BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR
Jim Chamberlin
Central
Deerwood

VICE CHAIR
Libby Wyrum
At Large
St. Paul

SECRETARY
Joe Gans
Greater Mille Lacs
Aitkin

TREASURER
Chris Kudrna
At Large
St. Cloud

Paul Berglund
At Large
Minneapolis

Jon Ferris
East Central
Cambridge

Chris Gamer
Southeast
Plainview

Richard Handeen
Western
Montevideo

Noelle Harden
Lake Agassiz
Vergas

Mike Lija
Crow River
Dayton

Liz Morris Otto
At Large
Delano

Joel Rosen
Lake Superior
Mahtowa

Tiffany Tripp
Cannon River
Faribault

Betsy Wieland
At Large
Stillwater

Dale Woodbeck
At Large
Excelsior

STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Theresa Keaveny
New Ulm
Ext. 5
theresa@sfa-mn.org

NETWORK COORDINATOR
Jerry Ford
Howard Lake
Ext. 700
jerry@sfa-mn.org

LIVESTOCK & GRAZING SPECIALIST
Kent Solberg
Verndale
Ext. 701
kent@sfa-mn.org

DEEP ROOTS
Sue Wika, Ph.D.
Ashby
Ext. 703
sue@sfa-mn.org

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
Jason Walker
Minneapolis
Ext. 702
jason@sfa-mn.org

SPECIAL PROJECTS
Wayne Monsen
Stillwater
Ext. 712
wayne@sfa-mn.org

WEBMASTER
Laura Borgendale
Minneapolis
laura@sfa-mn.org

MULTIMEDIA COORDINATOR
Katie Feterl
Minneapolis
katie@sfa-mn.org

CHAPTERS

CANNON RIVER
cannonriver@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 706

CENTRAL
central@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 704

CROW RIVER
crowriver@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 705

DRIFTLESS
driftless@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 711

EAST CENTRAL
eastcentral@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 718

GREATER MILLE LACS
greatermillelacs@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 707

LAKE AGASSIZ
lakeagassiz@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 708

LAKE SUPERIOR
lakesuperior@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 709

WESTERN
western@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 710

NETWORKING GROUPS

DEEP WINTER GREENHOUSE
depthewinter@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 717

ECOLOGICAL SERVICE LIVESTOCK
servicelivestock@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 719

FORAGE COUNCIL
foragecouncil@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 714

GARLIC GROWERS
garlicgrowers@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 716

BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE

The Board of Directors meets four times a year: February (usually the day before the Annual Conference, which is Feb. 9, 2018), April, July and October.

ABOUT

CornerPost is published yearly and is the annual report of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Organization.

For IRS filings, recent financial reports and other organizational records, visit sfa-mn.org/sfa-documents.

Contributions to SFA are fully tax deductible under terms of section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code. SFA’s federal tax exemption number is EIN: 41-1671893.

To join, donate or learn more about our programs, visit www.sfa-mn.org. We thank you for your support.

CONTACT US
Sustainable Farming Association
4924 Upton Ave S
Minneapolis, MN 55410
1.844.922.5573
www.facebook.com/SFA.MN
twitter.com/sfamn
Editorial: Jason Walker
jason@sfa-mn.org
Memories of a True Soil Devotee

By Jim Chamberlin
SFA Board President
jchamberlin@hugllc.com

Our community lost a pioneer this fall in Bruce Bacon. I first met him in 2003 when I attended a three-day permaculture workshop at his Garden Farme. I had applied for a work scholarship to offset some of my registration fee and Bruce assigned me the task of rebuilding the two-stall outhouse, which sits on the hill close to the original garden and the small prairie just to the west. Seldom did I attend an event at Garden Farme when Bruce didn’t bring up the outhouse and how I saved the crapper.

Bruce was a true caretaker of the land. He understood that we are all connected: people, land, trees, animals, water and soil. Always seeking knowledge, he spent the last few years of his life developing a network of brilliant minds on soil science. His “soil committee” included soil scientists who had spent their careers digging soil pits and PhD’s who were on the cutting edge of soil biological testing. He spent thousands of dollars testing his soil to develop a better understanding of how to work the earth beneath our feet.

Somehow I was added to his committee.

Maybe twice a year I would get a call from Bruce, wondering how we can do more, how we can further the shared work of restoring soil health. On one such call he spent an hour explaining the soil ecosystem as he understood it. He spoke of the four “pools of energy” in soil. I’m not sure I fully understood his explanation, as his knowledge was much deeper than mine, but this how I recall it:

1) Plant photosynthetic exudate is the first pool, and the base of the soil food chain. Dr. Elaine Ingham describes it as “plant snot” – cookies and ice cream for the smallest microorganisms, the primary feeders that ultimately get consumed by something bigger. The more diverse the plants and “plant snot,” the more diverse the microbe population.

