Agriculture, done well, heals.

When SFA adopted a Strategic Plan with this mantra, I didn’t anticipate how meaningful it would become in 2020. But the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly revealed the high value of nutritious, locally raised food. It’s also laid bare the importance of an agricultural paradigm shift toward a regenerative, holistic model that embraces human health, environmental stewardship and community well-being. And, the pandemic exposed disparities in agriculture and injustices in our food system that have existed, shamefully, for years.

That’s grim context, but as I reflect on SFA’s work in 2020, I’m proud of our progress and the way our staff and network took those challenges and stepped up just like you’d expect from a tough group of farmers.

Our Strategic Plan consists of five goals, each distinct and significant. Here is an update on each as it pertains to our work in 2020; I think you’ll see why I’m proud that SFA was able to take steps toward each in a year like no other.

Thirty-one years ago, the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota was formed in response to the farm crisis that was decimating rural communities across the state. The leaders who launched SFA understood the strength, resiliency and hope that a supportive, innovative and creative community provides in challenging times. Then, as now, farmers, leaders, citizens and educators who came together to form SFA created a trusted space to ask questions, seek help and demand change.

Whenever I’m asked to describe SFA and what makes us unique and effective, I immediately describe our network that spans the corners of the state and unites growers of all ages, backgrounds and experiences. What ties us all together is our commitment to sustainability for our land, our future and our communities. Our farmer-to-farmer network has always been the heartbeat of who we are.

How, then, can an organization such as ours, one built on farmers talking to farmers in their fields, leaning on their trucks or sipping a coffee in a hallway, thrive during a time of social distancing and lockdowns?

What I know is that we have all been practicing resilience well through agriculture done well are the tools we already had in hand to weather these unprecedented times.

Over the past year, I have watched and worked with you to meet the challenges of a global pandemic and civil unrest, and we’ve come out stronger and wiser. Our chapters have continued to find ways to connect — and not just through Zoom (raise your hand if you are Tired. Of. Zoom.) You’ve been hosting pasture walks, building COVID safety plans and writing soil health case studies. I know you have been reaching out to neighbors and haven’t been shying away from the challenges of this extraordinary year. I know you have been leaders because I’ve seen you in action.

As we plan for our first-ever virtual Annual Conference, I think about how much I will miss greeting you at St. Ben’s or catching up with you in the halls on the way to a session. I’ll miss that moment when someone says, “Hey, can I run an idea by you?” and then we sit for an hour talking through a great idea that probably started from a tractor seat somewhere in greater Minnesota. As I sit writing this, I can hear the laughter and conversation that carries through the halls during the conference. I’ll miss that too.

I’m incredibly grateful to be part of an organization that is made up of people who choose to step up and step forward; people who are willing to join together, share their wisdom and listen for the next great idea that will help us all thrive during this challenge and the next ones that are sure to come. Thanks for making room for me to stand with you and work with you.

Until our paths cross again may you all stay healthy, creative and generous.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Connie Carlson
constance.carl@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR: Connie Carlson, Crow River, Buffalo
VICE CHAIR: Joe Gans, Greater Mille Lacs, Aitkin
SECRETARY: Katie Myhre, At Large, Minneapolis
TREASURER: Yvonne Baller, East Central, Ogilvie
John Beaton, Lake Superior, Saginaw
Scott Haase, At Large, Blue Earth
Noelle Harden, At Large, Moorhead
Chris Kudrna, At Large, St. Cloud
Claire LaCanne, At Large, Faribault
Liz Morris Otto, At Large, Delano
Zachary Paige, Lake Agassiz, Vergas
Dayle Reinke, Central, Wadena
Josh Streblow, Western, Redwood Falls
Tony Wells, Cannon River, Faribault
Dale Woodbeck, At Large, Excelsior

STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Theresa Keaveny, Ext. 5, theresa@sfa-mn.org
SOIL HEALTH LEAD: Jared Luhrman, Ext. 720, jared@sfa-mn.org
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR: Katie Feterl, Ext. 715, katie@sfa-mn.org
NETWORK COORDINATOR: Jerry Ford, Ext. 700, jerry@sfa-mn.org
SILVOPASTURE LEAD: Tyler Carlson, Ext. 702, tyler@sfa-mn.org
SPECIAL PROJECTS: Wayne Monsen, Ext. 712, wayne@sfa-mn.org
SENIOR TECH. ADVISOR: Kent Solberg, Ext. 701 kent@sfa-mn.org
GRAZING LEAD: Doug Voss, Ext. 703, doug@sfa-mn.org
COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATE: Jason Walker, jason@sfa-mn.org
DGA COORDINATOR: Angie Walter, angie@sfa-mn.org
SILVOPASTURE CONSULTANT: Diomy Zamora, diomy zamora@gmail.com
ORGANIZER/OUTREACH: Dan Zimmerli, Ext. 713, dan@sfa-mn.org
WEBMASTER: Laura Borgendale, laura@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
GREAT MILE LACS, greatermilelacs@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

TWIN CITIES GROWERS NETWORK, tcgrowers@sfa-mn.org
GARLIC GROWERS, garlicgrowers@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 716
FORAGE COUNCIL, foragecouncil@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 714
SERVICE LIVESTOCK, servicelivestock@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 719
DEEP WINTER GREENHOUSE, deepwinter@sfa-mn.org • Ext. 717

Dial 1.844.922.5573 then the appropriate extension.

