I spent a lot of time in the fields this summer organizing Kernza® field days, a crop in development at the UMN Forever Green Initiative (where I work) that is the first commercially available perennial grain in the U.S. Minnesota growers, many of them SFA members, are leading the way in producing and marketing this crop.

I’ll add a disclaimer that I have a personal connection here. My Dad was one of the first to plant Kernza in Minnesota and now has about 100 acres in production, one location of which was a field day site this summer.

Two days after that field day, my Aunt Annette sent me a poem inspired by what she witnessed. Titled Civic Imagination, she wrote about the soil pit dug in the field to show off the seven-foot-deep root system of the Kernza stand:

Two hundred people with only their heads showing above the tall grass, peered into, its depth to look at the long clear veins of a perennial wheat grass that may some day feed our great great grandchildren and restore hardened soils to the supple saturation points they once had.

A few stanzas later, she declares,

We are now webbed to act swiftly.*

SFA members know about this web and how critical it is to how we get our work done. We are proud of our relationships, developed through outreach and intention, that lift and carry each other as we strive to be more sustainable, more regenerative and more equitable in how we steward the land in our care. But I hadn’t really considered how our network also readies us for swift action.

With my eyes now more open, I see it’s true. I have witnessed our webs of people from all walks – grazing experts, culinary professionals, poets, economists, breeders, designers, engineers, policy makers, and citizens – acting swiftly together to meet the challenges right in front of us.

I saw how swiftly our web activated during the first few weeks of COVID-19 and how the strength of that web continues. I saw the same swift action this summer, when it was obvious we were experiencing a drought of historic proportions and producers had to make challenging decisions about their herds and livelihoods. Our web was at the ready with expertise, resources and action.

And let us not forget the soil food web – the community of organisms living in the soil and the foundation to our work, our health, and our lives. The soil web started SFA and continues to teach us. Let us continue to learn from the soil and bring its lessons to our relationships with each other.

So, I ask, who is woven into your web? Who is missing? And whom do you want to welcome into your web so that together, we can act swiftly?

*Civic Imagination by Annette Fernholz, used with permission.
Strong Web of Support During a Difficult Year

Disruptions may continue in 2022, but so will SFA’s commitment to members

Writing this, my first Cornerpost article, was a tough assignment given that I didn’t join SFA until the fall of a year marked by unprecedented challenges for SFA members and for all Minnesotans. I took the helm of an organization that has been so ably led throughout a lengthy COVID storm by Theresa Keaveny and a small but mighty team of staffers and consultants who never faltered in their efforts to provide you, our members and supporters. Membership topped 1,300 – a record.

Our fall in-person field days, café chats, workshops and networking group gatherings were well attended and many chapters began meeting in person again, to everyone’s delight. While we may find ourselves yearning for a kinder, gentler 2022 it looks like we’ll continue dealing with extreme weather conditions, higher input costs, an unpredictable supply chain and ongoing COVID-related disruptions.

The good news is that you can continue to count on SFA’s strong web of support to swiftly address new disruptions as they arise, and to work with you, farmer to farmer, to strengthen the resiliency and sustainability of your operation and your ability to be good stewards of the land in your care.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lucinda Winter
lucinda@sfa-mn.org

Despite the continuing challenges of COVID and the economic fallout from a historic drought, SFA ended 2021 in a strong financial position, thanks to you, our members and supporters. Membership topped 1,300 – a record.

Our fall in-person field days, café chats, workshops and networking group gatherings were well attended and many chapters began meeting in person again, to everyone’s delight. While we may find ourselves yearning for a kinder, gentler 2022 it looks like we’ll continue dealing with extreme weather conditions, higher input costs, an unpredictable supply chain and ongoing COVID-related disruptions.

