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

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The Future of Sustainable Agriculture

All agriculture should be sustainable agriculture. Let’s take another look at the accepted USDA definition:

Sustainable agriculture means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- Satisfy human food and fiber needs
- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends;
- Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

The future of agriculture hinges on what kind of agriculture we want to have as a society, both in the U.S. and globally, and we must start by defining the goal of our efforts. Without a broad definition of the kind of agriculture we want to have, the result will be driven by economies of scale by default. Using the USDA definition of sustainable agriculture as a guide, the future of agriculture must follow, enhance and improve upon each of those components, and SFA must program accordingly.

Satisfy Human Food & Fiber Needs

The conversation in the coming decades will focus on how we care for the projected 9 or 10 billion people on earth by 2050. This “10x50” debate will shape everything we do in agriculture. The specifics of how we satisfy human food and fiber needs are beyond the scope of this report; however, any brand of agriculture which does not satisfy human food and fiber needs is clearly not sustainable. Additionally, the definition of “satisfy” in this context must be extended to include the quality of food and fiber being produced. Merely providing enough calories to feed the human population is not sufficient. The massive explosion of diabetes in the US alone is cause for alarm regarding the standard American diet. Food safety and nutritional quality must be given equal footing with any efforts designed to focus on the quantity of food produced.

Enhance Environmental Quality & the Natural Resource Base

An agricultural model that degrades or even holds constant the quality of the natural resources employed in food production is not sustainable. Not unlike a competitive athlete, any business or industry remaining stagnant in quality cannot succeed. Agriculture is the dominant land use globally, and has the greatest effect on environmental quality – future generations are dependent on agriculture to enhance, not hold or degrade, environmental quality.

Fortunately, science backs up this endeavor. Proven production models focused on biodiversity, water-use efficiency, reducing soil loss, and animal and human welfare.

With a renewed focus on building soil health rather than just targeting crops for higher yields, farmers are actually able to expand productivity with little or no increase in off-farm inputs. (Gabe Brown, Midwest Soil Health Summit, 2014) More work needs to be done to help a new generation of farmer practitioners to trust these models; the Sustainable Farming Association will continue to do so over the next 25 years.

Make Efficient Use of Nonrenewable Resources and On-Farm Resources

Agriculture that abuses or thwarts nonrenewable resources or the development of on-farm resources is not sustainable. Therefore the future of agriculture is more efficient use of fuel and electricity, not less, with business models that complete the cycle of inputs and by products such as methane digesters that generate a portion of the farm’s energy needs. Additionally, sustainable agriculture is really “regenerative” agriculture where, over time, the capacity of the resources is expanded. By definition, this improves efficiency.

The future of rural communities must also be examined. Rural communities, particularly in the Upper Midwest, have begun to see a rebound in population, but business-as-usual practices in agriculture will not support that trend. The only local components of many of the largest commodity crop and/or livestock farm operations are the production aspects and the impact on local infrastructure. The rural banking network of past generations has been threatened, and the financing of production agriculture is increasingly centralized. Input suppliers increasingly supply farms directly, with fewer dealerships and independent suppliers needed. Markets for these products are centralized and are no longer available short distances from farm operations, leaving larger negative impacts on roads and bridges in rural areas while removing revenues and jobs.

The key to reversing this trend is to keep more dollars in local communities. Healthy rural communities boast a broad economic spectrum that includes a diversity of businesses, and farms are economic development engines just as any other small business. Because farm families and farm workers don’t travel for their jobs, they tend to buy locally and, where possible, sell locally through farmers’ markets, CSAs and direct marketing. Diversified sustainable farms add value to a community by providing both jobs and the powerful aesthetic most rural communities desire.

By John Mesko

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sfa cornerpost | executive director

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Large farms can partially credit their growth to the vast economies of scale they enjoy. As profit margins for farm products as well as production inputs shrink, bulk input purchases drive input prices lower and eliminate smaller, local suppliers. This isn’t likely to change anytime soon; barring some economic crisis, or a significant change in the political climate surrounding the U.S. Farm Bill, the economic underpinnings supporting large farms are not going to change of their own accord.

However, rural communities do have choices as to the type of farm operations they want to have. Rural communities that consider, plan for and support a diversity of farm businesses will develop a diversity of residents in their communities as well. Just as in nature, diversity is a powerful force for resilience and productivity. Rural communities can prepare for long-term success and growth by reestablishing local food economies and, in turn, revitalizing rural businesses.

Sustain the Economic Viability of Farm Operations

If farm operations fail to meet financial needs and don’t provide a living wage to the farmer and all employees, it is not a sustainable business. Some definitions are required here, however, as modern farming culture has developed a view on this topic. Farming has always been a difficult business financially; farmers have had off-farm income for as long as information has been collected.

In modern society, the expected gap between the lifestyle of farmers and their non-farming or urban neighbors has decreased. Particularly when raising children, the expectations are the same.

Also, too many farmers consider themselves to be “successful” or “making it on the farm” if they meet their direct costs of production, selling products at a profit. However, no other business would consider itself successful under those circumstances. Farms must make return to capital and return to labor if they are to be sustainable.

Enhance the Quality of Life for Farmers & Society

Regarding the world of agriculture in the Upper Midwest, the Sustainable Farming Association considers its community to be those farmers, aspiring farmers, agriculture supporters and consumers who contribute in diverse ways to agricultural businesses of all types; the local food, restaurant and beverage scene; and the revitalization of rural communities. Since 2009, SFA has been serving our region by empowering farmers and farm supporters to advance a healthy sustainable food system for everyone. As SFA grows, and we strengthen the organization to best serve our community, there is a need to re-assess our structure and best practices.

