



SPRING 2009 NEWSLETTER



News From The Orchard

The orchard is a great place to spend some time in the spring. We like to do most of our annual pruning in the spring for a couple of reasons. We have time in early April and you avoid some insect and disease problems. The snow should be gone but it should still be cool enough for a sweater. We learned to prune our trees at fruit growing workshops put on by Frank Foltz. The reason for pruning is to develop a strong, healthy tree that can support and ripen high quality fruit with a minimum of insect and disease problems. Trees should have a central leader with 5 to 8 scaffold branches that are spaced well apart from each other and pointing in different directions. The first scaffold branch should be 30 to 36 inches off the ground. As you move up the tree the scaffold branches should be 8 to 16 inches above each other and pointing in different directions. This kind of pruning is called structural pruning. Some simple guidelines for structural pruning are;

- Remove all dead or dying wood.
- Do not remove more than 25% of the living wood in one year.
- Remove root suckers and watersprouts.
- Remove narrow angled crotches.

-Remove branches sprouting from the bottom or top of the scaffold branches.

-Keep the center of the tree open so air can move through and sunshine can penetrate.

Other helpful tips include, buy quality pruning tools and keep them sharp, make your cuts flush with the branch collar and don't forget to thin your fruit when your tree overbears. This is done when the fruit is about the size of a marble and will give you higher quality fruit. Summer pruning is an option and can be combined with fruit thinning. Care must be taken to avoid spreading disease. Sterilizing tools between trees is a good idea.

Frank Foltz has been a wonderful resource for the 100 orchard grafting workshops and has helped us accomplish one of the first goals. We are getting close to planting our first 100 orchards. We may have to change our name to the 1000 orchard project. I am a landscape planner and a tree lover and like the idea of 100's of orchards dotted across the landscape in central Minnesota and a network of knowledgeable landowners sharing their expertise on growing and marketing their fruit in a sustainable way. We continue to encourage the use of scion wood gathered locally from trees that have good characteristics. These trees have been tested. Grafting trees to get our orchards established gives us this opportunity. Thanks to Happy Dancing Turtle and Camphill Village for providing space to put on our grafting workshops over the past couple of years, and thanks to the forester that donated \$1000 to SFA to get this project going. Look at what we have done!

Look for future workshops that cater to the advanced orchardist along with marketing and utilization ideas.

Submitted by Greg Nolan



SPRING 2009 NEWSLETTER

Coloring Book Available to Local Schools

“Annalid and her Friends” is available again this year to bring to your local school. Please contact Sue Peterson for your copies of this great educational tool!

Annual Meeting Report

The SFACM Annual meeting was held on January 10, 2009 in Browerville. Approximately 35 people attended. They enjoyed an uplifting report by Tina Wheeler, Little Falls School District Food Director, about the reception of the Farm to Schools program there. The kids are really learning a lot about how food is grown, and enjoy helping in its preparation.

After her presentation, the annual business meeting was held and board members elected. Unanimous ballots were cast to re-elect Chris Barnier and Kevin Happke, and to elect Mike Stine.

Sue Peterson, chapter coordinator, gave a brief overview of the previous year's accomplishments including: four Orchard workshops, a fall harvest festival at The Farm on St Mathias, several farm tours, and hosting GrazeFest by Solbergs and Middendorfs.

Back to Basics Workshop

Kent Solberg, Jim Chamberlin, and Sue Peterson presented four seminars at Back to Basics in Pine River on January 31. It was held at the Pine River-Backus High School in Pine River and was hosted by Happy Dancing Turtle. Sue conducted seminars on starting your own orchard and self-sufficiency gardening. Jim presented information on small woodlot management. Kent covered local foods – a farmer's perspective. All of the seminars were

well received. The central chapter also had a display in the exhibitor area promoting SFA.

100 Orchards Project Grafting Workshops

The first grafting workshop of the year was held in Pine River, at the Hunt Utilities Group campus. Frank Foltz taught 18 participants the principles of grafting in the morning. A local sustainable lunch was served, and then the participants got to bench graft their own apple, pear, and plum trees unto hardy rootstock in the afternoon. Evaluations from the workshop averaged 4.5+ (with 5 being the best). Plans are being made to have a pruning workshop in Pine River this summer.

The next grafting workshop is Saturday March 28 from 1-4PM at Camphill Village in Sauk Centre. It will be taught by Judy Heiling. Please contact Sue Peterson for more information or to register

18th Annual Conference - SFA of MN - February 21, 2009

More than 450 attendees skidded their way to St. Olaf College in Northfield, for this very successful conference. Chris Barnier, Bob and Arlene Jones, Larry and Ann Skoglund, and probably others from the Central Chapter attended. My apologies to those I did not see. The attendance was nearly twice that of previous years and the keynote speaker, Joel Salatin was certainly a major draw.

Farmers, educators and food lovers of all ages were well represented. Young adults of college age were especially visible. Local foods and



SPRING 2009 NEWSLETTER

sustainable programs are part of the St. Olaf atmosphere and the food choices were amazing. The twelve breakout sessions, ranging from soils, to production, to marketing received glowing reports.

Joel Salatin was obviously inspired. Joel likes to call himself a Christian-libertarian-environmentalist-lunatic farmer. His topic for the keynote "Everything I Want to Do is Illegal" is the title of his book of war stories of farmers dealing with the laws written for, and by, industrial agriculture. When the arbitrary enforcement of these laws prevents small sustainable farmers and entrepreneurs like us from innovating, sustainable farming is threatened.

Joel's message was very clear. We must passionately defend our traditional, pre-industrial, small farm heritage. When our heritage-base food practices are demonized and criminalized we must be prepared to react. Appropriately scaled local food systems will continue to flourish if they are free from a daily barrage of bureaucratic hurdles.

Mike Stine, Central Chapter

The Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference and Trade Show

The Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference and Trade Show, put on by the Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, was held January 21-23, 2009 in St Cloud at the Civic Center. On Wednesday, January 21, they held one beginning growers workshop on vegetable

production and another on starting an apple orchards.

The conference included a trade show and many sessions including: High Tunnel Raspberries, Advanced Production of Asparagus, Pumpkin Production, Garlic Production, Minor Root Crops and their Health Benefits and also Critter Control and Deer Fences. The Central MN SFA shared an exhibit booth with the Crow River Chapter of SFA, and there promoted the 100 Orchards Project and grafting workshops.

Kevin Happke, Central Chapter

Food Safety Bill currently in Congress

The U.S. Congress is in the process of rushing through legislation that would form a food safety agency of the US government, with sweeping powers to enter, inspect, confiscate, and punish farms of any size that produce food. This legislation requires coding, packaging, labeling, and tracking that is burdensome in the extreme, and that gives an unfair advantage to corporate farms. This is a thinly-veiled attempt to pander to companies like Monsanto and Cargill that would like to see the end of family farms, organic and eco-farming, and the existence of local food systems.

The Senate and House Bills are very similar. Go to the following website to read the bill: www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s111-425-28k

The last reading was about a week ago, and the Senate Bill was referred to the Food and Ag Committee, on which our own Senator Amy Klobuchar sits. The bill is expected to be passed within the next two weeks.

Mike Stine, Central Chapter