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

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/sfadocuments. 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. SFA’s mailing address is 4924 Upton Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55410.
THERESA from page 1

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.

For years, soil health has been the linchpin of SFA’s work. Our unique emphasis of adding livestock to the landscape led to more “hands-on” training for cattle, dairy, sheep, goat and poultry farmers: fencing workshops, pasture walks and a stockmanship school. Since soil health education has become more mainstream (e.g. MN Soil Health Coalition, U. of Minnesota’s Office of Soil Health and Extension), SFA has doubled down on our “boots-on-the-ground” approach with on-site farmer coaching and support that addresses “context” and results in better adoption of practices. Over 400 farmers and ag professionals attended our 2020 events, virtual and in-person, and nearly 40 farmers received on-farm help, resulting in more impactful landscape changes. Jared Luhman’s article elaborates.

Another strategy is our Silvopasture and Agroforestry Project, an innovative area which few farmers, landowners and foresters know much about. Eighteen months in, SFA has enjoyed strong participation from agricultural professionals, agro-ecologists and curious farmers. Next year, we will be looking at agroforestry among Indigenous people and undertaking a cost/benefit analysis. A cadre of very willing farmer demonstrators have hosted field days, taken part on panels and webinars and are now being featured in case studies. We’ve gone from ground zero to leading in this promising topic, having produced a plethora of amazing publications, podcasts and videos that will be valuable for years to come.

Goal 2. Strengthen SFA’s economic resilience.

SFA has a new Finance and Economic Resilience team. Led by Treasurer Yvonne Baller, the team got its feet wet during the “Give to the Max” fundraising drive last month, raising over $16,000. Now, the team will work to create a “meetup” toolkit that will help guide small membership get-togethers in the social distancing era as well as a “house party” toolkit that chapters and groups can follow to host post-pandemic fundraisers and meet-and-greets.

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

We have begun encouraging our members to become community leaders, whether by serving on chapter boards, running for office or taking leadership roles. Often, openings arise on local and statewide boards and commissions that deal with sustainable agriculture, conservation, environment and rural development, and these beg for our members’ involvement. A relevant example is the Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture’s Emerging Farmers Work Group, which tapped 17 diverse farmers. To this end, we’ve convened a series of chapter leadership webinars and are laying the groundwork for a new SFA chapter in the New Ulm/Minnesota River area; as a result, many capable community leaders are stepping up to serve. Expect more information on opportunities to serve on various boards and commissions next year.

Goal 4. Conduct consumer communications and engagement campaigns that increase demand for and access to sustainably produced food, fiber and goods.

SFA now coordinates the Local Food Producer Resiliency Work Group, born this spring as COVID-19 was disrupting markets, creating greater economic hardship and disproportionately affecting emerging farmers and farmers of color. This team, comprised of over 60 farmers, food advocates, educators and funders, came together in an emergency and is now cooperating to leverage long-term food system changes such as expanding meat processing options.

The SFA Annual Conference on Feb. 13 (more on Pages 5-8) will feature discussions on meat processing, farm to rural grocery, and a new program featuring VISTAs (Volunteers in Service to America) who will help build capacity for farmer and market resiliency in Southern Minnesota.

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.

As COVID took over our lives last spring, we pivoted to help farmers take advantage of government relief programs. SFA helped lead a team involving MISA, U. of M. Extension, Farmers Union, Renewing the Countryside, Farmers Legal Action Group, Minnesota Farmers Market Association and Land Stewardship Project that convened several webinars on how to apply for programs and grants. Dan Zimmerli, Angie Walter and I leaned in to educate ourselves on program benefits and applications so we could help SFA farmers through the process, either directly or through the webinars. The TC Metro Growers, an SFA Networking Group led by Karl Hakanson, also stepped up with continual programming for beginning and BIPOC farmers and those seeking to grow local food successfully.

Looking back on what we’ve learned, how SFA has adapted, and where we are headed, I have a good deal of hope and enthusiasm for 2021. We will continue to focus on soil health, livestock integration and other farm topics that benefit our members and help create a just and regenerative farming paradigm that protects land, water, air and people.

One that, done well, will help us heal.
Fundraising in a Virtual World

As my first year as SFA Treasurer draws to a close, I am impressed with how SFA has responded to challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our annual in-person spring fundraiser and other events were canceled or reduced in size, causing us to pivot to online and through-the-mail fundraising. Members met the challenge and we have held our numbers steady despite no farmer networking gatherings.

A new Financial Health and Resiliency Committee was launched to help build SFA’s near- and long-term financial strength, an outcome of our Strategic Plan. This committee, which I chair, made its first priority to organize around the GiveMN Give to the Max Day with a goal of raising $15,000. Thanks to a generous $6,000 matching gift from an anonymous donor and support from many others, SFA exceeded our goal and raised $16,350. This, the solid response to membership mailers and email appeals, and generous grants have given the SFA board, staff and chapters the flexibility of offering programs that are relevant and impactful. Please help us grow this network by inviting friends and family to become a member or donate to SFA (below).

I would like to thank the foundations and government entities that have provided grants to help make SFA successful. See donor list at right.

SFA Financial Summary
July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020

Income: SFA raised $707,640, nearly $177,740 more than the previous year, and over $100,000 above our budget goals. Of this, $618,789 was raised at the SFA state level and $88,851 by chapters and networking groups (NG). Total SFA expenses were $524,323 which includes state level expenses of $450,222 under our budget target and chapter and NG expenses of $77,101. SFA ended the year with net income of $183,318. The bottom line: SFA ended the fiscal year in a solid financial position.

SFA members may access our latest fiscal year financials at sfa-mn.org/sfa-documents and enter the password “sfa.” You may also access our annual 990 tax report to the IRS.

It has been a pleasure to serve as SFA board treasurer this year and I look forward to continuing in this role and supporting the financial health and resiliency of SFA. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me via email at ymb.baller@gmail.com.

Government and Foundation Grantors
• Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture – Specially Crop Block Grant for our Garlic Project and Asparagus Project
• North Central Sustainable Agriculture and Research and Education – Silvopasture Professional Development Program
• LCCMR – Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commissions on Minnesota Resources, Silvopasture Education/Outreach
• McKnight Foundation – Soil Health
• Catholic Campaign for Human Development – Rural Organizing and Leadership Development project
• Otto Bremer Trust – General Operating Support
• Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships
  – South and East Central
  – East Central
  – Statewide
• Minnesota Dairy Initiative
• Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
• Lakewinds Food Cooperative – Round Up
• City Center Market, Cambridge – East Central Chapter Round Up
• Southern MN Initiative Foundation — Cannon Valley Grown and VISTA support

Yes! I would like to support SFA. Here’s my member gift of:

☑ $40 Single ☑ $50 Household ☑ $75 Supporting ☑ $150 Patron ☑ $500 Steward

Or, make a recurring donation: $_______ ☑ Monthly ☑ Quarterly ☑ Yearly

All are welcome to join at a different amount if it is more affordable: ☑ $_______

Name(s): ________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________

City: ____________________________ State: ____ Zip: ____________ Phone: ____________

Email: _________________________________________________________________

☐ My check is enclosed, payable to SFA ☑ Charge my credit card: ☐ VISA ☐ MC

Card number: ___________________________ - ___________________________ - ___________________________ -

Exp. Date _____ / _____ Card code _______ Signature __________________________

Your contribution is fully tax deductible under terms of section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code. SFA’s federal tax exemption number is E41-1671893.
ANNUAL CONFERENCE
SUSTAINABLE FARMING ASSOCIATION • FEB. 8-13, 2021
VIRTUAL, INTERACTIVE EVENT • #SFA2021
FREE FOR SFA MEMBERS

2021 SPONSORS:

- COMPEER FINANCIAL
- LAKEWINDS FOOD CO-OP
- DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
- MINNESOTA GROWN
- NORTHERN CENTRAL SARE
- MINNESOTA INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
- MINNESOTA FARMERS UNION
- PRAIRIE CREEK SEED

SCHEDULE & MORE INFORMATION IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES:
PULL OUT OF CORNERPOST AND SAVE FOR CONFERENCE USE!
The Economics of Silvopasture
NOON-1:15 P.M. MON., FEB. 8
Sponsored by Compeer Financial. Presenters:
• Dr. Ashley Conway, Ph.D., PAS, Assistant Research Professor, University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry
• Dr. Joseph Orefice Ph.D., Lecturer and Director of Forest & Agricultural Operations at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies
• Tyler Carlson, SFA Silvopasture & Agroforestry Project Lead
Take a deeper dive into the costs of silvopasture establishment and the economics of silvopasture production systems. View findings from research conducted throughout the United States.

Agriculture in the Metro
NOON-1:15 P.M. TUES., FEB. 9
Sponsored by MISA
Hear stories of land access and other unique challenges affecting farming in metro areas. Discussion to follow. Presenters:
• Chris Barth & Ashley Thorfinnson, California Street Farm
• Naima Dhore, Naima’s Farm
• Taya Schulte & Seamus Fitzgerald, Growing Lots Urban Farm
• Lakisha Witter, Live Organically
Hosted by Karl Hakanson, SFA Twin Cities Metro Growers Network and U. of M. Extension Educator

Conservation Connections: Programs for Soil Health and Conservation
NOON-1:15 P.M., WED., FEB. 10
Sponsored by Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. Presenters:
• John Beaton, Fairhaven Farm
• Moses Momanyi, Dawn2Dusk Farm
• Xong Mouacheupao, Agape Hmong Garden
Hear farmers discuss experiences starting a farm, developing conservation plans, and working with NRCS offices. An NRCS staffer will respond to concerns and obstacles faced and will share programs available to best help you implement conservation practices on your farm.
Hosted by Jared Luhman, SFA Soil Health Lead

Farm to Rural Grocery
NOON-1:15 P.M. THURS., FEB. 11
Sponsored by Minnesota Grown
Presenters: Ren Olive and Kathy Draeger, U. of M. Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships
Diversified market streams are important for farmers just as diversified supply chains are important to the resilience of our food system. Selling farm-raised products to rural grocery stores can increase sales and help community. Results from the 2019-2020 MN Rural Grocery Survey show 41 percent of rural grocers in communities of less than 2,500 have a strong desire to purchase more locally grown and raised foods, and over half of rural grocers are already purchasing locally produced foods. Join this session to learn about this market opportunity and the “Farm to Grocery Toolkit” and to engage in conversation about the opportunities and barriers.

• Local Producer Sustainability Project for South Central & Southwest Minnesota
Immediately following the Q&A for the statewide Farm to Rural Grocery presentation, we invite farmers, cottage food makers and other local producers in a 20-county region of southern Minnesota to join us for a rollout of the new Local Producer Sustainability Project.

SFA: A Look Behind, A Leap Ahead
9:30-10:30 A.M. FRI., FEB. 12
Hear the latest and greatest of SFA programs, progress and pivots on the Strategic Plan, and what you can do to help build our farmer to farmer network. Learn about our new chapter, which is currently being formed in the New Ulm area. Presented by SFA Executive Director Theresa Keaveny and Community Organizer Dan Zimmerli.

The Perennial Kitchen Cookbook
6-7 P.M. FRI., FEB. 12
Presenters: Beth Dooley, Beth Dooley’s Kitchen; Connie Carlson, Forever Green and U. of M. Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships
Join Beth Dooley (right), James Beard Award-Winning writer, local foods champion, Star Tribune Taste writer and a regular on MPR Appetites as she talks about her experiences writing “The Perennial Kitchen Cookbook: A Field-guide to Creating a Sustainable Kitchen.” The book includes recipes using regional perennial crops including kernza, hazelnuts and others.

Social Hour! Music & More. Performances by SFA Members. 7-8 p.m.
We’ll have a virtual Friday Night Social with a roster of SFA performers (to be announced soon).
Sat., Feb. 13
Morning Plenary Session: Meat Processing Initiatives and Challenges
9:30-10 a.m.
Sponsored by Lakewinds Co-op
Presenter: Thom Petersen, MN Department of Agriculture Commissioner
COVID-19 laid bare disparities and inequities in our food system, including meat processing. But these problems existed long before. Thom Petersen will discuss Minnesota initiatives and challenges in expanding processing opportunities.

BREAKOUT SESSION I • 10-10:50 A.M.
A Conversation With Alan Guebert, interviewed live by Jerry Ford
You’ve read Mr. Guebert’s award-winning column, “The Farm and Food File,” in The Land magazine and over 60 newspapers, and heard him as a keynote speaker at the Minnesota Organic Conference and MOSES Organic Farming Conference. We’re going to hold a frank and unrehearsed conversation with him, with topics ranging from sustainable ag during and after COVID, the meat processing conundrum and your questions and comments.

Love Farming Again: Ways to Improve Quality of Life
Sponsored by Minnesota Farmers Union
Presenters: Becca Carlson, Seeds Farm; Meg Moynihan, Derrydale Farm & Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture
No one loves their job all the time, and farmers especially face a litany of unique challenges and stresses. Unsteady income, loneliness and relentless work schedules are just a few of the things that can affect farmers’ mental health and quality of life on the farm.
In this session, Becca Carlson and Meg Moynihan will share their own perspectives and lead a discussion about work saving, enhanced income and work-life balance that can improve your quality of life. Bring your questions and stories about what works for you.

BREAKOUT SESSION II • 11 A.M.-NOON
Side Hustles: Creative Ways to Add Offseason Income
Presenters:
• Matt Brechwald, "Off-Farm Income" podcast
• Wil Crombie, Man Alone Media, Organic Compound
• Kayla Elefson, Turtle Hare Farm Stay
Hosted by Jared Luhman, SFA Soil Health Lead
If farming is your dream, but you’re not sure that you can make a full-time living at it yet, this session is for you. Learn how these farmers developed side hustles that complemented their farming operations and allowed them to do what they love without the need for a full-time, off-the-farm job.