The agriculture community, including farms, farmers and support businesses, continues to consolidate as it has for the past 50 years. A new problem is on the horizon, however: As the baby boomer farmers exit agriculture, many do not have a successor in mind. This means that when a farmer retires, the farm assets, including land, buildings, equipment and breeding stock are generally sold to the highest bidder and the production is absorbed by a neighboring farm. When this happens, rural communities lose significant economic, social and civic infrastructure, and the well-being of a community is threatened. So, how does SFA address these three issues?

Economic Participation: SFA has been helping to enhance the economic participation of its members since 1990. Our organization, focused on farmer-to-farmer networking, connects farmers to the larger agricultural support community which, in turn, opens economic doors for many. By expanding the opportunities farmers have for networking, both in-person networking at events as well as online networking and problem solving, we have the opportunity to help farmers become more efficient and effective.

Social Participation: Sustainable farm families tend to be creative, well-educated, innovative, entrepreneurial, and generous with time and resources. Recent work at SFA to strengthen our regional networks is allowing rural Minnesota to draw on the unique resources of the sustainable agriculture community and foster innovative responses to community opportunities and challenges. One aspect critical in today’s farm economy is the need to find quick solutions to problems faced by producers in the midst of the farming season. Urban careers have built-in social networking opportunities which double as highly efficient problem-solving sessions; farmers need those same opportunities.

Civic Participation: The opportunity before SFA today is that this rapidly changing sector of our rural communities is not represented by traditional rural organizations in the way farmers have been in the past. SFA can and should support rural communities by helping to rebuild the social capital which has been lost over the last 50 years.

SFA has organized its community around the need for educational information sharing and networking among farmers, and the ability for farmer-innovators to lead their communities in problem solving. At the core, our community is Minnesota, and we seek to develop leaders and connect them with others who will shape Minnesota and ensure that our communities move forward from a broad base where everyone can contribute in meaningful ways.

Investments & Ideas

More work should be done to unite farmers of all stripes, and soil health is the issue that can bridge this gap. We need more funding to help farmers understand the importance of focusing on soil health and to actually get the message across. This message must be researched, developed and presented as a way to increase individual farm profits first, and environmental enhancements as a secondary benefit. As part of this, we need soil testing protocols that demonstrate the change in resilience and nutrient holding capacity.

In addition to reaching out to farmers, we need to teach consumers why soil health is the answer to food production concerns both in the US and worldwide. If we want more farmers in rural communities, we need communities that want and see a need for more farmers. In the next 25 years, we need communities to build a committee of people who meet regularly to develop and pursue the kind of agriculture we want.

Finally, we need leadership training for government and extension agents and boards and townships that will result in a diversified leadership pool for rural communities. Rural recovery will sustain if the leadership capacity comes from within.

SFA has built the infrastructure and the relationships to achieve these goals. With your help and support, we can ensure that truly sustainable farm systems have a chance to become the dominant force in worldwide agriculture.
The Timeless Value of Authentic, Personal Connections

By Jason Walker
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As both an SFA employee and someone interested in sustainable ag, I try to attend as many of our events as possible. However, with my role as primary caregiver to three young children, there are times it just won’t work.

Happily, though, a July 8 pasture walk at Living Song Farm was doable, so I made the drive to the hilly, verdant acres of Jerry, Marianne and Willard’s place. At the farm, we learned about soil health, fencing, cover crops, and how Living Song Farm manages its pastures and livestock. There was good conversation, lunch, and Marianne even performed a song.

But the highlight of my day at Living Song Farm was meeting Holly Pearson, an eager attendee and prospective farmer from Northeast Minneapolis. Chatting with Holly, learning about her family’s goals to get on their own piece of land and start farming, I knew she would be interested in SFA’s Deep Roots program, especially Farm Skills 101. Essentially, I was doing what I always do when out and about – talking, probably too much, about SFA, our programs, and our mission.

The next day, Holly registered for our Nov. 7 Deep Winter Greenhouse workshop as well as the free beginning farmer membership SFA offers. ‘Wow,’ I thought, ‘that worked out great. She’s really into this stuff, and this is exciting.’ I introduced her via email to Sue Wika, Ph.D., who leads our Deep Roots Farmer Development Program, and before long Holly had registered for the Farm Skills 101 fall semester.

This was really cool, for many reasons – cool for SFA that an energetic soul like Holly was now part of the fold, cool for Holly that she was about to learn the hands-on skills she’d need to farm someday, and cool for Sue that her program is rightly becoming such a no-brainer for prospective farmers.

I write this not to take credit for meeting Holly, but to illustrate why SFA is such a crucial organization in today’s world of backlit screens, smartphones and social media – we offer people an authentic, personal connection. In fact, that’s pretty much all we do, at our core: SFA offers face-to-face, farmer-to-farmer interactions that have the potential to make change.

Websites, social media, and publications like this are all tools that organizations use to communicate with supporters. They are each valuable. But that chance meeting with Holly will hopefully pay off for all of us down the road by helping a new farmer get started, and what made it happen was farmer-to-farmer networking. Many of you have likely had such interactions at SFA events and conferences in the past, and know exactly what I am talking about. If you haven’t been to an SFA event to witness and have such interactions, well, what in the name of Gabe Brown are you waiting for?

