.

We’re always looking for new members to join our chapter to fuel sustainable agriculture efforts. As a member, you get discounted registration at events statewide, the monthly chapter update newsletter as well as statewide communications, plus networked into the farmers and supporters in your region. If you know of

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Or contact: Greg Schweser, Associate Program Director Sustainable Local Foods - 612-625-9706 - schwe233@umn.edu

Chapter Updates: To Next Page

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someone in your community who might like to get involved, send them our way! News and event information is also available on our chapter webpage and Facebook page.

2013 Recap

The annual statewide Festival of Farms event was hosted in the Central Chapter in Onamia this year at the Farm Market Café. Participants visited Eller Family Farms and Dutch Fury Farm and learned from presentations on the café’s local food business model, hoop house best practices, soil health, pasture management and cover crops.

SFA’s Sustainable Food Production Program is continuing to provide students with beginning-farmer curriculum and skills training based in our region, thanks to hard work from some folks from the Central Chapter. Board member and professor Sue Wika is one of them. The next course is Jan. 26. Check out the “Sustainable Food Production” page on the SFA website for more information.

Farm Transitions workshops were also held in our chapter’s region. Visit the Farm Transitions page on the SFA website for more information.

Other events in our region included the New Crops Project Field day in Staples, Grazefest near Aitkin, a Cover Crops Bus Tour near Wadena, a Keep Cattle in Minnesota session near Wadena, a Grant Writing Workshop for farmers at the College of Saint Benedict, and more!

Thanks to all of you who participated and made the events successful. We are happy to host activities that bring you valuable educational and networking opportunities!

Future Plans

Lots of planning is under way for 2014. Here are a few things to look forward to:

Save the date: The Central Chapter’s annual meeting is tentatively scheduled for January 25 at the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls. All members are encouraged to attend! More details coming soon.

The SFA’s annual conference will be held in our chapter at the College of Saint Benedict again this year on February 8, where we will be ready to meet and greet new chapter members. Find your chapter’s table and say hi!

We’ll be at the Back-to-Basics event in Pine River on Feb. 1 as well as the Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council’s winter meeting focused on soil health, part of SFA’s Keep Cattle in Minnesota series, on Feb. 18 at Central Lakes College in Staples.

Other SFA events that will be held in our chapter include the MDA’s Organic Conference Jan 10-11 in St. Cloud and the SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit at Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria Feb 19-20.

We look forward to seeing you at these events! For more information about the Central Chapter and its ongoing projects, visit www.sfa-mn.org/central.

Crow River

By Nick Neaton
Chapter Secretary

The Crow River chapter is finishing up another productive year of fun and educational activities in the region.

Our annual meeting in January drew a nice crowd to the fine facilities at Gale Woods Farm. One highlight of the day was a new award – Outstanding Youth in Sustainable Agriculture. The chapter recognized three young women with the Outstanding Youth in Sustainable Agriculture awards at the January 2013 Crow River SFA Annual Meeting. Each winner received a commemorative plaque, as well as a $100 award to put towards their farming operation.

Youth Award Winners: Three young women were the recipients of the Outstanding Youth in Sustainable Agriculture awards at the January 2013 Crow River SFA Annual Meeting. Each winner received a commemorative plaque, as well as a $100 award to put towards their farming operation.

Youth Award Winners: Three young women were the recipients of the Outstanding Youth in Sustainable Agriculture awards at the January 2013 Crow River SFA Annual Meeting. Each winner received a commemorative plaque, as well as a $100 award to put towards their farming operation.
awards of $100 each for use in their agriculture operations.

July brought Festival of Farms, and the Crow River chapter kept it local this year by offering farm tours at four farms within a five-mile distance from each other. Participating farms included: JPR Acres, Prairie Sun Farm, Sweet Beet Farm, and True Cost Farm, which are all located in the Watertown/Montrose area. More than 100 people toured the farms throughout the day, and several joined us for the post-festival celebration at Nature’s Nest Farm near Montrose.

August featured a little event called the Minnesota Garlic Festival. Our eighth annual Garlic Fest drew more than 3,000 visitors to Hutchinson on one of the most beautiful days of the summer. New features at this year’s Garlic Fest included: ‘flash-mob’ musicians; the “Rogue Runway Show” on the Fashion Stage; and – yes – “Men in Skirts.” You, um, had to be there …

Our Fall Social featured Dr. Marla Spivak, a renowned University of Minnesota entomologist who spoke about her work with honeybees and outlined steps farmers and consumers could take to create a pollinator-friendly environment. The night also featured honey tasting and a screening of the film Queen of the Sun. Around 100 people attended this event at the Buffalo United Methodist Church. As the year wraps up, Crow River chapter members are continuing their focus on farm-to-school efforts in the metro area, particularly with Hopkins, Westonka, and Orono school districts.