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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/sfa-documents. Contributions to SFA are fully tax deductible under terms of section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code. SFA’s federal tax exemption number is EIN: 41-1671893. SFA’s mailing address is 4924 Upton Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55410.
Solid Financials Foster Our Resilience

SFA ended fiscal year July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021 (FY2021) financially strong and stable which allows us to focus on resiliency while continuing relevant and impactful programming. This financial strength could not be achieved without membership support, donors and grants. I would like to thank the foundations and government entities that have provided grants that help make SFA successful (right).

SFA, Chapters and Networking Groups (NWGs) ended the fiscal year with strong account balances, positioning them well for FY2022.

Income exceeded projections for the year. Although we budgeted for expenses to exceed income by $75,000, actual expenses exceeded income by only $36,596 because we raised $38,000 more than projected. SFA members can access our latest fiscal year financials by entering the password “sfa” at sfa-mn.org/sfa-donate. There, you can also access our annual 990 federal tax documents. There, you can also access our annual 990 federal tax documents.

SFA members can access our annual 990 federal tax documents. There, you can also access our annual 990 federal tax documents. There, you can also access our annual 990 federal tax documents.

I value the opportunity to serve as SFA board treasurer and look forward to continuing in this role. If you have questions, please contact me at ymb.baller@gmail.com.

Government & Foundation Grantees

AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Kernza CAP

Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) – Rural Organizing and Leadership Development project

Lakewinds Food Co-op — Round Up

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

Minnesota Dairy Initiative

Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture – Specialty Crop Block Grant

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Technical Assistance for Grazing

North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education – Silvopasture Professional Development Program

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): ________________________________

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My check is enclosed, payable to SFA

Charge my credit card: VISA MC

Card number: _________________________ - ___________ - ___________ - ___________
Exp. Date ______ / ______ Card code ________ Signature __________

Designate a chapter if you like; this is not required:

- Cannon River
- Central
- Crow River
- East Central
- Greater Mille Lacs
- Lake Agassiz
- Lake Superior
- Minnesota River
- Western
- Statewide

Clip and mail with check to SFA, 4924 Upton Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55410.

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.

SFA has partnered with the National Resource Conservation Service to promote the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program. This “boots-on-the-ground” work is supported by the NRCS Resource Conservation Partnership Program. There are currently 1,085 MAWQCP-certified farms, totaling 780,000 acres.

I was hired by SFA as the Agricultural Water Quality Certification Project Outreach Coordinator in August of 2021 and have spent the last couple of months reaching out to different agricultural groups about the program and educating their members on its benefits. I have also spent time educating myself and our staff about how the program works.

MAWQCP is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Certified producers are deemed to be in compliance with any new water quality rules or laws for 10 years. They also receive recognition and signs to promote that their business is in the program and is protecting our state waters.

Higher priority is given to Ag Water certified farmers for financial and technical assistance (EQUIP/NRCS) to implement practices that promote better water quality on their farms. There are also tuition grants for farmers enrolled in the Farm Business Management program. The MAWQCP has four Endorsements that farmers can receive after being Ag Water Quality Certified: Climate Smart Farm, Soil Health, Integrated Pest Management, and Wildlife.

For more information, go to tinyurl.com/agwaterquality or contact me at 320-815-9293 or angie@sfa-mn.org. Learn more about MAWQCP at both SFA-sponsored and other ag events in 2022.
Session Descriptions

The Changing Landscape of Meat Processing and Slaughter

Presenters: Harshada Karnik, Meat Processing Fellow, MN Farmers Union and U of M Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships; Carla Mertz, Iron Shoe Farm, Princeton; Paul Sobocinski, Project Manager, Solving the Local Meat Processing Bottleneck Project; Levi Muhl, MDA Dairy and Meat Inspection; Stu Lourey, Minnesota Farmers Union Government Relations Director.

Description: New and existing initiatives aim to create more slaughter and meat processing opportunities, including funding for local meat processing options, mobile meat slaughter, transitions of retiring meat processing owners to the next generation, and educational programs at Minnesota community colleges. These developments are new since SFA’s 2021 annual conference and they address many decades-long challenges.