I am proud to work for SFA and of the work that I do as Communications and Membership Coordinator. But forging a connection with Holly at Jerry’s field day was the highlight of my work year, and it was an effortless example of SFA in action.

Let’s see how many authentic, personal connections we can all forge in 2016. Working together, we will make an impact.

Businesses and Organizations: Become an SFA Patron or Member

Your business or organization can become a part of achieving SFA’s mission when you contribute financially to SFA. Enjoy perks like discounts on SFA sponsorships and exhibitor registration, prominent logo placement on SFA website and publications, free advertisements, and more. View all the perks and join now at www.sfa-mn.org.
The SFA Deep Roots Farmer Development Program completed its first full year of classes in 2015. Over 60 students completed multi-day intensive courses and partial day workshops.

The Deep Roots commitment to small class sizes and intensive attention to student skill development is especially attractive to those entering farming or developing a new enterprise. In comparison to field days, students signing up for a Deep Roots course can expect a hands-on day in the field.

Deep Roots is particularly focused on coursework appropriate to integrated farming systems. As Sir Albert Howard (1943) said, “Nature doesn’t farm without livestock.” Our programming discusses everything from the microscopic life of the living soil system to the impact of typical farm animals, ruminant and monogastric.

From animal husbandry to animal handling, from building temporary fencing to semi-permanent fencing, from using the tools to build a gate to handling hoof trimmers and thermometers, Deep Roots students experience long, varied days typical of integrated farmers. Students end their days exhausted, but energized by their developing skill sets. It’s common to hear students tell of dreaming of building h-braces and tying fence knots.

After completion of Farm Skills 101, one student wrote: “I’m tired. My hands smell of grease. My neck is sunburned. And I know more about sustainable farming after three weeks than after years of reading books.” Another wrote: “…we learned all sorts of things that we didn’t know we didn’t know.”

After completing Deep Roots coursework, students are guided into SFA’s longstanding Farmer-to-Farmer Network® organization. Deep Roots will also maintain a special network for Deep Roots students. A directed session for Deep Roots graduates, their partners, and any interested parties will be held at the 2016 SFA Annual Conference.

For more information about the 2016 Deep Roots short courses or Farm Skills 101, visit deeprootsfarmer.com.
All Signs Pointing Toward Soil Health Progress

By Kent Solberg
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And what a year it has been! Since January I have had the opportunity to work with approximately 50 farms on a variety of issues including farm succession, forage pasture seeding and management, cover crops, soil health, fence design, low-cost milking parlor systems, using goats to control invasive plant species, integrating livestock into cropping systems, and outwintering.

Speaking engagements have included the SFA Annual Conference, the Midwest Soil Health Summit, the Minnesota Organic Conference, and a number of field day events. Funding for much of this work has come through the Pasture Project and the Minnesota Dairy Stewardship Initiative. Through all this, SFA has had the opportunity to have a positive influence on everything from small start-up farms to the largest row crop operation in Minnesota.

This year we began a three-year research and demonstration project under a USDA Conservation Innovations Grant (CIG) in partnership with the Pasture Project, Practical Farmers of Iowa and Land Stewardship Project. The work involves eight demonstration sites in Minnesota (six) and Iowa (two). SFA is responsible for four sites. The work involves incorporating cover crops into cropping systems and integration of livestock. For most of our cooperators, this is a new venture and one they are excited about.

We held a field day in September on one of our cooperating farms. The program included discussion on soil health principles, how covers and livestock were being integrated into this operation, and a hands-on demonstration of semi-permanent energized fencing. Further field days associated with this project were held on Nov. 12 and 13 near Redwood Falls and Blue Earth.

This fall we are wrapping up a three-year MDA Sustainable Ag Demonstration grant on complex cover crops and

Midwest Soil Health Summit is Feb. 17-18

We have heard a consistent message after the first two Midwest Soil Health Summits – attendees keep saying it’s “the best conference I’ve ever been to.”

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.

The 2016 slate features internationally known experts like Jay Fuhrer from Burleigh County, N.D.; grazing pioneer Dr. Allen Williams; researchers Shannon Osborne and Michael Lehman; producers Grant Breitkreutz and Todd McPeak; and SFA’s own experts Kent Solberg and John Mesko. Plus plenty of networking, discussion with the experts, a film screening, trade show, evening social hour, and much more.

Register today at www.sfa-mn.org. We’ll see you at Arrowwood!

If you had the opportunity to travel in farm country last winter, you likely noted, as I did with great disappointment, the amount of topsoil loss to wind erosion. While there is much work to be done, I am EXTREMELY encouraged by the amount of cover crops being planted this fall. In the over 12,500 miles I logged for SFA in the first 10 months of 2015, I have observed the largest number of acres in cover crops ever.

I am also encouraged by the number of cattle producers using techniques such as bale grazing and seeded annuals (cover crops) to extend the grazing season, reduce manure spreading costs and improve soil health. Two or three years ago it was rare to see farmers using these techniques. SFA programs such as the Midwest Soil Health Summit, Keep Cattle in Minnesota, Minnesota Dairy Initiative and GrazeFest have played a gigantic role in equipping and encouraging producers to adopt these and other soil building techniques.

Even with all the progress I have observed, our work is only beginning. Grants can and do help get this work off the ground. But the granting world is fickle and cannot be depended upon for long-term program financing. Your help and financial support will be crucial to broadening these efforts if we desire to have a significant positive impact on our agricultural landscape.
Networking Groups, Chapters: A Very Active Year

As SFA continues to strengthen our network, we are moving forward with enhancements to our existing structures and the addition of some new vehicles for connection.