Our annual meeting (Jan. 4 at Gale Woods Farm) will focus on the theme: Local food – the next step: Expanding the breadth and depth of eating local. The meeting will feature several area farmers and foodies discussing how we can develop and support a broader local food infrastructure. We hope to see you there!

Bob and Marie Petry give a tour of their GrassStain Farm in Wolverton during Lake Agassiz Chapter Festival of Farms on July 13, 2013.

Lake Agassiz

By Marie Petry
Chapter Coordinator

Lake Agassiz Chapter is on the grow! We had a successful Festival on the Farm event in July with beautiful weather for a group touring GrassStain Farm near Wolverton. There was something for every age including intensive grazing paddock and pastured pen poultry talks for adults as well as egg-picking and cow-petting for the kids. After the tour, the group shared a potluck lunch and networking time followed by a chicken butchering demonstration.

The farming expertise and experience in NW Minnesota is rich and fertile; the Lake Agassiz Chapter of SFA wants to harness these resources to help us all grow in our own sustainable farming endeavors. There are beekeepers, dairy goat farmers, heritage hog breeders, farmer’s markets, vegetable growers, and many more enterprises working towards the same goals. Sharing our resources through networking helps all of us achieve our goals.

We are gaining new members and ready to take the next step of forming an Organizational Committee. We need YOU to join our work in establishing the Lake Agassiz Chapter. Will you join us? If you are interested in this next step, contact Marie Petry at grass@wtc-mail.net.
Creating The New Paradigm: ‘Going Grass’

By Kent Solberg

Grass-based dairy systems are the low-cost method for new producers to enter dairy and a primary means to improve soil health and water quality. Feed costs are the single largest annual expense for dairy and beef producers. Developing a “forage chain” consisting of a combination of planned grazing, permanent pasture, seeded annuals (which may also serve as cover crops), season extension grazing techniques (such as grazing crop residue), and outwintering serves a viable model in reducing feed costs while improving soil health.

These methods can serve both new and existing dairy and beef operations looking to improve their bottom line.

Soil health is a natural outcome of sound grazing practices and has led, in part, to the development of the Keep Cattle in Minnesota project. Taking the soil health message to a broader agricultural audience is the focus of SFA’s new conference, the Midwest Soil Health Summit. New beef and dairy producers are often taking over a retiring farm operation, or at least parts, thus the need for successful farm transitions. Successful farm succession may require a new paradigm for livestock agriculture.

As a society, we are at a crossroads in the future of livestock agriculture. Farm start-up models of the past (take out a loan for land, machinery and livestock to begin farming) are no longer valid. Costs are prohibitive. Potential margins small. Risks great. A new paradigm of how we bring new livestock producers into the marketplace must emerge.

This paradigm will be incremental. New producers often need some level of formalized foundational hands-on training, such as the SFP program, that can be completed in one year or less at a reasonable cost. Training would include an internship. This is followed by an “apprenticeship” on an established farm where they can begin building equity (in livestock), demonstrate positive cash flow, and gain production and management experience. Ideally, the internship and apprenticeship would occur on at least two different farms. As finances allow, the new producer can begin acquiring a basic line of machinery and equipment, rent a “starter farm” (with the support of a mentoring individual or group, such as an MDI Dairy Profit Team), then ultimately moving into acquisition of their own farm.

The dominant agricultural paradigm for decades has equated maximum production (yield) with maximum profitability. However, this has often proven to be untrue, and even detrimental to many producers.

Production is important, but it’s not the Holy Grail that many have made it to be. High input costs (fuel, labor, machinery, etc.) dictate this reality. New producers simply do not have the capital to compete and succeed under this model. Transferring focus from maximum production to net earnings forms the fiscal basis of this proposed paradigm.

A production model for beginning producers would incorporate a combination of old (livestock on pasture, diverse crop rotations, gleaning crop residue) and new technologies (electro plastic twine, mob grazing, improved forage varieties, complex cover crop mixes, baleage, etc.).

Under this new paradigm livestock will do much more of the work vs. the producer spoon-feeding livestock everything they need and hauling waste away. Husbandry (or management) becomes the focus instead of inputs. Soil health is emphasized. Profitability follows.

This is not a utopian dream. We have many producers in the Midwest doing these things, and doing them well. SFA is uniquely situated at this crossroads to help educate and train new and existing producers through our farmer-to-farmer network and events like GrazeFest, KCIM, and the Midwest Soil Health Summit.