Climate Change is Here


Description: “Climate change is here” says Climate Land Leader Wendy Johnson, who operates a conventional corn and soybean farm with her father and a regenerative food farm with her husband and child. She will talk about how her operations are part of the climate problem – and solution. Climate Land Leader Joe Luetmer and Heather Cusick of Climate Bridge Strategies will join the panel to discuss farmers’ role in reducing climate impacts and becoming more resilient in the face of volatile weather.
Integrating Livestock, Cover Crops, and Crop Land

Presenter: Jared Luhman, SFA Soil Health Lead, Dry Creek Red Angus

Description: Jared Luhman will share the many ways that his farm has integrated livestock, cover crops and cropland to increase profitability and reduce winter feed expenses for his cow herd. This will be followed by an open discussion on grazing management.

Halal Meat Production

Presenters: Wayne Martin, Moderator, U. of M. Extension Educator in Alternative Livestock Systems; Nicole Droher, MDA Compliance Office; Serdar Mamedov, Assistant Extension Professor; Tiffany Farrier, Kandi Acres.

Description: Are you interested in raising chicken, goats, sheep, dairy or cattle the Halal way to serve the expanding Muslim community in Minnesota? This panel provides information on an exciting new curriculum from the University of Minnesota created to encourage local Halal meat production. The values underlying Halal production and marketing as well as particular practices will be reviewed. A new project on Halal meat production in Kandiyohi County and the Willmar area will also be described.

Farm Resiliency for Fruit & Veggie Growers

Presenter: Dan Zimmerli, Cedar Crate Farm

Description: Resiliency is a word we hear often, including climate resiliency, infrastructure resiliency, community resiliency and so many more. But what does it mean for a market farm to be resilient? In this session, Dan will discuss the ways he has attempted to make his farm able to weather changes and unforeseen challenges. He'll touch on insurance, crop planning, farm enterprises, climate resiliency and more. And we want to hear from you: how have you built resiliency on your farm?

Growing for Seed

Presenters: Zachary Paige, North Circle Seeds; Tiffany LaShae, Soul Fire Farm; Clint Freund, Cultivating the Commons

Description: Join Zachary Paige of Minnesota seed company North Circle Seeds to learn about the economic and holistic benefit of growing and breeding seed for your micro-climate. He and the panelists will go through the steps of seed saving from choosing your seed to pollination considerations, biennial seed production, threshing, winnowing, cleaning and storing. Then we will discuss the community aspect of seed saving/production and provide economic and holistic opportunities for you, your family, your farm and local food community.

Conservation Resources for Your Farm

Presenters: Angie Walter, Minnesota Ag Water Quality Assurance Program Outreach Coordinator; Jared Luhman, SFA Soil Health Lead.

Description: Hear from other farmers who have had their farms certified in the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program or who have enrolled in NRCS programs, how this has benefitted them, and the advantages of getting your farm certified, too.

Pastured Pork & Poultry

Presenters: Valerie Luhman, Grassfed Cattle Company; Scott Haase, Blue Dirt Farm.

Description: Beef and sheep are not the only animals that you can raise on pasture; in fact, other livestock species may allow you to generate even more profit per acre. Hear how Scott Haase raises hogs and Valerie Luhman raises chickens on pasture as they discuss their unique production models. Valerie will also share results from her farm’s grant research on the difference between corn- and soy-free feed versus corn and soy-based feed for pastured chickens. Bring your questions and comments.
Session Descriptions

Farm Scale Winter Greenhouse: The Affordable Solution to Year-long Crop Production

Presenters: Dan Handeen, Research Fellow, U. of M. Center for Sustainable Building Research; Ibrahim Mohammed, Urban Agriculture Program Manager, Appetite for Change.

