

Local Area Tours Descriptions

Saturday, 1:30 – 6 pm

1. Farming on the Edge of the City

Hmong-American farmers occupy a unique place in the history of Minnesota's local foods movement. Since Hmong refugees began resettling from Laos and Thailand to Minnesota in the 1970s as political refugees after the Vietnam War, many families have relied on their ag heritage to make a living growing produce and flowers for local farmers markets.

Today, they lead the Twin Cities local food economy, making up more than 50% of all the farmers in metro farmers' markets, generating more than \$250 million in annual sales. We'll visit their growing operation and see how they do it.

Sever's Corn Maze provides entertainment for all ages, especially youngsters who know little about agriculture. Run by Sever Peterson and his family, the corn maze, corn pit and a variety of other ag fun events happen every fall during harvest. We'll see how the family has evolved from their vegetable-growing operation that marketed via roadside stands throughout Minnesota to a family fun entertainment center. Besides still growing corn and soybeans on the edge of the city, Sever will discuss transitioning the farm to the next generation and he might even talk about his Brazil farm.

Dinner at Gale Woods Farm where we'll join our other IFAJ tours for dinner and fun at a real working farm. Located on picturesque Whaletail Lake in Minnetrista, Gale Woods Farm features a unique educational opportunity where visitors of all ages gain an understanding of agriculture, food production and land stewardship.

2. Fish and Crops Coexist – and Thrive

Urban Organics takes a high-tech approach to indoor farming. Based in an old brewery, Dave & Chris Haider use a water recirculation system to raise fresh fish, mostly salmon and arctic char, and leafy green vegetables. Using special hydroponics for "greens" and aquaponics for fish, they provide 270,000 lbs. of fresh fish per year and 475,000 lbs. of organically growth produce to local grocery stores, restaurants and hospitals. They use the nitrate-rich water from the fish to help feed the vegetable aquaponics. All in all, it has a low environmental impact using 5% less water than traditional ag methods.

Restorative Farming is how David Legvold describes his minimum tillage operation. Conventional and organic don't have a place on his farm. Instead, he treats land ethically and gently using no-till and strip-till practices. Through these methods, he's increased soil organic matter from 1.7% up to 5.5%. Increased organic matter and improved field health allow him to rely on nutrient cycling and to use up to 30% less fertilizer. A retired teacher, his farm is a popular stop for field days and we'll hear about his commitment to conservation practices.

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3. Brewskis Anyone?

Small breweries and tap rooms are sweeping through cities across the U.S. Craft brewing has almost turned into a cult in the Twin Cities. You'll visit several of the most successful breweries, large and small, and hear how they got started and even get to do some tasting. But don't worry, it's not just a booze cruise. You'll also visit Rahr Malting elevator, the largest single-site malt production facility in the world. Plus, you'll hear from a farmer who grows hops to feed the expanding local beer business.

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4. See the City Sites

Minneapolis and St. Paul, situated on the banks of the Mississippi River, are home to a vibrant metro area of nearly 3 million people. You'll see the milling area, which started the Twin Cities, plus many scenic historic sites. Plan on seeing and hearing about all the ag businesses, sporting arenas and colleges that help make this a desirable area for Fortune 500 companies. When you leave the Congress, you'll actually know something about the city because you've spent time exploring it.

6:30 – 9:30 pm Dinner at Gale Woods Farm where we'll join our other IFAJ tours for dinner and fun at a real working farm. Located on picturesque Whaletail Lake in Minnetrista, Gale Woods Farm features a unique educational opportunity where visitors of all ages gain an understanding of agriculture, food production and land stewardship.

Sunday 1:15 – 5 pm Arboretum Extravaganza

Our entire IFAJ group will spend the afternoon at the University of Minnesota Arboretum, which features more than 1,215 acres of magnificent gardens, model landscapes, and natural areas – from woodlands and wetlands to prairie. It's a jewel of the university and a practical, hands-on research area. Expect to see and hear about apple production, especially varieties that were developed here, like Honeycrisp. Plus, experts will show and discuss the grape growing area and how it's the backbone of the Midwest wine industry. You'll even see the new bee research unit. To wind up the afternoon? Of course, wine and cheese tasting.

