SFA 2019-2023 Strategic Plan

SFA Mission
The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota advances the sustainable agriculture principles of environmental stewardship, economic resilience and strong, diverse communities through farmer-to-farmer networking, education, innovation, and demonstration.

SFA Vision
Agriculture, done well, heals.
We believe agriculture done well heals by connecting people, plants and animals to the land.
We believe agriculture should heal and connect people, plants and animals to the land.
To achieve this, we see our landscape populated by resilient sustainable farms, resulting in healthy soil, healthy food, clean water, strong communities and a positive impact on our climate.

SFA Values
- A vibrant, robust farmer-to-farmer network
- Strong chapters with effective leadership and programing
- Healthy soils
- Widespread livestock integration into farming operations
- A spirit of learning
- New ideas and projects
- Awareness of the true cost and value of sustainable farm products
- High quality habitat for fish, wildlife and pollinators
- Diversity of all types (people, farming methods and operations, biodiversity)
- A community of cooperation and sharing
- Partnerships and strategic alliances
- Equity and inclusion of underserved communities in programs, leadership and membership
SFA Goals and Strategies

Goal 1. Promote and advance widespread adoption of soil health principles: keep the soil covered, minimize soil disturbances, increase crop diversity, keep living roots in the soil, and integrate livestock.

a) Make soil health education widely accessible, relevant and available. Tactics would include but not be limited to:

- Expand direct farmer consultation, Café Chats, workshops, field days, webinars and meetings.
- Create opportunities for farmers, livestock producers and agricultural professionals to be soil health mentors, coaches, and on-farm assistants through “train the trainer” programming.
- Offer on-farm soil health assistance and support, prioritizing farmers integrating livestock.
- Partner with under-served communities such as women, people of color, immigrants, Indigenous people, youth, and people with disabilities to create and offer relevant, timely soil health programming.
- Provide timely information, economic data, trends and research findings on the costs and benefits of soil health practices, improved soil organic matter and livestock integration.

b) Advance livestock integration as an essential soil health principle and the primary component of SFA’s soil health program. Tactics would include but not be limited to:

- Conduct and/or share on-farm research to document the impact of livestock integration on soil health and farm profitability.
- Leverage programs such as Ecological Livestock Services Networking Group and the MN Department of Agriculture’s Cropland Grazing Exchange to promote livestock integration.
- Expand grazing dairies through the MN Dairy Initiative and the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program, pairing beginning apprentices with seasoned Master Grazer dairy farmers.

c) Educate farmers about integrating diverse agro-ecological practices, including organic and regenerative agriculture, agro-forestry/silvo pasture and permaculture, complex cover crops and small grain adoption and utilization.

d) Promote widespread regeneration of the soil food web, through adoption of soil health principles, as an economically viable means to sequester carbon, stabilize nutrient cycles, and restore water quality.
Goal 2. Strengthen SFA’s economic resilience.

a) Create a Development Committee to craft and implement a development plan that helps achieve SFA’s annual budget goals and long-term financial security. Action items for the committee would include but not be limited to:
   - Participate in fundraising and development education, training and ongoing support of the Development Committee, Board and chapter leaders to ensure its success and expand SFA’s fundraising capacity.
   - Leverage SFA’s farmer-to-farmer network as a core fundraising platform (“fundraising case statement”) and membership builder.
   - Develop a house party fundraising program for chapters, at-large members and networking groups to increase membership and financial support, build community, and strengthen the farmer-to-farmer network.

b) Share resources, staff and infrastructure with other non-profits and agencies to maximize efficiencies, align services and programs as possible and to generate greater support, interest and investment from funders.

Goal 3. Grow SFA’s farmer-to-farmer network, chapters and networking groups and equip them to succeed in achieving SFA’s mission.

a) Create opportunities for engagement in SFA’s farmer-to-farmer network for all segments of the agricultural community, including conventional and organic farmers, women, people of color, immigrants, youth, indigenous people, and people with disabilities. Tactics would include but not be limited to:
   - Convene regular video, phone conferencing or face to face gatherings with chapter leaders and coordinators for networking, relationship building, support, leadership development and problem-solving.
   - Promote community events emphasizing connections between consumers, main street businesses and farmers.

b) Build new SFA chapters and networking groups as opportunities arise to fill gaps in SFA’s farmer-to-farmer network.

c) Position SFA members as leaders among their peers and in their communities. Tactics would include but not be limited to:
   - Provide leadership opportunities within SFA such as statewide and chapter committee or board service, event planning, public speaking, meeting facilitation, house party hosting, farmer-to-farmer consulting.
   - Empower SFA members to serve on local, regional and statewide boards and commissions of importance to sustainable and regenerative agriculture, food systems and rural development.