Description: The University of Minnesota’s Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and the College of Design’s Center for Sustainable Building Research have been working with farmers to refine low-energy solutions for winter vegetable production. The newest design responds to concerns of high cost and system profitability by incorporating a lower-cost heat retention system and a larger-scale buildout. Appetite for Change, a North Minneapolis nonprofit, has built the first Farm Scale Winter Greenhouse and will be growing winter crops for the first time this year.

Identifying and Running for Boards & Commissions

Presenters: Jason Wisniewski, SFA Southwest Minnesota Organizer; Mark Gutierrez, Minnesota Soil Health Coalition; Anneliese Walker, Walker Farms; Sai Thao, Compeer Financial; Kathy Draeger, RSDP Director.

Description: It seems that everywhere you look there are openings on various boards and commissions in every community across the country. We could see these as opportunities to shape our community for the better with an emphasis on sustainable agriculture. In this session, panelists will present on what the major benefits – and they are major – are for serving on boards and commissions in your local communities. We will also have panelists who have served on various boards and commissions talk about their experiences. Finally, we will identify some areas where you can look in your local community to serve.

Garlic Production and Marketing: Scaling Up


Description: As demand for local premium garlic continues to increase in the Upper Midwest, many growers are looking for best practices in both business management and garlic production as they scale up their operations. Ryan Pesch conducted the research and wrote the U. of M. Extension paper on Garlic Enterprise Analysis in 2017-18. In this session, he returns with advice on increasing your operation’s capacity. Viktor Vasileiadis has become probably the largest grower of market garlic in Minnesota, with over seven acres planted in the fall of 2021. He uses machinery to crack bulbs into cloves, plant and harvest.

Winter Feeding Opportunities, Bale Grazing and Grazing Stockpiled Forage

Presenters: Ivan Reinke, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician, Cloverleaf Grass Farm, Wadena; Jeff Duchene, NRCS Grazing Specialist, Perham.

Description: Bale grazing is a form of wintering cattle on pasture, also called outwintering. The benefits of bale grazing/planned winter feeding on pasture include improved distribution of manure and associated nutrients, reduced machinery costs for feeding and manure handling, improved long-term pasture productivity and improved soil health. These practices can also reduce feedlot issues. Stockpiled Forage is planned forage to extend the grazing season later into the fall/winter. We will discuss planning, outcomes and infrastructure needed to implement these practices on your farm.

Chapter Partnerships with Programs, Projects and Other Organizations

Presenters: Gwen Anderson and Maddy Bartsch, Cannon River Chapter; Allison Rian, Greater Mille Lacs Chapter; Julie Allen, Lake Superior Chapter; David Abazs, Northeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships

Description: Through connection, cooperation and communication, the Cannon River Chapter has cultivated rich community collaborations over the last four years, beginning with a crucial connection to a community partner in 2018. Speakers will take you from that first collaboration to the chapter’s current projects, goals and partnerships. Also, the Forest Assisted Migration Project provided income opportunities for SFA farmers through innovative, climate-change-related work. Hear about the 15 SFA farmers from the Greater Mille Lacs and Lake Superior Chapters who worked with Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships on the project.

Drying Down: Gleaning Wisdom after Debilitating Drought

Presenters: Kate Droske, Early Boots Farm; Chrystal Odin, Philadelphia Community Farm; Liz Dwyer, Dancing the Land Farm; Mike Seifert, Ravenview Farm. Moderated by Kyle McClure.

Description: The drought of 2021 brought hardship across the agricultural sector and raised significant questions about short-term adaptation and long-term resilience for farms in a changing climate. In this session, a panel of farmers will reflect on the challenges of the past growing season and share where they found success, where they experienced loss, and what lessons and strategies they are carrying forward. The discussion will be moderated by Kyle McClure, an organizer of SFA’s Climate Bites.

