

# Food Alliance Midwest Conducts Successful Industry Event at Annual Meeting 2008

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**Saint Paul, MN**— On February 6, 2008, Food Alliance Midwest held its Annual Meeting, where Food Alliance Midwest Certified growers, ranchers, processors, and distributors as well as staff, university faculty, retailers, food service institutions, government and nonprofit allies, and other stakeholders of sustainable and value-added agriculture, came together to discuss the Midwest program and what various local organizations are doing to further the consumption of local and sustainable foods in our region. A well-rounded agenda with a “values-added” agriculture theme stimulated over 100 attendees and meaningful discussions from various industries leaders’ perspectives took place around value chains in the sustainable foods industry.

David Ward, Executive Director of the Association of Family Farms, was the keynote speaker. Ward pointed out to the audience, “The time is right to introduce ‘values’ into the conventional food supply chain. Consumers are looking to grocery stores, restaurants and even college campuses to lead the way in providing food that represents their values.” AFF hopes to develop communication strategies to inform consumers about where these “values based value chains” are occurring.

Other presenters included Jim Ennis, Director of Food Alliance Midwest, Bob Olson, Business Development Manager of Food Alliance Midwest, JoAnne Berkenkamp of Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Kevin Edberg of Cooperative Development Services, Lindy Bannister of The Wedge Cooperative, Warren King of Wellspring Management, Bertrand Weber of Taher Foodservice, and Brian Erickson of Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

Each year, Food Alliance Midwest grants a ‘Keeper of the Vision for a Sustainable Future’ Award to a certified grower and a market partner for their leadership in helping to develop both the supply and the demand for sustainably-grown foods. This year’s grower award went to Gary and Annette Gilbertson of Scandia, MN, who have been Food Alliance Midwest Certified since 2001 and were recognized for their commitment to growing a wide array of vegetables in a manner that protects the environment and is good for the community.

Amidst the continuous spreading of the Twin Cities suburbs, Gilbertson Farms plays an important role in preserving rural Minnesotan life. “We’re here because we love the land,” explains Annette. Annette and Gary are constantly learning new techniques for their farm, and currently employ crop rotation, minimum tillage, drip irrigation, and green manure as sustainable ways to increase economic viability and improve their yield. Their variety of efforts has resulted in loyal customers. As Annette says, “People are coming to us at the markets, looking for us. People have come to know who we are.”

For the Gilbertsons, Food Alliance Midwest represents a part of this process. “You’ll know it’s quality food,” says Gary. Annette agrees, “I want to be able to put that seal on my food and let people know what it stands for.”

"Gary and Annette embody sustainability and have been leaders for many years. They do a superb job promoting and educating both growers and consumers about sustainable agriculture practices. Over the past four years, the Gilbertsons have traveled to colleges and corporate campuses throughout Minnesota in the late summer serving roasted sweet corn in the cafeterias while talking to students and employees about their family farm."

Chef Ray Thering, 'Keeper of the Vision for a Sustainable Future' Market Partner award recipient, is currently the District Executive Chef for ARAMARK, located at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. At this complex and multifaceted account, Ray manages the culinary functions of Catering, Retail Operations, and Residential Dining facilities.

Ray hails from Buffalo, NY where he was raised on a farm and where his passion for animal welfare and "the farming scene" began. He went on to graduate from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY in 1973. At all of the exciting venues that Ray has been a part of, including Purdue University, Boston University, 3M World Headquarters, and the 1980 Olympic Games in Lake Placid, NY, where he was Executive Chef, Ray has championed his local and sustainable foods mission. Throughout his career he has been very supportive of this ever-burgeoning movement, stating that it is "much easier now" with consumers' recent awareness of where their foods comes from and how it's grown.

"Ray has been a pioneer and leader in bringing local and sustainably-grown foods into the University of Minnesota's Campus and was recognized for his leadership and commitment to support local growers. He is making an immense impact", says Jim Ennis, Director of Food Alliance Midwest.

New this year were two Partnership Achievement Awards, granted to organizations who have, along with Food Alliance Midwest, partnered in furthering consumer awareness and education around local and sustainably-grown foods. Doug Peterson of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) and Jan Joannides and Brett Olson of Renewing the Countryside (RTC) received these awards for their creativity and commitment to the Minnesota Cooks program.

Minnesota Cooks is in its sixth year and is a collaborative program of these three organizations, who, through two events a year, work to strengthen rural communities by reconnecting consumers with the wonderful Minnesota farmers and chefs who provide delicious, healthy, sustainably-grown foods.

Food Alliance farms and ranches are certified for using environmentally friendly and socially responsible agricultural practices. Food Alliance is one of the nation's fastest growing sustainable food certification programs and during the past eight years, Food Alliance Midwest has certified more than 100 producers across Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. Approximately 55 retail stores, 18 college campuses, 41 corporate campuses, and 3 health care institutions in the Upper Midwest offer Food Alliance certified products. Food Alliance Midwest, based in Saint Paul, MN, was established in 2000 by the Land Stewardship Project and Cooperative Development Services.

For more on Food Alliance Midwest, call 651-265-3682, or visit [www.foodalliance.org](http://www.foodalliance.org).