d) Ensure chapters and networking groups have financial resources to educate and reach members by identifying local fundraising strategies for unique chapter and networking group projects and programs.
Goal 4. Conduct consumer communications and engagement campaigns that increase demand for and access to sustainably produced food, fiber and goods.

a) Develop and execute an earned media and social media campaign for SFA programs to increase SFA’s brand awareness and inspire consumer participation in achieving SFA’s mission. Tactics would include but not be limited to:
   - Press kits, communications materials (with talking points, sample letters to the editor, CONNECT columns, social media and radio talk show content).
   - Compelling social media content that highlights SFA farmers value and contributions to a healthy food system, healthy environment, and healthy communities.
   - Communications trainings for chapters, networking groups and board members designed to engage consumers.

b) Create and sponsor experiences that bring farmers together with consumers, food advocates, and chefs that advance SFA’s mission. For example, pilot an SFA farm camp or weekend farm retreat for families. Or, sponsor or present at existing youth programs that provide agriculture educational programming, but do not offer SFA-oriented programming.

c) Actively support and engage in strategic partnerships with organizations that duplicate this work to further increase SFA’s exposure.

Goal 5. Provide education and support for beginning farmers, as well as farmers wishing to diversify or expand their farm businesses using sustainable and regenerative agriculture principles.

a) Help beginning farmers acquire the skills and connections they need to be successful.
   - Re-establish SFA’s Farm Skills 101 educational program and Deep Roots beginning farmer cohort, engaging with emerging farmers.
   - Partner with other groups, agencies, and education organizations offering farm transitions, farm incubator and beginning farmer education and training

b) Offer ways for new and experienced farmers to diversify or transition to sustainable business models.
   - Collaborate with other entities to provide resources and education on food safety practices and regulations to help farmers succeed in growing, processing, adding value to and marketing their products from the farm.
   - Promote strategies that boost farm income and support parity. Possibilities include: agri-tourism, deep winter greenhouse, high-value crop production.
   - Provide consistent and up-to-date research and information on alternative sustainable agricultural production practices and systems. Examples include: hosting workshops with Main Street Project’s poultry-centered regenerative agriculture model, facilitating round tables for farmers to learn about collective action and other ownership and farming structures and models, archiving and linking to research and white papers on the SFA website.
   - Create opportunities and cultivate relationships and partnerships that foster farmer-focused supply chain development for sustainably grown produce, meat and fiber. Examples include: Host a stakeholder meeting for farmers and processors interested in developing a garlic processing business for the restaurant market.

c) Help connect both new and existing farmers to experts who offer marketing and messaging strategy to potential buyers (wholesale, retail, restaurants, CSAs, farmers markets, direct sales).
Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota’s Strategic Plan Background

In early 2018, the Sustainable Farming Association Board of Directors decided to undertake a process to create a 3-5 year plan to guide SFA’s growth, programming and strategic direction. The strategic planning process was led by a team of Board members and chapter leaders as well as staff, and included Connie Carlson, SFA’s President; Katie Myhre, Secretary; Dale Woodbeck and Liz Morris Otto, SFA Directors at Large, East Central Chapter delegate Yvonne Baller, and staff members Jerry Ford (Network Coordinator) and Theresa Keaveny (Executive Director). David Abazs of Round River Farm, Finland, provided facilitation services.

Over the fall of 2018, the team interviewed 27 key stakeholders by phone, surveyed SFA members and invited chapters to provide input and suggestions. This input was discussed by the Board and chapter coordinators attending a strategic planning retreat in late October, 2018, at which leadership dug deep into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges we face. Following the retreat, the committee and Theresa crafted the plan above with Board involvement at its February and April meetings, with final adoption by the Board on Oct. 25, 2019. The plan reflects the context in which SFA works, wherein a lay of the land analysis and broad input helped shape the goals, strategies and possible tactics reflected above.

The SFA Strategic Plan will be implemented as follows: First, with preparation of a two-year implementation plan by staff and consultants, with a review and update 3-6 months; through periodic reports, evaluations and course changes made by the Board of Directors at its quarterly meetings; and third, through chapter and networking groups review of the plan with prioritization to help direct chapter delegates and the board in implementing strategies relevant to them.

Thank you to the Strategic Planning Team and our facilitator for the diligence, insight and thoughtfulness shown in gathering and assessing input, planning, participating in and facilitating the retreat and writing and revising the plan. Special thanks to Liz Morris Otto, Chris Kudrna and Connie Carlson for their leadership and direction, and to Jim Chamberlin whose belief that “agriculture done well heals” impacts us all.