Elderberry & Hazelnut Development, Production & Marketing

Presenters: Lois Braun, Researcher, Wyse Lab, UMN Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics; Mike Lilja, Board President, American Hazelnut Company; Christopher Patton, President, Midwest Elderberry Cooperative. Moderated by Connie Carlson, UMN Forever Green Initiative.

Description: Hybrid hazelnuts and elderberries are long-lived, hardy Midwest perennials that present exciting opportunities for sustainable production and soil health, though real challenges in scaling, harvesting and markets exist. Any current or interested grower is encouraged to attend to learn about the latest research on breeding, agronomics, economics and market development for hybrid hazelnuts and elderberries. Presentations, Q&A and networking will all be part of this session.
NINTH ANNUAL SFA MIDWEST SOIL HEALTH SUMMIT
March 8-9, 2022 • Oliver Kelley Farm, Elk River • Register at sfa-mn.org

Featuring Rick Clark, a fifth-generation farmer from Indiana who is using soil health practices on his 7,000 acres to regenerate soils, reduce pesticides, and produce profitable crops. Each day’s programming runs 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Registration: Current SFA members $75/one day, $125 both
Nonmembers: $100/one day, $175 both

Each day’s theme:

March 8 - Soil Health for Fruit and Vegetable Growers
- Nutrient Management
- Food Safety while Incorporating Livestock
- Perennial Fruit & Nuts
- Practices for Fruit & Vegetables
- No-till for Vegetables and more!

March 9 - Soil Health for Crop and Livestock Farmers
- Seasonal Grazing Enterprises
- Wide-Row Corn
- Silvopasture
- Dairy Grazing
- Kernza®
- The latest research, and more!

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

Register online or by using the form below and mailing with payment to: SFA, 4924 Upton Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55410.

Oliver Kelley Farm is located at 15788 Kelly Farm Rd NW, Elk River, MN 55330

For multiple registrations from the same household, add choices and insert total => TOTAL ENCLOSED: $ _________

Name(s): __________________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________ City: ______________ State: ____ Zip: ________
Email(s): __________________________________________________________

☐ Check enclosed, payable to SFA      Or, charge my: ☐ VISA ☐ MC
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Clip and mail with check or credit card info to: SFA, 4924 Upton Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55410
LUNCH INCLUDED WITH REGISTRATION • REGISTRATION NONREFUNDABLE • QUESTIONS? EMAIL JASON@SFA.MN.ORG
SFA PHOTOGRAPHS SCENES AT THIS CONFERENCE FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES; YOUR REGISTRATION ACKNOWLEDGES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED.
A Sharper Focus on Adaptive Grazing

Over the past calendar year, we’ve been continuing our work in leading a collaborative effort to advance the art and science of silvopasture on Minnesota working lands to improve outcomes for soil, water, habitat, carbon drawdown, and climate resiliency.

Our grant funding supports this work via workshops, webinars, field days, volunteer events, the formation of a Silvopasture Learning Network and farm consultations that provide training and networking opportunities for farmers, landowners and managers, and natural resource professionals. In addition, we have a robust research experiment on the opportunities to leverage adaptive grazing management and silvopasture to improve outcomes for oak savanna restoration at the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge.

In 2021, a SARE Professional Development Program grant has funded three workshops and field days across the state and webinars on the economics of silvopasture and adaptive grazing and silvopasture.

Also in 2021, a grant from the Legislative Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources has funded the ongoing refuge research (preliminary data should be available in 2022). It has also funded three cafe chats, a field day and workshop at Minneopa State Park, two field days at the refuge, two volunteer events restoring oak savanna on farms led by Great River Greening, two webinars, the release of the Silvopasture Case Studies, and an upcoming panel presentation at the MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts conference.

The Silvopasture Learning Network now has over 530 contacts engaged around silvopasture and oak savanna restoration.

This fall, we also initiated work on a new grant from NCR-SARE on the economics of silvopasture. This grant will cover research and development of a silvopasture decision-making tool for landowners, an initial version of which will be presented in March 2022 at the SFA Midwest Soil Health Summit.