Chapters

The big news this year was the addition of our newest chapter, the Greater Mille Lacs Chapter. Radiating out from the Aitkin area, this chapter is particularly focused on the challenges and opportunities of that region.

The existing chapters all stayed quite busy as well; see the series of chapter reports in this issue.

Another change was that the Coteau Ridge Chapter was declared officially inactive this fall. What this means is that the chapter no longer has representation on the SFA board of directors, and is no longer listed in our publications. However, this also presents the opportunity for interested people in the southwest part of the state and over into northwest Iowa and southeast South Dakota to revive the chapter, or to start a new one altogether. If you’re interested in embarking on such a project, please contact me at jerry@sfa-mn.org, or 1.844.922.5573 Ext. 700.

Networking Groups

Networking groups in SFA are people who want to join together around a particular topic or technique. These groups are less formal than chapters, and are designed to react quickly to changes and developments in their chosen areas.

The first networking group formed in SFA, the Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council, was already in existence for many years as a separate organization, and in 2014, they decided to fold into SFA to take advantage of our strong nonprofit status and extensive network. As the name suggests, they are centered along the Crow Wing area, but their 300-plus members welcome all who are interested in sustainable grazing and forage practices. Info: sfa-mn.org/forage-council.

2015 saw the addition of three more networking groups:

- The Deep Winter Producers Group has members throughout the region, and we will be producing farm tours between the Minnesota Organic Conference and the SFA Annual Conference at deep winter producers’ farms. This will culminate in a symposium at the SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 13, 2016.

- SFA’s Deep Roots Farmer Development Program also offers classes in winter greenhouses and other techniques. Info: sfa-mn.org/deep-winter-producers.

- The Sustainable Sheep networking group is a way for such people to share their wisdom and experiences. The group, headed up by Alethea Kenny, produces two events per year: the Fosston Fiber Festival and a Small Scale Sustainable Sheep Farming Event. In addition, they will produce a session at the Annual Conference, and are open to members who want to host farm tours. Info: sfa-mn.org/sustainable-sheep.

- The Upper Midwest Garlic Growers Group has been active since the summer of 2015 and hosted a field day at Plum Creek Garlic in June. Now its 80-plus members span six states in the upper Midwest. The group will sponsor a “How We Grow Garlic” session at the SFA Annual Conference that will be highly interactive and involve growers from across the region. They also intend to produce a series of farm tours next season. Info: sfa-mn.org/garlic-growers.

We’re looking forward to another year of increasing and enhancing our network. If you would like information on how to start a chapter or networking group, please contact me at jerry@sfa-mn.org.

By Jerry Ford
SFA Network Coordinator
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UPCOMING SFA EVENTS

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

- **Minnesota Organic Conference | Jan. 8-9, 2016** Several SFA’ers presenting • Stop by our booth and say hello

- **SFA ANNUAL CONFERENCE | Feb. 13, 2016** “Cultivating the Wisdom of the Community” • Register at sfa-mn.org

- **MIDWEST SOIL HEALTH SUMMIT | Feb. 17-18, 2016** Jay Fuhrer, Allen Williams, and more • Register at sfa-mn.org

- **‘Deep Winter Production of Greens’ Short Course | Feb. 21, 2016** Learn how to build a deep-winter greenhouse • Register at sfa-mn.org

- **SFA Deep Roots Farm Skills 101 | Spring 2016** Learn ‘Reality Farming’ • Register now at deeprootsfarmer.com

- **SFA Festival of Farms | July 2016** Learn, network and have fun at farms around Minnesota

- **Minnesota Garlic Festival | Aug. 13, 2016** Fun-filled, family friendly and fragrant • Info at sfa-mn.org/garlicfest
We Can Revitalize Climate Future With Soil Health

As we complete our 25th year as an organization, let us ponder what the next 25 years will bring. We know that conservation works. We’ve seen the healing power of nature. As sustainable farmers, we know if we treat the land right it will return the favor.

Climate change is, in my opinion, the biggest threat to ever face mankind. In her book, “The Secret Life of Dust,” Hannah Holmes explores the geologic history of our little rock, Earth. Holmes describes in detail how scientists believe earth was formed and the evolution of our planet over eons. She makes little, if any, inference to the pending climate issue. She does, however, describe the conditions that triggered major climate shifts in the past, and they all have one thing in common: whenever there has been a major disruption of our planet’s climate, there has been a lot of dust in the air. And right now, we have a lot of dust in our air.

I recently was invited to our nation’s capital to represent SFA at the Rural Climate Network meeting as part of the National Rural Assembly. I went looking to argue the role agriculture plays in affecting our climate. I’ve seen the Ohio State University research that claims we’ve lost more carbon from our agricultural soils than has been emitted by the burning of fossil fuels since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Your hero and mine, Gabe Brown, has shown us that with some effort and ingenuity we can return it where it belongs, to the soil. I went looking for an argument and couldn’t find one.

Everyone in the room was in agreement that agriculture can, and must, play a role in solving climate pollution.

While other farm organizations fight against environmental regulations like the Clean Water Act and Jurisdictional Waters of the State, SFA members are leading the way in exploring farming systems that restore our natural resources. Leading by example, sustainable farmers are building soil health, diversifying their lands, building economic opportunity, and educating consumers on the value of their work. Our efforts are making a difference and science is catching up with what we have known intuitively: Farming with nature builds resilience and is the only way to heal the land and feed the world.

We must partner with others who align with our mission and reach out to those whose methods we oppose; not by vilifying, but by showing viable alternatives.