2) Next is the microbial community, feeding on soil organic matter, plant exudate and each other. Billions – no, countless – microbial predator/prey dramas play out in the soil, as real as that of the deer and wolf or cheetah and gazelle. Microbes fix nutrients with their feces and bodies, dead and alive, making them available when the plants need them. The microbe pool also includes the fungal community that burrows into rocks as well as the living bodies of soil organisms. They extract and convert nutrients and feed them to plants and other animals. These fungal strands connect plants and serve as the communication network of the soil. Some of the largest organisms on earth are fungi.

3) Not to be discounted is the carbon pool. Often called “organic matter,” it is not so simplistic. At its core is humus, the amazing substance that glues soil together to build soil aggregate and structure. It acts as a sponge, holding water in the soil profile and is vital to the soil/water nutrient solution. Humus has a negative charge and improves cation exchange capacity allowing for better nutrient cycling and soil fertility. This pool, as I understand, also contains the humic and fulvic acids that extract minerals from the geologic parent material of sand, silt and clay.

4) Last but not least is the chemical pool. This is what agricultural science has focused on for decades. We know this pool inside and out, and must use it to balance and supplement our soils, but never assume it alone is the basis of soil fertility.

Bruce went on to talk about the electromagnetic forces that drive the system, the negative and positive ion exchanges and other “mystic” solar and lunar forces spoken of by Rudolf Steiner and others, but I didn’t grasp much of this, as physics is a stretch beyond my comprehension. There was more to explain, but work and life got in the way. How the pools of energy work together to build soil function could fill volumes, many known to Bruce. I will miss those calls and conversations with my friend.

He worried about the future, his farm, friends, and the land community. As Garrison Keillor wrote in tribute, Bruce left his mark on a lot of souls. Rest assured Bruce Bacon, your work, our shared work, will carry on.
**An Alternative Path: Profitability Through Stewardship**

By Theresa Keaveny  
SFA Executive Director  
theresa@sfa-mn.org

Minnesota Secretary of Agriculture Dave Fredrickson recently shared that our state has 73,000 farmers, down from the 183,000 that existed when statehood was established in 1858. Twenty six million acres, or 51 percent of the state, is farmable crop land; the average farm is 355 acres and the average age of farmers is 56.6 years. He noted that total agricultural output is $121 billion, supporting 431,000 jobs. Clearly, agriculture ranks high in the context of Minnesota’s economy. As Sec. Fredrickson pointed out, with continued low prices for corn, soybeans and dairy, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture is providing support services and counseling to farmers facing financial crisis. Another shakeout in agriculture looms.

As he spoke, I thought about how this squares with SFA’s work to shift the paradigm of production agriculture to one that supports soil health practices – minimize soil disturbances, keep the soil covered, incorporate diverse species, deepen root systems and add livestock to the landscape. SFA members and conservation farmers across the state say the biggest barrier to achieving a sustainable family farm system is the federal farm program, which incentivizes monoculture production while transitions to sustainable production are not similarly encouraged.

Though we believe it’s beginning to crumble, another barrier is the hesitation of farmers to shift from plowed and uncovered fields of corn and soybeans to integrating cover crops and livestock. One farmer recently told me that, upon telling his brother the benefits he’s experienced with multi-species cover crops and managed grazing, the doubtful response was, “show me.” Well, the farmer is doing just that, and his brother is not so doubtful anymore.

With every soil health field day we host filled to capacity, and our increasing calls and requests for help to add cover crops and increase soil organic matter, it’s clear the “show me” reluctance is diminishing. More and more farmers find there is improved water carrying capacity with healthy soil, enabling more timely cultivation and less damage and polluting runoff. Reduced fertilizer and farm chemical costs, competitive yields and improved net income per acre are other benefits.

While I don’t think SFA and sustainable farming practices can save everyone who is on the brink of bankruptcy, we are demonstrating an alternative path and helping restore profitability through stewardship. In this landscape, SFA’s priorities and chapter programs resonate with farmers large and small, beginning and retiring, organic to conventional:

- SFA is scaling up our soil health education, outreach and demonstration programs. A series of “Café Chats” is planned for the new year and a mentoring group of soil health practitioners is being organized to coach others. New information on soil health for small producers and vegetable growers is being developed.

- Partnering with the Pasture Project, Land Stewardship Project and Practical Farmers of Iowa, SFA’s on-farm research through the Conservation Innovation Grant is yielding results which will be rolled out at the 2018 Midwest Soil Health Summit – offering lessons about cover crops and grazing.

- SFA continues to serve as a regional coordinator for the Minnesota Dairy Initiative, providing support and education to dairy farmers with a special emphasis on grazing.

- Our Deep Roots Farmer Development Program features workshops on how to build and operate deep winter greenhouses to diversify income streams and provide delicious greens for family and community.

- SFA leaders are discussing with other stakeholders the importance of a fair, equitable food system that provides producers a fair rate of return, keeps them on the land and covers year-round stewardship costs.