This grant will also cover other outreach activities in 2022 and 2023.

In concert with the start of this grant, we formed a Silvopasture Advisory Committee to help provide direction on the development of the tool and to direct future work around silvopasture for SFA and the partnerships we are forming across Minnesota and the Upper Midwest.

Reopening Coteau Ridge With Focus on Soil Health

In October, I was contracted by SFA as a community organizer focused on Southwestern Minnesota. A priority for me was to reopen the Coteau Ridge Chapter. We formed a chapter organizing committee, and our charter is set to be officially recognized by the state SFA board in February. Once reopened, the Coteau Ridge Chapter will continue SFA’s long-standing tradition of creating spaces for farmer-to-farmer support and improving rural communities.

Previously, I had been working in ag tech and commercial real estate. I had just returned to my family’s farm after 15 years away to help regenerate our farmland.

We want to achieve a lot with the Coteau Ridge Chapter. One of my primary objectives is to increase profitability for our member-producers by honoring the Five Principles of Soil Health. I think most producers believe breaking-even or earning less than $100 per acre is the best we can do with our land. But the truth is, farmers utilizing no-till, cover crops, diverse rotations, and integrating livestock realize profits upwards of $500 to $1,000 per acre or more. To do this, these innovative producers find opportunities to sell products locally and to specialized markets.

By educating growers and consumers, we will create tremendous economic opportunities for beginning and emerging farmers of all backgrounds. We encourage everyone who eats and prioritizes their community’s physical and economic health to join us.

To support these goals, the chapter will begin hosting regular teleconferences, webinars, farm visits, cafe chats, and house/shop parties. We exhibit at community events and perform one-to-one meetings with current and prospective members. I plan to initiate a project to create an online marketplace for local products. Meanwhile, we are working to get our members involved with local and state boards.

Make sure your SFA membership is current then visit sfa-mn.org/coteau-ridge.

SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING
Jason Wisniewski
jwisniewski@sfa-mn.org

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
Dan Zimmerli
dan@sfa-mn.org

Cyber Launch, Real Network in Minnesota River Chapter

I am happy to introduce in this year’s Cornerpost that my organizing efforts have resulted in the SFA Minnesota River Chapter. The chapter, formed over Zoom amid the global pandemic, is focused on promoting and uplifting local foods in the New Ulm/Mankato region. At the heart of our chapter is the Minnesota River, so we want to uplift and underscore efforts to improve its water quality.

The Minnesota River Chapter also hosted the first annual Local Foods & Farmers Expo, an event that seeks to raise awareness of all of the wonderful local farm products available and to connect customers with our farmers. The Expo was held virtually in March and drew 12 farmers and over 30 attendees. Of note, this event was well covered by the media with the story being picked up by MPR News, the New Ulm Journal, the Mankato FreePress, and local radio stations. The next Local Foods & Farmers Expo is being planned now and will be held in early 2022.

Our chapter has also been hosting a series of “Farm Gatherings” that has allowed for our members to meet each other in person. We’ve had several gatherings that have allowed our members to see each other’s farming operations and to foster networking and social ties. We’re looking forward to the future.

The Minnesota River Chapter is currently seeking qualified candidates to serve on our board of directors. We are also looking for a social media coordinator. Interested? Email Dan Zimmerli at mnriver@sfa-mn.org.
Find the Right Context for Your Dairy

Sustainable Farming Association has been a significant part of Minnesota Dairy Initiative for over 20 years as consultants contributing “boots-on-the-ground” support to dairy farms across the state.

Our unique role is to provide information, education, and coaching to dairy farmers and managers based on each farm’s individual context. By taking a team approach, MDI coordinators facilitate constructive conversations that address concerns, achieve goals, and assist in supporting dairy farmers as they face challenges.