We must remain focused on outcomes: soil health, ecosystem restoration, nutrient-dense food, and rural economic stability.

We should avoid arguments over things like GMOs and remind people that these are just tools, and if the tool doesn’t work to achieve the desired outcome its value is limited.

Our elected officials must know that we have solutions and that they need to back these with policy, or get out of the way.

And finally, we must reach out to our neighboring farmers to expand our network and share our stories and visions.

My vision? I see an agricultural landscape much more aligned with the chaotic principals of nature and abundant with ecological diversity. When I travel through farm country, I envision landscapes where hillsides are keylined and planted to productive alley cropping systems. Where fields are never bare, but planted to a diversity of covers and crops. I see not only cows, but hogs, poultry, goats and more grazing pastures, fields, and multistory silvopasture systems. Productive buffers protect stream banks, and water runs clear and clean. Clean air is abundant and the smell of healthy soil replaces that of chemicals and feedlots. I see a future where small towns are revitalized by the economic activity of a restorative farm culture. And the dust is returned to the earth from where it came. This is the future I strive for.

Association Board Welcomes Paul Berglund to At-Large Seat

Chef Paul Berglund, a 2015 James Beard Award finalist who helms the kitchen at Minneapolis’ acclaimed The Bachelor Farmer restaurant, was elected to the SFA Board of Directors at its meeting on April 24, 2015, in Little Falls.

Berglund, who was elected to an at-large position, is committed to sourcing local ingredients for The Bachelor Farmer and even tends a rooftop garden atop the restaurant building. As an urban restaurateur, Berglund gives the SFA board a vital perspective on ways SFA farmers can more profitably communicate with and market to the chef-driven restaurant world.

Berglund has also attended the SFA Annual Conference the past two years and has completed a Deep Roots course on deep winter greenhouse production at Dr. Sue Wika’s Paradox Farm.

“Serving on the SFA board fulfills my personal values of citizenship and land stewardship,” Berglund said. “I believe that we are at a pivotal moment in environmental history. By participating in SFA, I can directly support those on the front lines of preserving our environment - thoughtful and conscientious farmers.”

Paul’s restaurant, which focuses on Scandinavian cuisine, received a four-star review from the Star Tribune in 2011 and is one of the Twin Cities’ most revered and popular establishments. It is located at 50 N 2nd Ave in Minneapolis’ North Loop neighborhood.

“We are excited to have Paul on our board,” SFA Executive Director John Mesko said. “His understanding of the connection between agriculture, food and people is going to broaden our work directly. It’s an important perspective for us as an organization.”

For more information, visit our SFA Board homepage at www.sfa-mn.org/board.
Fiscal Year 2015: On Strong Financial Footing

As your volunteer Board Treasurer, I am pleased to report our organization continues to operate on a strong financial footing. The fiscal year ended June 30, 2015 and our net income for the prior twelve months was $7,745. As a nonprofit we should be aiming to break even or make a little money and this is exactly what happened.

Revenues for the fiscal year were up 27 percent over the prior year from $333,527 to $423,367. This was a high revenue year due to several successful grants and we are not expecting revenue to be as high for the coming fiscal year which started July 1, 2015. Our largest revenue source at 70 percent ($294,263) is fees for running conferences and various government agencies. Most of these dollars come with ‘strings attached’ meaning our organization agrees to do certain things to earn those dollars.

The second largest revenue category at 25 percent ($106,875) is fees for running events and programs including charges for food, vendor fees, ticket sales, etc. 3 percent of our revenue ($12,687) comes from membership dues from individuals and organizations.

The remaining 2 percent of revenue comes from a variety of small, miscellaneous items such as t-shirt sales.

Expenses for the fiscal year were $415,623 compared to $355,639 the prior year. Our single largest expense item at 60 percent ($247,575) of the total is for employee salaries and contractor fees. After total personnel expenses, our second highest expense category at 17 percent ($71,891) is direct conference expenses for things such as rent and food. Personnel expenses for running conferences are found in the various personnel lines.

The remaining 23 percent of the expenses are typical operating expenses including a variety of items such as printing, mileage reimbursements and insurance.

Our Balance sheet as of June 30, 2015, showed assets of $137,732, almost all of which was dollars in the bank either waiting to be spent as we performed against our grants or dollars for various chapters.

Crow River Chapter had the highest balance at $30,984 and the next two highest, Central and Western chapters, each had over $8,000 in the bank. Chapter financial reports are available for viewing online by anyone interested at www.sfa-mn.org/chapterportal.

As a reminder, 100 percent of your dues goes to your chapter. If you don’t specify a chapter, the Association at the state level receives it. These numbers include all chapter and Association level revenue and expenses combined. Lake Superior chapter is excluded because it is legally a separate nonprofit organization. The only exception is $618 in the checking account being held for Lake Superior mostly because of dues collected by the Association for Lake Superior when someone renewed online.

Please, please consider a donation to our Association. While it is nice to see the growth in revenue due to grants, to be a truly sustainable organization we need to see more of our income coming from individuals and organizations that support our mission and benefit from our work.