- SFA partners with Renewing the Countryside in farm transition education and outreach work. Teresa Opheim’s bi-weekly farm transition columns appear in SFA Connect and we’ve helped launch her online discussion group. In the months ahead, watch for more SFA farm transition programming.

All of this work takes a robust budget, and membership dues are the foundation. When asking folks to join SFA, I’ve heard, “What’s in it for me?” My answer: SFA’s education and outreach work. Theresa Opheim’s bi-weekly farm transition columns appear in SFA Connect and we’ve helped launch her online discussion group. In the months ahead, watch for more SFA farm transition programming.

At this time of thanks and reflection, I am grateful for SFA, its 1,085 members and those who’ve welcomed me these last 10 months as the new Executive Director. It’s a privilege to be a steward of this organization. I’ve met family farmers, food advocates and agricultural professionals from every corner of the state. SFA has an amazing, talented and committed team of colleagues, board members, chapter leaders and partner groups.

SFA’s mission is to protect our food producing resources – air, land, water, farm families and communities – for future generations.

It’s a mission that needs support. Please consider the critical role SFA plays, and make a year-end gift, become a monthly sustaining donor or renew your membership today.

Thank you for this opportunity!
A recent article in the state’s largest newspaper quoted a state official who said, “it’s impossible to raise crops without an impact on groundwater.”

Male bovine manure.

The above quote was likely in reference to dominant agricultural practices – and, if so, the quote is accurate. But can we have productive and profitable agriculture that protects water quality, improves habitat for pollinators and grassland birds, provides opportunities for the next generation of farmers, and reduces erosion? Absolutely, yes. If you have been to a soil health or cover crop event in the past three years, it is likely that an NRCS rainfall simulator was on display. Typically, this device uses a rain scenario to compare continuously cropped ground, a field or fields using no-till and/or cover cropping to various degrees, overgrazed pasture, well-managed pasture, and possibly a sample from a CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) field. In every event, there are measurable differences in water infiltration and runoff between each land management scenario. As predictable, the greatest degree of runoff and least amount of water infiltration is ALWAYS on the continuously cropped ground.

Varying degrees of reduced runoff and increased infiltration are observed on various combinations of cover crop integration and minimized tillage systems, often seeing an improvement over time. Poorly managed pasture systems and set-aside lands (e.g. CRP) perform in wildly varying degrees, with heavy runoff and poor infiltration rates ranking as the most common.

Well-managed pastures and fields with several seasons of full implementation of the Five Principles of Soil Health almost always have the greatest degree of infiltration and lowest runoff rates. Why?

Where we have healthy and active soil microbial populations, we have good soil aggregate structure. Where we have good soil aggregate structure, we have good water infiltration and little, if any, runoff. Respectable crop yields with reduced input costs follow. Opportunities for new producers rise up. And yes, lives can literally be spared and damage to property reduced when snow and soil remain on the fields and not lifted via the wind across public highways reducing visibility and traction.

In the current environment of high public scrutiny of commodity agriculture, and low or negative net incomes from agricultural commodities, the farmer can reap the greatest benefit by implementing the principles of soil health into their operation. The most common comment we hear from producers who have been working toward soil health over 3-5 years is “I wish I would have started this sooner.”

There is a tremendous amount of help and information available. Hardly a week goes by during the growing season where there hasn’t been a workshop or field day somewhere in Minnesota concerning soil health, cover crops or no-till. Articles abound in the agricultural press. Numerous videos and podcasts are available. Numerous workshops will cover these topics this winter, including SFA’s Midwest Soil Health Summit (MSHS), which has been declared by past attendees as the best conference they have ever attended. Other notable experts have stated that it is the best soils short course in the Upper Midwest.

SFA is working to expand educational efforts on soil health with “Café Chats” modeled after similar work in North Dakota. We also aid in launching farmer-driven soil health networks in strategic areas of the state in cooperation with other organizations. I am scheduled to speak on soil health and grazing at 10 workshops and conferences over the coming months in addition to the MSHS (Feb. 14-15, 2018) and our own Annual Conference (Feb. 10, 2018).

Livestock integration is crucial for building soil health, but as many producers do not have livestock as part of their farming operations, we have joined with the NRCS and Minnesota Department of Agriculture to develop the Cropland Grazing Exchange. This site, linked on our Soil Health Portal at sfa-mn.org/soil, allows graziers and row crop farmers to link up, creating beneficial relationships for each producer by boosting soil health and profitability.

If you haven’t yet, I strongly encourage you to attend a workshop or field day utilizing the rainfall simulator, which is a powerful analytical and educational tool. If you can’t make it to an event, there are several short videos on the internet worthy of watching some cold winter’s eve, many of which are collected on our Soil Health Portal at sfa-mn.org/soil. If you are a producer wondering where to begin, please contact me (kent@sfa-mn.org) or 844-922-5573, Ext. 701) and I will do what I can to help you move down the road to soil health.

Only a year ago, I felt we were only “planting seeds” of soil health. Since then, I have seen the evidence that there is serious momentum in the soil health movement in Minnesota. While there is much work to be done, our efforts are beginning to show fruit.