Soil Health: Hay – Why and How
Sponsored by North Central SARE
Presenters: Kent Solberg, SFA Senior Technical Advisor, Seven Pines Farm and Fence
Doug Voss, SFA Grazing Lead, Voss Farms
We live in Minnesota, where winter comes every year. You need hay for our livestock, right? Should you make your own? What are the options, how do you make quality hay, what equipment do you need, and what costs are involved? Experienced haymakers Doug Voss and Kent Solberg will share considerations and tips.
Kent and Doug will also discuss the ways in which hay can be an integral component in implementing the five principles of soil health into a farm by keeping the soil covered, minimizing disturbance, increasing crop diversity, keeping living roots in the soil, and incorporating livestock.

Closing Plenary Session
Meatpacker Concentration: State Response
12:10-1 p.m.
Presenter: Keith Ellison, Minnesota Attorney General; Interviewed by Theresa Keaveny, SFA Executive Director
Meatpacker concentration has long caused lower prices to livestock producers and less market competition. Theresa Keaveny will ask Attorney General Keith Ellison questions about antitrust enforcement and other strategies to restore competition and price transparency.
EIGHTH ANNUAL SFA MIDWEST SOIL HEALTH SUMMIT

March 9-11, 2021 • Virtual Event • Register at sfa-mn.org • Free for members

Three evenings of education • 7-9 p.m. each night • Members free; $40 nonmembers

March 9: “Gab with Gabe”
Featuring Gabe Brown (left) of Brown’s Ranch in Bismarck, N.D. A rancher, a partner in Understanding Ag, and a Soil Health Academy Educator, Gabe Brown is on a mission to “regenerate landscapes for a sustainable future.” His practices positively impact the ecosystem from crop fields to orchards and vegetable growing – and he will talk about them all. We’ve also set aside a full hour for your questions and comments.

March 10: “Soil Health and Human Health”
With Sara Keough (lower left), Integrative Eco-Nutritionist and Technical Advisor for Understanding Ag. Sarah Keough specializes in clinical nutrition and regenerative agriculture to restore human and ecological health.

March 11: “Practical Applications for Soil Health”
• Jared Luhman on MN Ag Water Quality Certification (7:00-7:20)
• Sarah Lindblom on Vegetables (7:20-8:10)
• Kent Solberg and Doug Voss on Small Ruminants (8:10-9:00)

Would you like to be a SPONSOR/EXHIBITOR? Please contact Katie Feterl, katie@sfa-mn.org.

2020 SPONSORS:

FARM CRISIS & MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

• Crisis Mental Health Services | Ted Matthews, 320.266.2390 | Monica McConkey, 218.280.7785
• National Suicide Prevention Lifeline | 800.273.8255 | suicidepreventionlifeline.org
• Farm Advocate Program | 218.346.4866 | mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates
• U. of M. Extension rural crisis resources | 1.800.232.9077 | extension.umn.edu/rural-stress | fil@umn.edu
• Farm Mediator Program | 218.935.5785 | extension.umn.edu/get-help/farmer-lender-mediation
• Farmers Legal Action Group | 877.860.4349 | flaginc.org
• Catholic Charities New Ulm Diocese | 866.670.5163
• Minnesota Farm and Rural Helpline | 833.600.2670 | www.mda.state.mn.us/about/mnfarmerstress/copingstress
We’ll Keep Building Better Soil for Minnesota

In seven short months working with SFA, it has become clear to me that SFA places high value on education, relationships and networks. As the world seemed to shut down in 2020, SFA still found ways to build networks and provide resources for farmers across Minnesota. Our soil health team of Kent Solberg, Doug Voss and myself in addition to the rest of our staff have provided training on soil health, grazing management, fencing, silvopasture, dairy and much more.

Soil testing can be a valuable tool when evaluating what a landscape needs and how to improve soil health. Technical assistance is also an important piece of implementing soil health principles on a farm. Through a partnership with Kiss the Ground, a soil health-focused organization based in California, Doug and I were able to perform extensive soil testing on ten farms throughout Minnesota. In 2021 we will be evaluating soil test results and discussing resources and management practices that will help these farmers build soil health on their land. Keep an eye out for future opportunities to participate in Kiss the Ground’s Farmland Scholarship program.

We are also in the early stages of a new partnership with Renewing the Countryside and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Over the next two years, we will work to connect historically underserved farmers with the resources that are available to them through the NRCS. Sarah Lindblom, John Beaton, and Moses Momanyi are joining the SFA team to coordinate outreach to hundreds of historically underserved farmers in Minnesota. We’re excited for the role SFA is taking in creating a diverse regenerative farming community. The information and webinars are open to all. If you are interested in learning more or if your SFA chapter would like a presentation, contact me at jared@sfa-mn.org to be connected to the local coordinator.