Finally, financials for fiscal year 2015 (July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2014) are available online at www.sfa-mn.org/sfa-documents.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or want to understand more about our organization’s financials.
CHAPTER UPDATES

Central
By Lisa Baker

Central Chapter members from Princeton to Fergus Falls, Staples to St. Cloud, and everywhere in between continued our “new-ish” plan to encourage farmer networking in our region by inviting all members to informal board meetings held on member farms. This year, our meetings were hosted by board members Sister Ruth Lentner at the Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, Jim Chamberlin at Island Lake Farm in Deerwood, Bryan Simon at Lakeside Prairie Farm in Barrett as part of the Festival of Farms, and Kathy Connell at Redfern Gardens Produce in Sebeka. These gatherings have been an easy way to learn from one another and keep tabs through the ebbs and flows of farming seasons. In 2016, we’ll continue to meet on farms, and we’d love to find more members who would invite a group of 10-20 people over for potluck! Contact a board member or email central@sfa-mn.org if you’d like to host a meeting.

Looking ahead, two member farms in Avon and Deerwood are working to manage water on their properties differently by installing berms and swales to move water from concentrated areas out to drier hillside ridges. The Restoration Agriculture and Keyline Design for Improving Hydrology demonstration project is made possible by a grant received by the chapter from the Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships. This project is to connect with University resources to explore how we can utilize excess water as an asset to increase productivity and resilience, instead of a liability that leads to degradation of our soil and water resources. Watch for more details about field days and project results. The project will also be highlighted during a session on farm-scale permaculture at the 2016 SFA Annual Conference.

Also for 2016, we will be recruiting a committee of members for planning the next Festival of Farms event. We are looking to restructure our Festival of Farms event, possibly with a permanent location and a fall harvest season timeframe. Call a board member or email our chapter mailbox if you’d like to volunteer. We’ll hold 4-5 meetings now through next autumn.

We hope to see you at our annual all-member meeting in January. Watch our website and chapter newsletters for details on when and where.

Crow River
By Connie Carlson

Annual Meeting: It has been another exciting year for the Crow River chapter. We had a strong showing at our annual meeting in late January with more than 60 SFA members, supporters and community members participating in a daylong discussion of different trends and aspects of local food. Teachers, chefs, farmers, business owners, co-ops and consumers all came to the table to lend their voices and ideas to how we can continue to build the local food system in our region. Planning and organizing the annual meeting is often a lot of work, but we find the effort pays off in the great discussion of ideas and potential. The annual meeting truly helps us better understand the dynamics of our region and informs our goals and strategies to serve our members, farmers, businesses and consumers who live, work and play in our Crow River region.

Our next Annual Meeting is scheduled for Jan. 30, 2016, and we’re planning to focus on urban farming this year. Stay tuned for more details on location and content.

Governor’s Residence Garden: We are pleased to announce that it was another successful year of planting and maintaining the vegetable garden at the Governor’s Residence. Mary Jane Miller and a team of board members and volunteers planted tomatoes, potatoes, corn, peppers, eggplants, flowers, herbs and much more in early June and spent the rest of the summer giving tours and describing SFA’s mission to the hundreds of visitors who pass through the residence. The most frequently asked question: “Does the governor eat the food grown in the garden?” The answer: “Absolutely. His staff harvests and prepares meals from the fresh grown produce all through the summer. Some of the produce is even included in meals for the dignitaries and official guests Governor Dayton regularly hosts.” Pretty cool!

Tenth Annual Minnesota Garlic Festival!: Another August means another Minnesota Garlic Fest hosted in Hutchinson by the Crow River chapter. Every year, this festival gathers garlic growers, chefs, artisans, musicians and eaters from all corners of the state. This year was no exception: more than 3,000 attended and experienced the joy of walking through aisles of garlic; danced to the delightful jaunty tunes of the Brass Messengers band; enjoyed a pork roast by the Crowned King of Pork, Thomas Boemer; ate delicious food in the Great Scape Café; participated in kite-building; promenaded in the parade; took in the local art show; and much more. A special ‘thank you’ to the many volunteers - some of whom are members of different SFA chapters around the state - who supported and made possible the 2015 Garlic Fest! Onto the next ten years of stinky fun!

Chapter Updates: To Next Page
Catch up on the Ketchup:
Lastly, as many know, this was to be the year of the SFA ketchup. As announced at the February SFA Annual Conference, the Crow River chapter planned to start bottling a distinct and possibly garlic-y version of ketchup as a way for regional farmers to add value to their production and for eaters throughout the state to learn more about SFA and its mission. However, as research into sourcing, processing and bottling progressed, it became evident to the “Ketchup Advisory Board” – a committee of Crow River chapter board members and supporters - that the current Crow River food system could not support this project at this time. The profit and loss spreadsheets showed the costs were too high and the end product would have to be priced in a range that would be unmarketable.

As disappointing as it was to come to this conclusion, the Crow River chapter has walked away from this experience armed with real data and experience regarding the barriers small-scale producers experience as they continue to seek ways to build value into their production. Stay tuned as the Crow River chapter explores what we will do with this valuable information and how we will continue using it to shape our mission and goals for sustainable farming in our region. For a case study of the project: www.sfa-mn.org/crow-river.

Anyone interested in attending Forage Council meetings are welcome. The meetings generally take place at Brick’s Restaurant in Molley. The Council strives to promote vibrant, productive family farms and enhance soil health, forage production and water quality within the context of the landscape.

Information about our group and our meetings, minutes and notes can be found at www.sfa-mn.org/forage-council.

From Previous Page

The Greater Mille Lacs Chapter members gather at Gilby’s Orchard in Aitkin, Minn.

Greater Mille Lacs
By Jodi Olson
Greater Mille Lacs Chapter was started in March of this year. We have approached the year with a getting-acquainted period and have held five farm tours with potlucks. There has been supportive communication and we are in the process of utilizing new ways to continue to help local farmers.