Thank you for your support and help at this critical crossroads in agriculture.

Dr. Kris Nichols highlights Midwest Soil Health Summit on Feb. 14-15

We have heard a consistent message after the first four Midwest Soil Health Summits – attendees keep saying it’s “the best conference I’ve ever been to.” Other notable experts have stated that it is “the best soils short course in the Upper Midwest.”

If you’ve attended, you know why, as the level of soil health expert education is top-notch and attuned to issues farmers face in the Upper Midwest. And the opportunity to network and speak directly with the leading names in soil health, like 2018 lead speaker Dr. Kris Nichols, chief scientist at Rodale Institute, has proven valuable to many.

Don’t miss the 2018 Midwest Soil Health Summit – register today at www.sfa-mn.org/soil.
**SFA-Funded Project Humming Along; Support Renewed**

SFA recently finished the two-year Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Project (SARE PDP) titled “Networking for Soil Health.” The project was designed to expand the number of agricultural support professionals - NRCS, SWCD, Extension, Crop Consultants, industry personnel - who are able to conduct successful soil health related events for farmers.

The SARE-PDP project objectives:
- Conduct a series of Train-the-Trainer events
- Promote soil health
- Create a soil health events calendar
- Maintain a Soil Health Network database
- Assemble and publish a checklist to help agricultural service professionals conduct soil health education events.

During the project we hosted two Midwest Soil Health Summits and four Dirt Rich field day events as Train-the-Trainer events in conjunction with The Pasture Project. To encourage agriculture service professionals to attend Train-the-Trainer events, we offered scholarships with funds from the SARE-PDP that covered expenses for agriculture service professionals to attend. We provided 63 scholarships to agricultural professionals during the two years.

Scholarship recipients agreed to host at least one soil health training event within the year of attending the training. To date, recipients have held over 20 field days and meetings with nearly 1,000 people attending. These events helped spread the word of the importance of soil health and the participants became members of the soil health network.

SFA also hosted two soil health webinars, which can be found at sfa-mn.org/webinars, to provide practical experience in implementing soil health principles. They were:

- June 21, 2017 – Dr. Scotty Wells: “Filling the Void: Strategies for Improved Sustainability” In this webinar, Dr. Wells gives an introduction to the shifting soil health landscape, new opportunities for cash crops, the most updated data, and more.
- June 30, 2017 – Kent Solberg: “Soil health for wildlife and fisheries managers: Why should we (or I) care?” Solberg discusses what positive impacts soil health can have for wildlife and fisheries, and how habitat quality is a function of soil health.

SFA combined the objectives of Soil Health Promotion, Soil Health Events Calendar, and Maintain a Soil Health Network database into our Soil Health Portal on the SFA website, where members of the Soil Health Network can register their education events. Through this website the Soil Health Network grows as the participants are entered into the database: over 1,100 people so far.

SFA and SARE both agree that this project was very successful and training-the-trainers in soil health should continue. SARE has approved funding for the project to continue for another two years. SFA plans to continue the Midwest Soil Health Summits and the Dirt Rich field day events as well as design other training opportunities.

---

**Special Work on Specialty Crops: Herbs, Garlic & More**

Wormwood, catnip, hyssop, nettles, and a whole lot of garlic. It sounds like an elaborate folk remedy for whatever ails you, but it’s just a sample of the plants in SFA’s Specialty Crops Projects.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) sets aside grant money for Minnesota organizations to “increase the competitiveness of our specialty crops” in domestic and foreign markets, and they believe that organizations like SFA can help growers to be more resilient and profitable by developing the culture and markets for these crops while educating farmers about them.

We completed one such grant project in 2017, which we called “The Herb Project”, and a second one kicked off in November, “The Garlic Project.”

With our extensive and vibrant farmer-to-farmer network, SFA is perfectly positioned to reach a great number of growers, enabling them to establish these crops as a profitable part of their operations.

**The Herb Project**

Recognizing that herbs are a growing market for Minnesota farmers, MDA awarded SFA a Specialty Crops Grant to research the culture of growing herbs on small and medium sized farms, as well as the marketing of these crops in Minnesota. As we take a look back at the work done on both medicinal and culinary herbs, we see that it fell neatly into two phases.

Phase One was overseen by John Mesko at Lighthouse Farm near Princeton, MN, and involved a host of field trials on a vast number of herbs. You can read all about them and the related field days at www.sfa-mn.org/category/herbs.

Phase Two brought in our Herb Specialist, Connie Karstens, from Hutchinson, MN. Connie did a series of presentations on growing and marketing herbs, including a field day at her farm store, The Lamb Shoppe, where she sells cultivated and wildcrafted herbs and consults as a herbalist. The project culminated at Minnesota Garlic Festival, with an “Ask the Expert” presentation and a life-size, interactive “Game of Herbs.” You can see more at www.sfa-mn.org/the-herb-project.

**Growing and Marketing Premium Minnesota Garlic**

Without a doubt, SFA has a long track record with garlic - the Garlic Festival is coming up in its 13th year - and I am honored to be coordinating this grant project. Along with Connie Carlson of Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, and numerous other collaborators, we will be educating farmers on the cultivation of garlic, promoting the brand “Minnesota Premium Garlic”, working to enhance the marketing and distribution system, and conducting research on best practices for growing garlic in our region.

We’re recruiting farms for this research work, and we’ll be tracking over 25 farms on their production. There is a ready-to-go workshop that we can bring to your chapter, or even to a just group of growers that you gather. The website is: sfa-mn.org/the-garlic-project.

If you’re interested in participating or in hosting the workshop, please contact me at jerry@sfa-mn.org or 763-244-6659.

---

**By Jerry Ford**
SFA Network Coordinator
jerry@sfa-mn.org

**By Wayne Monsen**
SFA Special Projects Coordinator
wayne@sfa-mn.org
I want to start by extending a big thank you to current members and supporters! New and renewing members combined with fundraising have kept our programs vital. These funds give your organization’s board, staff and chapters maximum flexibility in offering programs that are relevant and impactful. Please keep encouraging your friends and neighbors to join or renew and please participate in our fundraising campaigns.

Our accounting firm has changed (again) to Mahoney, Ulbrich, Christensen and Russ, a company that does a great deal of nonprofit accounting and advising. Our bookkeeping and accounting costs have gone down with our new accountant. The lack of accurate and timely financials has been a source of great frustration for many of us and this problem has finally been solved.

To access our latest fiscal year financials, please visit sfa-mn.org/sfa-documents. The details below summarize fiscal year July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017. You can also access our IRS Form 990 by going to sfa-mn.org/sfa-documents. This is our annual ‘tax’ report to the IRS.

We did end the year with a larger than budgeted loss largely caused by a gap in our grant-writing efforts due to the Executive Director transition. The board was closely watching this shortfall and the staff prudently cut expenses where practical to ensure the loss was minimized. While our grant income was down, more determined membership building and a $25,000 fundraising campaign this spring helped us meet our Pasture Project matching grant and ensure program continuity. Congratulations to our donors and the board!

We ended the year with approximately $87K in cash of which $61K belongs to the various Chapters and Networking Groups. The remaining $26K means we are building our cash balance.

Looking forward, our current fiscal year budget calls for us to raise roughly 27 percent of revenue from internal, grassroots sources (membership dues, contributions, major donors, fundraising events, earned income from workshops and meetings), and 63 percent from foundation and government grants. The board and staff want to move the internal funding percentage up in the years ahead and we have a respectable start on this goal.

More is budgeted this new fiscal year for membership dues, monthly givers, and major donors. We are now sending membership renewal and recruitment letters 3-4 times per year. All members should be receiving electronic notices when their dues first expire. By renewing (or joining) online, you save SFA costs so please do so if possible.

Several chapters have been active in raising funds, notably the continued success of Crow River’s Garlic Festival, Lake Superior’s Harvest Festival, and the new Greater Mille Lacs’ Farm2Families and Central’s Minnesota Salsa Fest events. While the last two are new, and though attendance was light due to rain and cold weather, they are making plans for repeat events that build community and financial support, following Crow River’s and Lake Superior’s lead.

It might be obvious, but the more initiative chapters take to raise money directly the more that chapter has available for local, farmer-to-farmer networking. One simple step would be to call or visit with neighbors whose membership is expired or about to expire. Your chapter delegate gets a report quarterly naming those expiring members in your chapter.

After many years without an increase, the board did vote to increase membership dues from $30 to $40 per individual membership, and from $40 to $50 per household/farm per year. For members who belong to a chapter, only $5 of that membership goes to the statewide Association for its staff time spent organizing assistance to chapters, website, chapter communications and accounting services. In recognition of these services, the board did approve increasing this amount to $10 per membership effective June 30, 2017.

Our new Executive Director, Theresa Keaveny, has been working hard to get new grants and maintain the ones we have plus expand our fundraising and membership efforts. This has been critical to avoiding financial difficulty and she is to be commended!

It’s been a pleasure to serve as your Treasurer for another year and I look forward to a stronger financial year as our staff and members continue to engage on issues of sustainability important to us all. If you have questions about our financials, please feel free to contact me directly at ckudrna@charter.net or Theresa at theresa@sfa-mn.org.

SFA Financials: To access our latest fiscal year financials and our IRS Form 990, please visit sfa-mn.org/sfa-documents.