Change will not happen overnight, but we can be a driver of that change.
Our upcoming Annual Conference, “Back to Our Roots,” is all about the Minnesota sustainable farming community. We got lots of response to our survey on what sessions you wanted, and we’ve designed the content of the conference primarily around that very thing. Then we took recommendations from association board directors and chapter leaders on what they thought was needed. And, finally, we are including sessions driven by our ongoing projects. This has resulted in an intense schedule of 20 sessions, most of which will be “discussion format” – led by a couple of experts, but focusing on the wisdom and needs of the community.

Here’s a roster of the sessions as of Dec. 4, 2013 (subject to change). First are the topics resulting from the survey in their ranked order, then the Culinary Track, followed by the leadership ideas, and finally the project-driven topics. For a complete, up-to-date schedule, visit sfa-mn.org/conference.

### Survey-Generated Sessions

**#1 – Root Cellars:** John Fisher-Merritt, master of sustainable root cellaring, will be joined by Greg Reynolds, Riverbend Farm, and Jerry Ford, Living Song Farm.

**#2 – Integrating Perennial Cropping Systems:** With a focus on farm-scale permaculture and agroforestry, led by Jim Chamberlin, SFA board president, and Tyler Carlson of Early Roots Farm.

**#3 - Weed Control Strategies:** Gary Brever, Ploughshare Farm, is co-hosting this topic with Al Sterner and Jean Peterson, Goodness Grows, and Paul Schmidt, Sunfresh Foods – three very diverse farms.

**#4 - Innovative Cover Cropping & #5 – Integrating Crop & Livestock Production:** Hosted by SFA’s own Kent Solberg and a host of soil health and livestock specialists.

**#6 – Seed Saving:** Greg Reynolds, who is also heading up the annual Seed Swap.

**#7 – “Don’t Fence Me In” Fencing Showdown:** Kent Solberg, SFA’s Grazing and Livestock Specialist, hosts graziers and livestock pros.

**#8 – Season Extension:** Join Sue Wika and Tom Prieve, Paradox Farm, for an open discussion of season extension techniques.

**#9 – New Crops: Quinoa, Nettles, Amaranth, etc.:** This one will feature field reports and an open forum on these emerging specialty crops.

**#10 Soil Health - Row Crop Production:** How we can increase the vitality of soil in our row crop fields with such techniques as intensive rotation, cover crops, mycorrhizal fungi and more.

### Culinary Track

Mary Jane Miller, Chef, Recipe Consultant and Garlic Fes Chef Wrangler again leads this popular feature. A sampling:

**Cheese, Wine and Beer Pairing Smackdown:** Chefs, artisan cheesemakers, brewers, and vintners will show off their favorite pairing, and YOU get to vote on the winners (and taste the results!).

**Minnesota Fish:** With “The Fish Guys”

**Cooking Grassfed Beef:** With Thousand Hills Cattle Company

**Farm-to-Daycare:** Advice for growers, CSA farms and day-care providers, with samples of kid-friendly foods

### Project Topics

**Farm Transitions Portfolio:** Explore how to tell the story of your land and start to create your portfolio.

**Keep Cattle In Minnesota:** This series is dedicated to sustaining local beef and dairy industries.

**Adjust 2015:** A follow-up to last year’s popular open forum on making adjustments.

**Chapter Resources:** Jerry Ford rolls out the Chapter Resources Program, which will help each of our chapters to become even more active and vibrant.

**Plus the Friday night social events, kids programming and all those vendors and exhibitors**

### Leadership Recommendations

**Artisan Cheese:** Anne Borgendale, cheese buyer for Linden Hills Food Co-op, presents a delicious – yes, there will be samples! – discussion on the state of fine cheese in Minnesota. This will tie directly in to a “Cheese, Wine & Beer Pairing Smackdown” in the Culinary Sessions.

**Planting & Harvesting Calendars:** Eric Ament hosts a confabulation on how to streamline “this year’s plan” going into the growing season so that it saves time, with techniques to also save your back.
Annual Conference Registration Form

YOU MAY ALSO REGISTER ONLINE AT SFA-MN.ORG/CONFERENCE

Note: This year’s conference is Feb. 8 at the Gorecki Center, College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph, Minn. Lunch is not included with your registration. Please take advantage of the St. Ben’s cafeteria or the local-food restaurants in St. Joseph, or bring a sack lunch. Again this year is the special Leaders Breakfast and SFA Awards Ceremony on the morning of Feb. 8; an extra admission ticket is necessary to attend the breakfast.