As dairy farmers themselves, SFA’s staff members who work with MDI have an understanding of natural systems and a knowledge base that yield an uncommon perspective. Staff are passionate about dairy and become a relatable partner to address a wide variety of topics specific to dairy production. Last year, SFA provided support to 18 dairies on-farm and educational information to nearly 200 farm families.

MDI is funded by the Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture. The legislation that authorizes MDI expressly notes that sustainable farming support is one of MDI’s goals and that SFA is the entity that offers this service to MDI.

Our Principles Create Farm Resiliency

Farmers who focused on building sustainable, resilient farm businesses fared better given 2021’s challenges.

Our farm has been practicing regenerative grazing management for decades. In early 2021, during what is usually a spring flush, grass grew at rates we typically see in the slower late-summer months. However, it still grew, as many neighboring pastures did not. Using the same management practices we teach at SFA’s farm field days, pasture walks, and one-on-one consultations, we slowed our rotation, allowing grass to get more mature and put down deeper roots.

With Covid increasing the demand for local meat along with shortages of processing and possibly the worst drought in decades, 2021 was a challenging year. As I traveled for work around Minnesota, though, the thing that stood out to me was that farmers who focused on building sustainable and resilient farms and businesses fared better. Notice I didn’t say they were immune, and this is not to say that 100 percent of the time their situation improved but, overall, they were more resilient to many of these challenges.

Our farm has been practicing regenerative grazing management for decades. In early 2021, during what is usually a spring flush, grass grew at rates we typically see in the slower late-summer months. However, it still grew, as many neighboring pastures did not. Using the same management practices we teach at SFA’s farm field days, pasture walks, and one-on-one consultations, we slowed our rotation, allowing grass to get more mature and put down deeper roots.

We also timed rotations to leave more residue on the soil. When the rains did come, our pastures were ready to take advantage of every drop. They responded immediately, growing as fast as an average spring flush. Now we have thick, dense stands of pasture mixes which gives us plenty of feed for fall and winter.

I have seen similar results on farms across the state. Two farmers who had learned about bale grazing through an SFA field day or farm consult saw fantastic results, realizing that some of the only green and growing grass on their farm this summer was where the bale grazing had been.

Another farm wanted to implement the soil health principle of increasing diversity by adding a small grain into their cropping rotation underseeded with clover. This clover was additional feed in the fall of a year when extra feed was an extremely valuable commodity. These exemplify how SFA builds farm resilience despite severe weather challenges.

SFA has also worked to develop alternatives to the status quo commodity food system. We’ve helped farmers build direct-marketing enterprises, adding value to products they are already producing. Members of our staff sit on a committee working to increase rural Minnesota’s processing capacity and to generate opportunities for new people to come into this space. By generating new and diverse marketing streams for our members we are helping them build a more resilient business model that’s less susceptible to disruptions caused by changes in the commodity market.

The work SFA does to change the agricultural industry is essential! We provide education, networking, and one-on-one consulting opportunities, working with farms of all shapes and sizes and any level of experience, with the goal of building regenerative and resilient farms and businesses across the state.
Lots to Watch & Listen This Winter

The SFA team rolled out an impressive number of video, podcast, and written resources this year.

Thanks to the necessity of virtual events, our YouTube channel grew by 23 videos over the course of 2021. While there’s nothing quite like being together in person, each of these presentations from our winter conferences, Twin Cities Metro Growers Network presentations and more are now accessible regardless of geography or time. And people are watching, too. We’ve more than doubled our number of subscribers and video views, and these thousands of viewers have watched 5,400 hours of our resources in 2021 (up from 770 hours in 2020). Wowza.

Furthermore, in response to urgent needs for financial support during the pandemic, we joined several other Minnesota groups to walk farmers through a stream of grants and new COVID relief programs. We recorded webinars for CFAP, PPP, the Farmer-Rancher Grant and others, some of which were also translated to Spanish and Hmong, and worked to spread the word about these funding and relief opportunities. Some of our staff also provided individual support for farmers who needed assistance in the application process.