SFA Major Funders

The Sustainable Farming Association Board of Directors would like to recognize our major funding sources for the year:

- USDA SARE Professional Development (PDP) program – $75,000 over 2 years
- Otto Bremer Foundation – $50,000 for soil health and rural economic development
- McKnight Foundation – $80,000 for 2 years, Soil Health Network
- Minnesota Dairy Initiative – Support family dairy farmers to be economically and environmentally sustainable
- SARE Mini grants – event speakers and travel for $3,000
- MDA Specialty Crop Grant – promotion of herb planting, wild crafting, harvesting, and marketing last half of a $75,000 grant
- Pasture Project/Conservation Innovation Grant – $40,000 over 2 years and another $21,000 this year

By Chris Kudrna
SFA Board Treasurer
ckudrna@charter.net

SFA Board Treasurer
ckudrna@charter.net
SFA Cornerpost

By Theresa Keaveny
SFA Executive Director

SFA Board Treasurer
ckudrna@charter.net

SFA Cornerpost
Stay Updated With SFA: Engage With Us on Social Media

By Katie Feterl
SFA Social Media Coordinator
katie@sfa-mn.org

Social media gives SFA the opportunity to reach current and potential supporters on a daily basis with opportunities to engage with us both on and offline. Our Facebook and Twitter pages are quite literally a digital extension of the SFA network.

With daily posts about SFA and partner events, thoughtful articles, helpful resources, and features about what our members are up to, I hope to expand our farmer-to-farmer network and to illustrate the value of our work to all who are passionate about supporting sustainable agriculture in Minnesota — whether they farm or not.

SFA has nearly 4,000 followers on Facebook and over 1,150 followers on Twitter. Join the conversation! Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook
4,010 likes
1,470 fans in MN
1,020 in the Twin Cities Metro
64% Women
33% Men

Largest & most engaged demographics:
Women ages 35-44 (19%)
Women ages 25-34 (15%)

Average Post reach: 572
Engagement: 3.1%

Twitter
1,187 followers
67% Women
33% Men

Largest Demographics:
Followers ages 25-34 (43%)
Followers ages 35-44 (34%)

Average
Daily Impressions: 143
Tweet Engagement: 2.3%

Webmaster’s Report: Audience Continues to Grow

Overview
Sessions (Site Visits/Hits): 58,312
Users (Unique Visitors): 39,555
Average Pages Viewed/Session: 4.44
New Visitors: 66.9%
Returning Visitors: 33.1%

Most Visited Pages
Garlic Festival: 12%
Harvest Festival: 4.9%
Annual Conference: 3.3%
Midwest Soil Health Summit: 2.8%
Soil Health Portal: 2.1%
Deep Roots Program: 1.5%
MN Salsa Fest: 1.3%

Geographic Breakdown
By State
Minnesota: 69.7%
Illinois: 6%
Massachusetts: 4.1%
Wisconsin: 4%
California: 1.5%

How Visitors Are Viewing Site
Desktop: 60%
Mobile: 33.6%
Tablet: 6.4%

By Laura Borgendall
SFA Webmaster
laura@sfa-mn.org

SFA Business Supporters
In Memoriam: Ralph Lentz, Founding SFA President

By Audrey Arner

I think it was summer of 1992. We were sitting down to one of the first statewide board meetings of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota. We filled the picnic tables in Ralph Lentz’s yard outside of Lake City and he called the meeting to order: “Somebody else is going to have to keep time because I round-baled my watch.”

Founding SFA President Ralph Lentz, 88, of Lake City, Minn., passed away Oct. 1, 2017, at Lake City Care Center. Early in his career, he had taught high school earth science in Henderson then, in 1965, moved to Lake City and bought a farm outside of town. He was an agricultural teacher as well as the advisor to the Future Farmers of America at Lincoln High School for 30 years. Ralph retired from teaching in 1988.

At that point Ralph became very active in establishing the Sustainable Farming Association of Southeastern Minnesota, now known as the SFA Driftless Chapter. This was the first SFA chapter. When, in 1991, SFA incorporated as a statewide nonprofit organization, he shouldered the responsibility of chairing the board for several terms.

Ralph was among the most respected pioneers of grass farming in Minnesota and led the way by studying, demonstrating and implementing rotational grazing management in a sustainable agriculture system. He was a dynamic participant in The Monitoring Project facilitated by Land Stewardship Project, to identify and measure indicators of sustainability on grass-based farms in Minnesota. He also served as the state chair of the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative.

Ralph was awarded Outstanding Conservationist in 2013 by the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. He affected many SFA members—some beginners, some established farmers—to steer their operations toward stability, perennialization, and keen attention to water quality. He traveled to Russia several times teaching students about progressive sustainable farming practices in the United States. He hosted repeated spring dinners of “Where the Wild Things Are” for Slow Food Minnesota.

Ralph will be remembered as a teacher, father, grass farmer, veteran, grandfather, fisherman, Boundary Waters explorer, canoeist, devoted friend, observer of nature, and a continuous learner. Here are some remembrances from our community of sustainable agriculturists:

Gwendolyn (Tammy) Keith (Wellstone) was one of the very first SFA organizers, working as Land Stewardship Project staff in Lewiston.