The new board has listened to the new members and are focused on ways to bring education, marketing ideas, and certified and human processing to the area. We have been having a great time getting to know one another. We are much appreciative with all that the Sustainable Farming Association organization has to offer and we are looking forward to the coming year.

For more information about Greater Mille Lacs, visit www.sfa-mn.org/greater-mille-lacs.

Lake Agassiz
By Marie Petry
Lake Agassiz Chapter in northwestern Minnesota has been active and on the grow. The “Good Food from Good Farms” event was held three times during winter 2014-15 in three locations showcasing local foods in each area and featuring local celebrity chef, Sue Doeden, preparing a meal with local food. Also included were workshops on the area food hubs, a kitchen cheese press, and high tunnels.

The big news at the final of these three events was the first annual meeting of the newly revitalized Lake Agassiz Chapter where a 13-member board was elected. This was an exciting time which led to new activities in 2015. In late spring was the Spring Blossom Orchard Tour at Honeyberry Farm and Nursery in Bagley, and in June was the Summer High Tunnel Tour near Erskine.

SFA Festival of Farms tour was held at two farms near Pelican Rapids: Lida Farm and Lost Farm. It was a beautiful day, and we had a good turnout for networking and viewing two sustainable operations.

Our Annual Meeting will be Jan. 9, 2016, in Bemidji, Minn. Watch our website for more details. Also, check out our page at www.facebook.com/lakeagassizsfa. We have growing energy and enthusiasm and invite you to join our chapter.

NETWORKING GROUPS
Forage Council
By Vickie Kettlewell
With the last weeks of the grazing season now in sight, the haying season complete, the last of the crops off the field, and the weaning of the calf crop, members of the Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council (CWRBFC) are turning their attention to their 2016 signature events – the Winter Workshop and the “Land and Water” Summer Tour.

On Oct. 29 the Council met to review how 2015 events went, and to put together details and plans for 2016 events. The date is set and the headline speaker are already confirmed for the Forage Council’s annual Winter Workshop, which will be held Feb. 11, 2016, at the Central Lakes College Staples campus. Dr. Kris Ringwall, from the NDSU Research Station, Dickinson, ND, will focus his presentation on herd bull selection, cow size, calving, how to interpret EPDs, and he will offer an overview of the research being done at the Dickinson campus.

Anyone interested in attending Forage Council meetings are welcome. The meetings generally take place at Brick’s Restaurant in Molley. The Council strives to promote vibrant, productive family farms and enhance soil health, forage production and water quality within the context of the landscape.

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Updates: To Next Page
Sustainable Sheep

By Alethea Kenney

Sheep have been an integral part of Minnesota’s heritage and continue to be a growing part of diverse farms across Minnesota. The growing demand for local sustainably produced foods, fibers and art has a direct impact on sheep farmers and how they market and sell their products. The Sustainable Sheep networking group focuses on connecting sheep farmers, youth, fiber artists and consumers that want to promote, use and sell sustainably raised sheep, meat and fiber products locally. This group also has a unique opportunity to educate sheep farmers in more sustainable ways to raise sheep and to educate the public in the importance of choosing locally grown sustainably raised fiber for their garments, projects and art.

One goal of the Sustainable Sheep Community is to pull producers together on a website that allows consumers to access local products. Research is being planned to determine the market for local lamb and ways to increase consumer awareness of local products from sheep.

Two annual events help provide support for this Sustainable Sheep Community: the Fosston Fiber Festival (October) and the Small Scale Sustainable Sheep Farming Event will be February 20, 2016 in Fosston and feature speakers, vendors and lunch.

Seeing northern Minnesota sheep producers moving toward grass-based sustainable sheep production and more sheep products available and being purchased locally is the ultimate goal of the Sustainable Sheep networking group.

Please join us in seeing these goals become reality. If you are interested in more information, joining the Sustainable Sheep Community or in supporting this community and projects please contact sustainablesheep@sfa-mn.org or visit our homepage.
Webmaster’s Traffic Report • By Laura Borgendale

Overview
Sessions (Site Visits/Hits): 55,920
Users (Unique Visitors): 39,083
Average # of Pages Viewed/Session: 2.18
New Visitors: 68.1%
Returning Visitors: 31.9%

Most Visited Pages
Garlic Festival: 16.4%
Harvest Festival: 5.7%
Midwest Soil Health Summit: 4.1%
Annual Conference: 4.1%
Crow River Directory: 1.4%
Festival of Farms: 1.4%
Join SFA: 1.3%

Visits to Chapter Homepages
Lake Superior: 1,458
Central: 1,401
Crow River: 1,134
Lake Agassiz: 652
Western: 483
South Central: 420
Cannon River: 399
Southeast: 303
Greater Mille Lacs: 203
Coteau Ridge: 156

How Visitors View Site
Desktop: 65.5%
Mobile: 25.7%
Tablet: 8.8%

Where Users Live (Top 5 by Category)
By Metro Area
MSP Metro: 42.8%
Duluth: 10.9%
St. Cloud: 2.6%
Hutchinson: 2%
Rochester: 1.8%

By State
Minnesota: 68.9%
Illinois: 6.3%
Wisconsin: 4.5%
California: 2%
Iowa: 1.3%

For its chapter report, Cannon River submitted these photos. At left, Big Woods Farm. Above, a fleet of tractors at Open Hands Farm.

SFA Business & Organization MEMBERS

PATRONS

Glacial Lake Organics, LLC.