Beginning in 2021, we will be providing technical assistance to 20 farmers in central, west and northwest Minnesota specifically on regenerative grazing practices. This is a great fit as six of our SFA staff and consultants are experienced graziers themselves. This opportunity is made possible by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and will impact over 1,600 acres within the prairie pothole region. More information and applications to participate will be made available soon and we encourage farmers interested in improving their grazing management to apply.

2020 brought challenges that forced us out of our comfort zone. We limited in-person events and adapted to online and virtual education, including our new “Dirt Rich” podcast. I am confident we will continue to accomplish our mission to advance environmental stewardship, economic resilience and strong, diverse communities through farmer-to-farmer networking, education, demonstration and research.

Now comes 2021 and our eighth annual Midwest Soil Health Summit. This year, the Summit will be virtual on March 9-11 and kicks off with Gabe Brown, Bismarck, N.D. farmer and Understanding Ag principal, with a reprise of our Gab with Gabe from sessions from past Summits. See details elsewhere in Cornerpost. Our soil health program will also feature several field days beginning in June and running through the fall, adapted to COVID-19 guidelines. Stay tuned.

ROLLD: Building Around Local Food

New Chapter In Works

In early 2020, I was hired to advance SFA’s Rural Organizing and Leadership Development (ROLLD) project, which was created with a goal of reducing farm and rural poverty and improving farmer profitability in the general area of New Ulm in south west Minnesota. I spent much of early 2020 – pre-Covid – meeting with farmers and assessing what could help them tackle this issue.

After meeting with both farmers and folks adjacent to local foods production (co-op produce buyers, restaurant owners, etc.) it was clear that farmers needed more markets for their products and improved awareness of local foods.

A small group and I began strategizing how to tackle such a big task. One idea we’ve settled on is an event that we’re tentatively calling the Local Foods and Farmers Expo, which will help find new customers both domestic and commercial as well as raise awareness about the plethora of food producers in the New Ulm region. Grocers, restaurant buyers, institutional buyers like schools and hospitals, as well as the general public will be able to meet New Ulm-area farmers and learn how to purchase their amazing products like meats, vegetables, honey, eggs, flowers and more.

This project is even progressing to the point of launching a chapter in the Minnesota River Valley area, within 45-50 miles of New Ulm. This chapter will build upon the work we’ve done in 2020 and is organizing the first Local Food Expo on March 27, 2021. If you’re interested in being involved in the new chapter or helping with this event or just learning more about it feel free to contact me at dan@sfa-mn.org.

The ROLD Project is supported with funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD).

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
Dan Zimmerli
dan@sfa-mn.org

VISTA to Boost Support

My name is James Harren and I’m excited to announce the launch of the Local Producer Sustainability Project. I’ll be working on the project for this next year as a VISTA, or Volunteer in Service to America, hosted by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF). SMIF has developed the project in partnership with the Minnesota Farmers’ Market Association, Renewing the Countryside, and Sustainable Farming Association. The goal of the project is to develop business support systems for small food businesses in SMIF’s 20-county region in Southern Minnesota.

I’m kicking this three-year project off hoping to interview farmers, cottage food makers, and other local producers to see how they can be better supported. I hope this work will further develop a robust local foods economy in the region and will allow for collaboration statewide to support a lively local foods economy. If you are interested in getting involved, we are still recruiting for the project, please reach out to me at jamesh@smifoundation.org or 507.214.2014.

SOIL HEALTH
Jared Luhman
jared@sfa-mn.org
Silvopasture Education Now SFA Bedrock

This past year, SFA has been very busy promoting silvopasture management to natural resource professionals and farmers. Silvopasture is the intentional integration of trees, livestock, and forage, and its management follows many of the concepts of rotational grazing and is beneficial to soil health, water quality, wood products and forage production.

SFA received a two-year North Central SARE Professional Development grant, “The Professional Development Program for Silvopasture Adoption,” which started in October, 2019. This is an education, training and outreach program targeting agricultural professionals, notably University of Minnesota Extension personnel, natural resource professionals (NRCs, SWCD, DNR personnel) and farmer mentors to learn the rudiments of silvopasture management and its relationship to soil health.

Over the life of the project we plan to provide at least 50 scholarships to agricultural professionals to attend educational events throughout Minnesota, host webinars and field days, and produce educational materials.

In 2020, we gave 34 scholarships to agricultural professionals to attend silvopasture trainings.

Tyler Carlson started work as SFA’s new Silvopasture and Agroforestry Lead in February. He brings a lot of experience both practical from his own farm and through his educational background. SFA also brought on board an educator, Dr. Diomy Zamora, an expert in forest resources and conservation. Tyler and Diomy are instrumental in planning workshops, webinars, presenting at workshops, and writing educational materials.