Family Programming is returning so that the entire farm family can come enjoy our farmer-to-farmer showcase. Admission for children ages 3-12 is just $10, while kids under 3 are free. Please register even the free ones, however, so we can better plan the kids’ programming; simply write “under 3” in the “COST” field.

COST: SFA MEMBERS: $55 • NONMEMBERS: $65 • STUDENTS & AGES 3-12: $10 • UNDER 3: FREE

First Attendee
Name __________________________________________________ Email ___________________________________________________
Address _____________________________________ City ___________________ State____ Zip ______ COST ___________________

Leaders Breakfast? Yes (add $12.50) No

Second Attendee
Name __________________________________________________ Email ___________________________________________________
Address _____________________________________ City ___________________ State____ Zip ______ COST ___________________

Leaders Breakfast? Yes (add $12.50) No

Third Attendee
Name __________________________________________________ Email ___________________________________________________
Address _____________________________________ City ___________________ State____ Zip ______ COST $ ________________

Leaders Breakfast? Yes (add $12.50) No

Fourth Attendee
Name __________________________________________________ Email ___________________________________________________
Address _____________________________________ City ___________________ State____ Zip ______ COST $ ________________

Leaders Breakfast? Yes (add $12.50) No

TOTAL ENCLOSED: $ ________________ Make checks payable to Sustainable Farming Association

To register more than four people from the same household, copy this form or register at www.sfa-mn.org/conference
Award Nominations

2013 Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Awards

Based on qualifications of a high level of dedication, commitment, service, perseverance, achievement and contributions to the advancement of sustainable farming in Minnesota, I nominate the following person(s) for the:

Sustainable Farmer Emeritus Award (farmer or retired farmer only)
This award will be given to a farmer or farm family, currently farming or retired, that has dedicated many years to the advancement of sustainable farming in Minnesota.

Nominee: ______________________________________________________________________________________

SFA Distinguished Service Award (may be a non-farmer)
This award is for a farmer or non-farmer who has shown a high level of dedication, commitment, service and perseverance to supporting sustainable agriculture in Minnesota.

Nominee: ______________________________________________________________________________________

My name: ______________________________________________________________________________________
Address: ______________________________________________________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________ Email: _______________________________________________________
Please explain why your nominee(s) deserve the award: ______________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

Your signature: _________________________________________________________________________________

Honorees will be announced at the Leaders Breakfast at the SFA Annual Conference on Sat., Feb. 8, 2014, at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn. You may register for the conference and Leaders Breakfast at sfa-mn.org/conference, or use the registration form elsewhere in this CornerPost.

Mail your nomination form by Jan. 17, 2014, to: SFA, c/o Mary Hanks, 10500 295th Street W, Northfield, MN 55057; or email your nomination to Mary.Hanks@state.mn.us.
Ninth Annual Minnesota Garlic Festival
Sat., Aug. 9, 2014
• McLeod County Fairgrounds in Hutchinson
• Vendor inquiries welcome!
• mngarlicfest.com

Sponsored by the Crow River Chapter, Sustainable Farming Association

Irene Bender, Garlic Queen

At left, Rachel Malloy, flamenco singer. Above, the Peculiar Pragmatic Promenade.

Above, champion garlic grower Gary Klingelhoets and Gertie the Garlic Bulb.

At left, kids activities.

Below, members of The Narren of New Ulm interact with the crowd.
The keynote speaker will be Gabe Brown of Brown’s Ranch in Burleigh County, N.D. Brown is a pioneer in diverse cover cropping, having used no-till techniques for two decades. His family ranch encompasses 5,400 acres, all managed sustainably and with the goal of building ideal soil health conditions. Following Brown’s address will be a presentation by Richard Bieber, a producer from South Dakota who has been practicing no-till for 27 years and cover cropping for over a decade. Bieber says, “When it comes to soil health, you are speaking directly to my passion.” Other speakers:

- **Wendy Taheri**, Research Microbiologist with the North Central Agricultural Research Laboratory, will present on cover cropping and mycorrhizae in soils.
- **Kent Solberg**, SFA Livestock and Grazing Coordinator, will be leading a session on designing and customizing cover crops.
- **Jay Fuhrer**, District Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Bismarck, N.D., will lead a session on how to make soil health principles work on your farm.
- **Ryan Stockwell** of the National Wildlife Federation will present a session on the financial side of implementing soil health practices.

Cost is $100 for SFA members and $150 for nonmembers. Register today at sfa-mn.org/midwest-soil-health-summit