Those of us who learn better off-screen have new resources at our fingertips as well. Jared Luhman completed our first set of Silvopasture Case Studies, featuring five Minnesota farms utilizing silvopasture in a variety of contexts with a range of livestock. Sarah Lindblom also added a Quick Cover Crop Guide, Soil Health Testing Kit and Report Card to our resource library. The Kit and Report Card complement our new Soil Health Testing demonstration video, which can be used to help anyone get a baseline and track progress on their soil health. We also updated our Soil Health for Fruit and Vegetable Growers resource, courtesy of a Lakewinds’ Community Giving Round-Up. Find all of these on our website and at our events.

Lastly, Dirt Rich, SFA’s podcast spotlighting seasonal conversations on food and farming, produced its second season. Jared Luhman and I recorded nearly two dozen episodes, chatting with farmers, researchers, ag professionals and others about their farm stories and work. It’s been a blast getting to learn more about seed saving, oak savanna restoration, Kernza, grazing and more, and to make connections with so many wonderful guests. Listen to Dirt Rich wherever you get your podcasts, or on the SFA website. We look forward to 2022 and to Season 3!

Sharing Knowledge Builds DGA’s Foundation

About three years ago, SFA partnered with the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship program, expanding our capacity to teach farmers how raising livestock has myriad benefits for soil health and farm profitability. Through this program, SFA has created a network of dairy farmers and provides them with education and support.

I have served as SFA/DGA Central Minnesota Education Coordinator for the past two years and currently work with three apprentices who are going through the apprenticeship, two journey workers who have graduated from the program and 17 Master Graziers.

Some highlights of the DGA program in 2021 include:

- Attending virtual conferences to either present or learn information that I could share with my network of farmers
- Hosting a Master roundtable event in February where we talked about cover crops to use on pastures and carbon credits
- An educational field day at Redhead Creamery in Brooten for my apprentice group

- Four on-farm pasture walks from May-September that were sponsored by the Minnesota Dairy Initiative
- Soil Health Academy hosted by one of our DGA Master Graziers
- An in-person DGA retreat in Vermont for all DGA education coordinators around the country (DGA is currently in 15 states).

For more information about Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship or if you are interested in joining as a master grazier or apprentice, please contact me at 320-815-9293 or angie@sfa-mn.org.
Garlic Project Continues to Educate New Farmers & Boost Markets

We’re four years into this project, and 2021 has been a busy one. With our partner, the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, the Minnesota Premium Garlic Project enhances profitability for existing and new farmers by improving premium garlic production with best practices, expanding markets and supply chains, and conducting research on improved cultivation methods.

In our outreach to new farmers, we have a mentoring program that works with fifteen growers. This summer, we held field days at two of their farms near Alexandria (above) and Milaca.

Once again, we released the Premium Garlic Directory for the Upper Midwest. Starting in July, the directory has listed 37 growers, and reports suggest that it increased sales for most of them. We also added listings for wholesale buyers of garlic so that growers could contact them directly.

We are working on opening up more opportunities for wholesale and bulk sales for growers. Our network has helped companies that aggregate garlic from other growers to find suppliers. We are talking with a food processing/preparation company about developing a signature Minnesota garlic product, and we’re facilitating connections with other wholesale buyers.

Coming up in February, we will present a session on Annual Conference, “Garlic Marketing: Scaling Up”, that will feature the largest market garlic grower in the state, along with solid advice on the economics of scaling up a garlic enterprise.

Our field trials will have their final iteration next summer, and we’ll release four years’ worth of findings on such practices as spring fertilization, timing of planting, mulching and scape removal.

We are looking forward to the return of the Minnesota Garlic Festival on Aug. 13, 2022, in Hutchinson, after a two-year hiatus.

An additional thank you to our 2021 Conference sponsors who came on board after the 2020 Cornerpost was published: