Soil Health Lead - Job Description

Title: Soil Health Lead

Reports to: SFA Executive Director

FSLA Status: Exempt

This is a full time, professional position based out of a home office in western, central or southern Minnesota, or SFA’s New Ulm, MN office. An estimated 1,000 miles per month of travel, and one-two overnights per month are expected.

Position Summary: The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA) is committed to the sustainable agriculture principles of environmental stewardship, a resilient farm economy and robust, diverse communities, through farmer-to-farmer networking, education, innovation, demonstration and outreach. SFA’s Soil Health program, now nearly 10 years old, is dedicated to the widespread adoption of soil health principles (keep the soil covered, deepen root systems, diversify plants and perennials, minimize soil disturbance, incorporate livestock). As described in its strategic plan, SFA’s unique niche in soil health programming is assisting farmers to incorporate livestock systems using managed grazing. This work includes a vigorous dairy component, where SFA is a partner and “coordinator” with the MN Dairy Initiative (MDI) and Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA).

SFA’s Soil Health Program has six components, below and the Soil Health Lead is responsible for managing items 1-4, below, working with SFA’s Grazing Lead, Senior Technical Advisor, Network Coordinator, Silvopasture Team and Executive Director. This approach brings people together for planning, coordination, coaching, education and efficient use of resources will addressing geographical considerations.

1. Soil Health networking and education (research, innovation and generation of knowledge products), planning and conducting the Midwest Soil Health Summit (March), “Dirt Rich” soil health field days (late summer), Café Chats (5-8 in a series, late February and March) and panels held at SFA’s Annual Conference (early February), SFA chapter and networking gatherings held throughout the year, and speaking and tabling at relevant group events such as the MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

2. One on one assistance to farmers on creating integrated soil health plans, adding cover crops, no till, livestock systems adoption, soil testing and increasing soil organic matter (SOM). This includes gathering and providing information on the economics of soil health.

3. Fencing, managed grazing and livestock management, which includes assistance in creating and implementing grazing plans.

4. Serving as a regional coordinator with MDI, providing assistance to 12-15 dairies in a given year, working in concert with the MDI regional coordinators

5. Silvopasture and managed woodland grazing, handled by SFA Special Projects Coordinator and Silvopasture Lead.

6. Soil Health for fruit and vegetable growers, taught by 3 farmers who have been trained to do soil health demonstrations and presentations for smaller growers and fruit and vegetable producers.

Principal Duties and Responsibilities:
1. Soil Health education and farmer-to-farmer networking
   a. Plan and conduct SFA’s soil health programs including Midwest Soil Health Summit (March), 2 “Dirt Rich” soil health field days (late summer), 5-8 Café Chats (in a series, late February and March), and 1-3 panels held at SFA’s Annual Conference (early February).
   b. As requested, present soil health programs to SFA chapter and networking gatherings held throughout the year.
c. Provide (or obtain content for) monthly soil health columns for CONNECT e-newsletter and knowledge products for SFA web site and social media.
d. Provide soil health and livestock integration presentations and tabling at relevant group events such as the MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, MN State Cattlemens’ Association, MN Organic Conference, MN Soil Health Coalition.
e. Serve as SFA’s liaison to Green Lands Blue Waters Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group, MN Office of Soil Health, and other soil health-related entities and agencies.
f. Gather and impart information on the economics of soil health and livestock integration.
g. Take part in soil health research program with MN Native Landscapes.

2. One on one assistance to farmers (will be based in part geographically)
a. Serve as SFA’s liaison to the Kiss the Ground soil health project, work with team to recruit the farmers, provide technical support and conduct soil testing and mentoring to these farms.
b. As time allows, aid other farmers in creating integrated soil health plans, adding cover crops, no till, livestock grazing systems development, soil testing and building soil aggregate structure.
c. Acquire working knowledge of MDA, NRCS, FSA and SWCD conservation programs that facilitate soil health, integration of livestock, and provide information on relevant programs to farmers.

3. Serve as SFA’s coordinator with MDI and provide direct service to 12-15 dairy farmers (geography will be a consideration in determining which farms) in cooperation with SFA Grazing Lead. Attend MDI coordinator meetings and trainings as scheduled, roughly 4 times per year.

4. Learn and teach fencing basics, managed grazing and livestock management, which including referrals to implement grazing plans.

Additional Duties: Attend and contribute to SFA staff team meetings (3-4 times per year), attend quarterly SFA Board of Directors meetings, and other duties as requested.

Orientation and Support: SFA has a wealth of tools to assist staff and consultants, and learning how to access these tools will be a priority during orientation. Orientation and support is provided by SFA’s Senior Technical Advisor, SFA's Executive Director, Network Coordinator and Communications Director, and will be spelled out in a written on-boarding plan. Orientation will include an overview of SFA soil health related programs, introductions to soil health allies, MDI, Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship and dairy farmers being served.

Additional staff development opportunities include offerings of MN Department of Agriculture, University of Minnesota, Soil Health Academy, MN Soil Health Coalition, Land Stewardship Project, Practical Farmers of Iowa and a wide range of workshops, field days, webinars and gatherings. Participation will be based on professional development goals of the Soil Health Lead and budget considerations.

Qualifications:
● Undergraduate degree in soil science, agronomy, agroecology, natural resource management, biology and natural sciences, natural resource management, range management, agroforestry, ecology, animal husbandry, or sustainable agriculture systems preferred. Other combinations of related training and experience that demonstrate a robust comprehension of agriculture and ecology would be considered.
● Working farmer, or 5+ years of agricultural experience
● Broad dairy and livestock experience with emphasis in managed grazing systems
● Demonstrated ability to teach, coach and mentor other farmers
● Understanding of soil health principles and the practices needed to bring these principles to life on the landscape, including incorporating livestock into cropping systems
● Documented attendance at soil health and regenerative agriculture educational programs, field days, workshops, webinars
● Ability to work as part of a team
● Strong written and verbal communication skills.
Compensation: SFA offers a competitive salary and benefit package, excellent professional development and opportunities for advancement.

Other: A valid driver’s license and access to a working vehicle is required.

To apply: Submit a resume’, cover letter explaining your vocational goals and vision, and 3 references (phone and email) to theresa@sfa-mn.org.

Application deadline: April 15, 2020