In 2020, we hosted workshops in Northern, Central and Southern Minnesota and five webinars, each of which had regional and local research and natural resource professionals and Minnesota farmers as presenters. Tyler and Diomy produced educational materials for these workshops; those fact sheets and archives of the silvopasture webinars are available on SFA’s website. Additionally, two podcasts on Silvopasture have been aired and a third is in production. We will host three workshops, three field days and more webinars in 2021.

SFA is partnering with U. of M. Extension, Great River Greening and Center for Integrated Natural Resource Management on a silvopasture project, funded by LCCMR (Legislative Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources, funded by the MN Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund), that focuses on oak savanna restoration.

The project has created a Silvopasture Learning Network to promote silvopasture to improve soil health, water quality, and restore oak savanna in Minnesota as well as foster farmer-to-farmer learning, promote advocacy, and facilitate volunteer efforts to expand natural resource conservation. To join the network, go to: https://sites.google.com/umn.edu/silvopasture.

Dairy Farmers: MDI Builds Bright Futures

SFA has long been an active participant in the Minnesota Dairy Initiative (MDI), which has a 20-plus-year history of working with dairy farms throughout Minnesota. Using a team approach with expert farmers and agricultural professionals, MDI provides “boots on the ground” support to dairy farmers to improve their operations, plan for long-term success, and manage transitions.

MDI is funded by the Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture; SFA’s unique role is to provide information, education and coaching to dairy farmers on sustainability, pasture management and managed grazing, transitions to organic, cover crops, soil health, value-added, marketing and succession planning. SFA also offers pasture walks with MDI “Common Funds” support. The legislation that authorizes MDI expressly notes that sustainable farming support is one of MDI’s goals and SFA is the entity that offers this service to MDI. Last year, SFA provided on-farm services to 13 dairy farmers and educational information to nearly 200 dairy farm families.

The MDI Coordinator’s role within SFA is to tap our farmer-to-farmer network for insight into how our dairy farms can, within their context, be more profitable and improve farmer quality of life. SFA has staff who are passionate about dairy. As dairy farmers themselves, they provide a relatable partner in addressing any number of concerns a dairy farmer might have. It is a pleasure for SFA to work with Minnesota dairy farms in areas that matter to those operating these farms in an environment where the only constant is change. Learning from their own experiences, our staff can help build deliberate resilience while working with natural systems in the environment.

SFA and MDI would like to advertise its benefits to the dairy farmers to encourage their use of this program. If you or someone you know could benefit from MDI, feel welcome to contact me to start a constructive conversation toward your bright future in dairy, or visit mn-dairy-initiative.org.

SILVOPASTURE & AGROFORESTRY

Tyler Carlson & Wayne Monsen
tyler@sfa-mn.org; wayne@sfa-mn.org

MINNESOTA DAIRY INITIATIVE

Doug Voss
doug@sfa-mn.org

OTHER SFA RESOURCES:

- Soil Health Case Studies: Vols. I, II and III (new!)
- Silvopasture Resource Manual
- Fact Sheet: Silvopasture in Minnesota
- Fact Sheet: Silvopasture Design & Establishment
- Fact Sheet: Converting Wooded Area into Silvopasture “Dirt Rich” podcast, with over a dozen episodes and more to come in 2021

Visit sfa-mn.org
Lots to Watch & Listen This Winter

The distancing we all did in 2020 certainly lent itself well to growing SFA’s digital communications. In May, we debuted our podcast series, “Dirt Rich.” These seasonal conversations on food & farming have been an absolute delight, and co-host Jared Luhman and I are looking forward to producing more episodes in 2021. We hope that our guests keep you company on a walk or in the field, and that their experiences spark ideas and growth in your own farm operation or garden. Listen on SFA’s website or wherever you get your podcasts.

Additionally, SFA staff and networking groups quickly pivoted to hosting online workshops and field days early this year. We’ve recorded most of these, and posted them to our YouTube channel to share presenters’ valuable experiences and knowledge with those unable to attend live. In fact, with over 30 new video resources this year alone, we’ve nearly doubled our library in size! There you can find a series on silvopasture, with a farmer and a journey worker who talked to the audience about their experience in the apprenticeship program. I was able to attend several conferences for recruitment and educational purposes before things were shut down.

DGA farm visits went virtual from March until June. I hosted an SFA fence workshop with Kent Solberg on my dairy farm in September. DGA hosted three in-person pasture walks in September and October on master farms with support from Minnesota Dairy Initiative. They were well-attended and people walked away with new information to use on their own farm. I am looking forward to adding more educational programming in 2021.

Also, we had a graduate in Jack Schouweiler, who completed the program and is implementing a farm transition with his Master Grazier. Congratulations!

If you are interested in joining as a master grazer or apprentice, contact me at 320.815.9293 or angie@sfa-mn.org.

SFA works collaboratively to boost dairy grazing through farmer networking, education and outreach by partnering with the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship program. I have served as central Minnesota’s Education Coordinator for the program for 15 months. DGA has seen some growth over the past year despite COVID happening and all the restrictions that have come with it. I have added two master graziers and a new apprentice has started the program.