“I am missing the man who gave us the gift of his time and knowledge, both as a human, mentor and an SFA board member from the very beginning back in 1988. We bought our breeding stock from him (loved our Pinzgauers), learned about stream bank restoration using grazing, and how to enjoy moving the herd in the sunshine and in the rain. We had plenty of intense discussions – he was both open and strong with his opinions! We'll all miss you, Ralph.”

Florence and Dave Minar, longtime friends and fellow graziers, remind us that “His impact will be felt on our lives for a long time. As we drove to the funeral we both realized it could be the last time for this trip. In Ralph’s waning years, as he had more difficulty walking, we tried to make the journey more than once a year, but always in October. It may have been the mallards in his back pond, or the fall colors or his famous October party. But, no, it was Ralph himself. It was the love of his cows and his farm that drew us, as we toured his farm each time. It was the talks, the laughs, and the thoughts that sustained us until our minds said, ‘Time to go see Ralph.’ The one story that comes to mind is when Ralph first met Larry Gates, then of the DNR, in the ‘80s. Ralph wanted to show Larry the stream that ran through his farm and how his cattle had improved it. Larry told Ralph he was full of shit. Ralph finally made Larry a believer. Over the years the two of them have given many presentations across the country on the subject.”

Julia Frost-Nerbonne met Ralph during the Monitoring Project and they became friends forever after. “Ralph was a born teacher. Having people explore the stream experiment or learn about grazing always made him say. But he was also one for a glass of brandy and an ice cream before launching into an argument about the nature of life. Ralph always said he would die with his work boots on. And while that not technically be true, he was a farmer to the very end.

Land Stewardship Letter editor Brian DeVore remembers that “Ralph really was a pioneer and groundbreaker, as well as an excellent observer of the land. I will never forget those wonderful hours I spent following Ralph and Larry Gates along Ralph’s creek, seeing firsthand how Ralph’s rotational grazing system was IMPROVING water quality, not making it worse — a real paradigm shift. I soaked in the information, observations and arguments, and learned a lot about how true innovation is executed on the land. Rest in peace, Ralph.”

SFA farmer emeritus Jim VanDerPol from the Western Chapter recalls that “Ralph bent me in the way I should go with my farm and I will be forever grateful. My first glimpse of him was as he sat in a chair at an SFA conference and told us all that livestock animals were there for us to use and enjoy and never abuse. He lives on in the practices and thoughts of us who consider animal husbandry an ancient and honorable profession. Thank you for that, Ralph, and for so much else. My wish for you is that the band knows ‘Waltzing Matilda’! I used to head to SFA annual meetings with a pack of handouts of Waltzing Matilda lyrics for that late-night crowd in somebody’s hotel room. Ralph, of course, already knew all the words and led the rousing chorus.”

Editor’s Note: Many thanks to Audrey Arner for writing this eloquent remembrance of SFA’s founding president.
SFA Members get $10 discount through Jan. 31 | Register below or at sfa-mn.org/conference

The SFA Annual Conference is tailored to Minnesota’s sustainable farm community.

Most sessions are “discussion format” and focus on our farmers’ wisdom and needs.

The conference culminates in our popular post-conference “afterglow” reception with drinks & hors d’oeuvres.

SCHEDULED SESSIONS INCLUDE:

- Soil Health for Small Farms
- Do I Really Need a Permit for a Potluck?
- Growing Premium Minnesota Garlic
- Benefits of Grazing Public Lands
- Telling Your Story to Sell Your Product
- Livestock Health: To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate
- Multi-species Rotational Grazing Systems
- FSA Programs for Small Farms and Women Producers
- Deep Winter Greenhouses – The Producer Perspective

AND MANY MORE – full slate at sfa-mn.org/conference

Also: Spotlight on Our Sponsors Lunch, with a free boxed lunch for the first 50 attendees

SPONSORED BY:

SFA Annual Conference Member preregistrations ($50 before Dec. 31; $60 through Jan. 31): ______

Nonmember preregistrations ($60 if received before Dec. 31; $70 thereafter): ______

Veggie Buds registrations ($10 for ages 3-12): ______ TOTAL ENCLOSED: $ ___________

Name(s): ____________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________ City: ______________ State: ____ Zip: ______

Email(s): __________________________________________________________

☐ My check is enclosed, payable to SFA, 4924 Upton Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55410
Charge my:  ☐ VISA  ☐ MC

Card number: _______ - _______ - _______ - _______  Exp. Date _____ /_____  Card code _______

LUNCH NOT INCLUDED WITH REGISTRATION • CONFERENCE RUNS 8 A.M.-5 P.M. • REGISTRATION NONREFUNDABLE

SFA PHOTOGRAPHS SCENES AT THIS CONFERENCE FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES, YOUR REGISTRATION ACKNOWLEDGES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED.
CHAPTER UPDATES

Greater Mille Lacs
By Mathew Nix

The Greater Mille Lacs Chapter started the year off with a great annual chapter meeting featuring a potluck, seed exchange, business meeting and guest speaker, Merrit Bussiere. At the meeting we welcomed two new board members to the leadership team, Matt Hurd and Christian McShane. We also thanked our retiring board member Jodi Olson as her term came up and she pursued another community project.