Albert Lea Seed Organics

Grain Millers
Our Annual Conference is all about the local sustainable farming community. We surveyed what sessions you wanted, then 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 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 are the sessions as of Nov. 12 (subject to change). For an up-to-date schedule, visit sfa-mn.org/conference.

Survey-Generated Sessions

• “Basics of Farm-Scale Permaculture”
• “Growing Fruits Sustainably in a Northern Climate”
• “Beyond Farmers Markets: Marketing Alternatives”
• “Farm Power Primer: Machinery Options, Operation and Maintenance”
• “Pollinator Strips” with Carmen Fernholz
• “Know Before You Buy: What to Look/Out for When Considering a Property for a New Farm Project”
• “The Art of Stacking: Add Revenue Without More Acres”
• “Developing a Forage Chain”
• “North Country Beekeeping Basics”
• “The New Cottage Food Law”
• “Wintering Livestock”
• “Animal Handling Systems”

Plus Sessions from our Networking Groups:

• Deep Winter Producers
• Garlic Growers
• Sustainable Sheep
• CWRB Forage Council

New This Year: WOC Talks (Wisdom of the Community)

SFA members and supporters can submit talks on subjects related to sustainable farming and food systems in four categories:

Farm or Production “Hack” • Networking
Financial or Marketing Tips • “Big Picture”

Also in 2016

• Seed Swap Returns
• Deep Roots Network session
• “At Home With Honey” with Sue Doeden
• “Sales Agreements and Legal Issues,” with Farm Commons’ Rachel Armstrong
• The Friday night music jam returns to Minnesota Street Market in St. Joseph.
• A new film by Deb Wallwork
• Resources for Chapters and Networking Groups with Jerry Ford

Budding Farmers

Art and science projects, cooking lessons and more – the Budding Farmers program is coming to the Annual Conference. Registered children will complete art, science and cooking projects, and move around playing imaginative games. Also, each child will go home with fun activity pages and materials, including a seed-sprouting kit.

Registration for children’s programming is just $10 – Budding Farmers students will return to their parents for lunch, and parents may want to pack snacks and drinks for their students to have during class time. Children attending must be between 3 and 12 years old and potty trained; kids under 3 are welcome to attend the conference but are the responsibility of their parents.

Silver Sponsors
Annual Conference Registration Form

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

Note: This year’s conference is Feb. 13 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 on the morning of Feb. 13; 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 “Budding Farmers” children ages 3-12 is just $10; must be potty trained. Kids under 3 are free but will be the responsibility of their parents.

COST UNTIL JAN. 1 – SFA MEMBERS: $45 • NONMEMBERS: $55 • AGES 3-12: $10 • UNDER 3: FREE
JAN. 1-FEB. 1 – SFA MEMBERS $55, NONMEMBERS $65 • FEB. 1-13 – ALL ADULTS $65

First Attendee
Name ___________________________ Email __________________
Address ___________________________ City _____________ State___ Zip ______ COST __________________
Leaders Breakfast? Yes (add $15) No

Second Attendee
Name ___________________________ Email __________________
Address ___________________________ City _____________ State___ Zip ______ COST __________________
Leaders Breakfast? Yes (add $15) No

Third Attendee
Name ___________________________ Email __________________
Address ___________________________ City _____________ State___ Zip ______ COST $ ____________
Leaders Breakfast? Yes (add $15) No

Fourth Attendee
Name ___________________________ Email __________________
Address ___________________________ City _____________ State___ Zip ______ COST $ ____________
Leaders Breakfast? Yes (add $15) 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
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Lorri Ann Hartel, Chapter Administrator
DeEtta Bilek, Education Coordinator
Contact James to start planning installation of your solar system in 2016. The 30 percent federal tax credit for solar system installations is reduced to 10 percent for systems installed in 2017 so next year (2016) is the last year to take full advantage of the 30 percent federal tax credit.

Solar electric panels are long lasting and warranted for 25 years. Solar electric systems will pay for themselves in 4-14 years dependent on your electric rates, utility incentives or REAP grants, if you are a business or residence, the location of your installation, and distance to the existing electrical service.

Solar electric systems are also a hedge against rising electric rates and produce pollution free electricity.

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SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit
Feb. 17-18, 2016 • Arrowwood Resort • Alexandria, Minn.

The SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit features experts and farm leaders for two days of education and farmer networking – all geared at improving the health of your soil.

The 2016 speaker slate (subject to change):

- **Dr. Allen Williams**, a champion of the grass-fed beef industry as well as a leader in cutting edge grazing methodology.
- **Jay Fuhrer**, District Conservationist with the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in Bismarck and a leader of the innovative soil health techniques in Burleigh County, N.D.
- **Todd McPeak**, a producer from Burleigh County, N.D.
- **Grant Breitkreutz**, a producer from Redwood Falls, Minn.
- **Dr. Michael Lehman**, a Research Microbiologist at the North Central Agriculture Research Lab at South Dakota State who will present his research data on testing mycorrhizal responsiveness in crops including corn and soybeans.
- **Dr. Shannon Osbourne**, a Research Agronomist who focuses on understanding how soil and crop management options influence the soil environment and how these practices can be developed into production systems.
- **Kent Solberg**, SFA Livestock & Grazing Specialist, will detail the Five Principles of Soil Health and how each is a separate yet vital piece of the soil health puzzle.
- **John Mesko**, SFA Executive Director, will present “Soil Health Basics,” an introductory class geared solely to first-timers.

Register today at sfa-mn.org/midwest-soil-health-summit