DGA started 2020 with a Master roundtable event in January that focused on helping farmers handle mental stress. I organized a panel at the Minnesota Organic Conference with a farmer and a journey worker who talked to the public and gathered the information to use on their own farm. I am looking forward to adding more educational programming in 2021.

Also, we had a graduate in Jack Schouweiler, who completed the program and is implementing a farm transition with his Master Grazier. Congratulations!

If you are interested in joining as a master grazer or apprentice, contact me at 320.815.9293 or angie@sfa-mn.org.

DGA Still Drawing a Crowd (and a Graduate!)

SFA works collaboratively to boost dairy grazing through farmer networking, education and outreach by partnering with the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship program. I have served as central Minnesota’s Education Coordinator for the program for 15 months. DGA has seen some growth over the past year despite COVID happening and all the restrictions that have come with it. I have added two master graziers and a new apprentice has started the program.

DGA started 2020 with a Master roundtable event in January that focused on helping farmers handle mental stress. I organized a panel at the Minnesota Organic Conference with a farmer and a journey worker who talked to the public and gathered the information to use on their own farm. I am looking forward to adding more educational programming in 2021.

Also, we had a graduate in Jack Schouweiler, who completed the program and is implementing a farm transition with his Master Grazier. Congratulations!

If you are interested in joining as a master grazer or apprentice, contact me at 320.815.9293 or angie@sfa-mn.org.

Lots to Watch & Listen This Winter

The distancing we all did in 2020 certainly lent itself well to growing SFA’s digital communications. In May, we debuted our podcast series, “Dirt Rich.” These seasonal conversations on food & farming have been an absolute delight, and co-host Jared Luhman and I are looking forward to producing more episodes in 2021. We hope that our guests keep you company on a walk or in the field, and that their experiences spark ideas and growth in your own farm operation or garden. Listen on SFA’s website or wherever you get your podcasts.

Additionally, SFA staff and networking groups quickly pivoted to hosting online workshops and field days early this year. We’ve recorded most of these, and posted them to our YouTube channel to share presenters’ valuable experiences and knowledge with those unable to attend live. In fact, with over 30 new video resources this year alone, we’ve nearly doubled our library in size! There you can find a series on silvopasture, with a farmer and a journey worker who talked to the audience about their experience in the apprenticeship program. I was able to attend several conferences for recruitment and educational purposes before things were shut down.

DGA farm visits went virtual from March until June. I hosted an SFA fence workshop with Kent Solberg on my dairy farm in September. DGA hosted three in-person pasture walks in September and October on master farms with support from Minnesota Dairy Initiative. They were well-attended and people walked away with new information to use on their own farm. I am looking forward to adding more educational programming in 2021.

Also, we had a graduate in Jack Schouweiler, who completed the program and is implementing a farm transition with his Master Grazier. Congratulations!

If you are interested in joining as a master grazer or apprentice, contact me at 320.815.9293 or angie@sfa-mn.org.
Garlic Project Moves into Phase Two; Farmers Keen on Asparagus

After a successful “phase one” of the Minnesota Premium Garlic Project, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture funded an additional 24 months to continue this work while adding a component to expand wholesale markets and mentor beginning growers. This project’s intention is to provide an additional, high-value income stream for farmers. Here are some highlights of Phase One:

• Beginning and ending surveys indicated that the number of farmers growing garlic increased by 48 percent during the first 30 months.
• Production per farm increased by an average of 17 percent.
• Field trials on five distinct practices were conducted.
• Reports from the growers indicate that demand still exceeds supply.
• We connected with over 40 underserved farmers and beginning farmers.
• We presented six field days and twenty workshops – including programming at MN Garlic Festival – that reached almost 4,000 attendees.

Phase Two (began May 2020): This phase will focus on increasing market access, supply chain networks and improving production. For beginning growers, we started a mentoring program that now counts fifteen participants. We are establishing a model for increasing wholesale markets for growers who wish to focus on those avenues. A popular directory of garlic growers boosted sales and a three-part marketing class is set to launch in January. Field trials are continuing, providing useful information of best practices. There will be further marketing training, field days and workshops, and we’re adding podcasts. More information is available at www.sfa-mn.org/the-garlic-project. Check out these resources, all available at sfa-mn.org/minnesota-asparagus-project:

• “Growing Asparagus In Minnesota,” a comprehensive guide with graphics, photos and more, by Annie Klodd, UMN Extension Educator.
• “Minnesota Asparagus Market Study” by Swan Ray of the U. of M. RSDP.
• A great YouTube video of Paul Schmidt demonstrating planting and harvesting. Thank you to SFA volunteer Jameson Johnson for the filming, production and editing.

What’s next in 2021? Watch for an asparagus production webinar in late February or early March. SFA is also seeking additional funding to build out a strong asparagus marketing program and continue production workshops.