The primary focus for the chapter in 2017 was to enter the unknown and somewhat daunting territory of creating and executing a signature event. This effort was handily helmed by our newly elected president, Debby Flowers. The event, Farm2Families, was held on the very soggy Saturday of August 26th. Although the weather impeded attendance we chalked it up as success as our coffers still have coin and everything went smoothly. The event featured a meal sourced primarily from local farmers, a farm store featuring local products, local musicians providing a festive ambiance and presenters sharing about beekeeping, soil management, and the sustainable uses of a local sedge peat resource.

One lesson learned from the signature event that might be pertinent to other chapters considering something similar: These events will take a lot of time to create and organize. This time investment will largely come from your board. After the fact we realized that all the time invested into our event ended up sacrificing time we usually spend organizing our meetings. Go figure, we are beings with a finite amount of ideas to fill that time!

After all the dust has settled from our Farm2Families event, the board began looking forward to what comes next. In 2018, we plan to give our signature event a second go. We also plan make a concerted effort to ensure our farmer-to-farmer connections are strengthened and expanded. So here’s to another year of connecting with each other and promoting sustainable farming practices in our local communities.

Crow River
By Tim Kirkman

GARLIC BREATH: One year after flooding threatened to derail our annual Garlic Festival, 2017 brought some of the most perfect weather we’ve enjoyed and above average attendance to match. Our 12th annual celebration of everyone’s favorite vegetable brought all the smells, sights, and unpleasant odors of all things garlic. But it also marked the beginning of the changeover as the (allegedly) retiring Jerry Ford hands the reins over to Sarah Lindblom. This year Sarah served as an observer to Jerry, but over the next two years Sarah will take over more and more responsibilities until Jerry is finally turned out to pasture. Jerry’s pasture will consist of nothing but garlic, garlic chives, and garlic scapes, of course.

The other big difference this year was a change in leadership behind our Great Scape Cafe, a pop-up restaurant during the festival that brings together top area restaurants and local food. Greg Reynolds hung up his apron after 11 years of coordinating the food proceedings. Greg was capably replaced by Sarah’s sister, Jennifer Lindblom along with the indomitable Mary Jane Miller.

The 13th Annual MN Garlic Festival will be Aug. 11, 2018, once again at the McLeod County Fairgrounds in Hutchinson. Info: www.sfa-mn.org/garlicfest.

OTHER EVENTS: On April 7, we helped to coordinate a hands-on demonstration of the Oggun tractor, a new option for small farms and market growers. The Oggun is a modernization of the Allis G and is an open-source and affordable tractor. This event was held at Dan and Donna Moe’s The Farm of Minnesota near Hutchinson.

Our Spring Social was held in Northeast Minneapolis at the Food Building. This event featured speakers from Forever Green talking about the research and future opportunities in getting more cover crops on the land.

On October 28th we collaborated with the Land Stewardship Project to feature a new documentary on Wendell Berry for our fall social. This event was held at York Farm in Hutchinson.

ANNUAL MEETING: This past January we had our annual chapter meeting, entitled “The Life Cycle of a Family Agricultural Enterprise.” Speakers included Anne Borgendale of Brynhild Creamery, Lucie Amundson of Locally Laid, and Greg Reynolds of Riverbend Farm. Our speakers touched on the challenges of starting up a food business, maintaining it with growth and market changes, and phasing out operations as needed.

At this meeting it was also announced that Connie Carlson would be replacing Greg as chapter President. Thanks to Greg for so many years of leadership and involvement in shaping the Crow River chapter!

This coming Jan. 20, we will meet in Delano. We plan to have a variety of learning opportunities, including Kent Solberg discussing soil health, Theresa Keaveny speaking on FSA programs for small farms, and an opportunity for attendees to brainstorm ideas to improve the Garlic Festival.

Watch the SFA Connect and our chapter webpage for details: sfa-mn.org/crow-river. Contact us at crowriver@sfram.org, 1.844.922.5573 Ext. 705.
Consider a year-end gift to support SFA’s mission to protect our food-producing resources – air, land, water, family farms and communities – for future generations.
Or, become a monthly donor to provide sustainable, year-round support.

Yes! I would like to make a tax-deductible donation to SFA

☒ $25 ☐ $50 ☐ $75 ☐ $150 ☐ $500 ☐ $1,000 ☐ $____________

Name ______________________________________________________________
Address ____________________________________________________________________________________
City _________________________________________________________ State _____ Zip _________________
Email ______________________________________________________  Phone _____ - _____ - ___________

☐ My check is enclosed, made payable to SFA, 4924 Upton Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55410.

Charge my credit card: ☐ VISA ☒ MC ☐ Make this a monthly gift (credit cards only) $_____/month
Card number ___________ - ___________ - ___________ - ___________  Exp. Date ____ / ____  Code _____
Signature ____________________________________________________
__________________________________