Monday, 7:30 am – 5 pm IFAJ Livestock Tour- Learn About Family Livestock Operations *(maximum of 50 people)*

Shafer Farms, a seven-generation family farm specializing in beef and pork production, is nestled in the creeks, bluffs and valleys of southeastern Minnesota. The farm, established in 1886, will give you a good view of a large, but still typical, family run operation.

Clear View Dairy is a family dairy that dates back more than 100 years. Today, it maintains a 1,100-cow herd with strong environmental and social goals. Owner Jon Huseth will talk about his operation and the dairy's involvement in Ag Pathways, which brings Hispanic men and women to the U.S. to work using transnational visas. www.cviewdairy.com & www.agpathways.com

King's Café at Miesville will host lunch. Yep, it's one of those small-town burger joints with a big menu that offers over 100 different burgers. We might even catch a little baseball practice from the local Miesville Mudhens.

Fleet Farm stores, originally designed to service rural communities and farmers, have expanded into major cities. We'll stop at one of their stores so you can see the wide variety of foods, clothing, farm supplies, horse tack, sporting goods and on and on. It's huge and you could almost get lost in the endless aisles.

Tuesday, 7:30 am – 5 pm IFAJ Area Tours (box breakfasts available at 7 am)

1. Dairy, Dairy and More Dairy

Meadow Star Dairy, only two years old, houses 10,000 cows and has 150 calves born per day. It uses a rotary parlor system from DeLaval where a new cow steps in every 4-5 seconds. As part of Riverview LLC, a diversified agribusiness that started as a family run operation in 1939, it keeps growing. This dairy is one of several owned by the company. It's uber-progressive and even provides housing for its employees.

Redhead Creamery made its first batch of cheese in 2013 and by the end of 2014 it had built and opened up its own cheese making facility right on the family farm, Jer-Lindy Farms. But the ridiculously good cheese you'll taste is the culmination of years of study, trips to artisan cheese plants, funding campaigns, testing, waiting, sampling and starting over. Alise Sjoström runs the operation and we'll find out how she's turned it into such a successful business. Plus, it's our lunch stop.

World's Largest Ball of Twine. Quick photo op stop because who wouldn't want their photo taken next to this monster string ball at Darwin, MN.

2. Family Farms Make Precision Decisions

Sullivan Farms epitomizes a large family crop operation – including father and three sons – that's dedicated to using the latest in precision ag technology. Each son has dedicated duties to keep a division of labor in place. Their bread-and-butter crops are corn and soybeans, but they also grow canning crops such as sweet corn and peas. They're also committed to saving their soil and practice a wide variety of conservation practices.

Stoney Creek Farms has been recognized in the cattle industry for their environmental stewardship efforts. Grant and Dawn Breikreutz run 150 Red Angus cows and custom feed 750 head of cattle a year. They practice no-till cropping and use a variety of cover crops, plus they use intensive grazing with their cows. You'll see what changes they've made to improve soil health and water infiltration. Sustainability is their mantra.

3. University Research Pays Off – Group A (north to south)

U of M St. Paul Campus is the first stop where you'll start with a visit to the Raptor Center, which rehabilitates around 1,000 sick and injured raptors each year. The Raptor Center trains veterinary students and veterinarians from around the world to become future leaders in raptor medicine and conservation. You'll see eagles and hawks up close and personal. Then it's off to the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab with an inside look at how it can safely handle highly infectious and foreign animal diseases. For those with strong stomachs, watch as students perform a necropsy demonstration conducted in a special teaching lab. Next, updates from crop plot research and the long-standing weather station.

Bell Museum, a new natural history museum that features a digital planetarium, wildlife dioramas and high-tech exhibits. We'll hear from bee research experts while enjoying lunch overlooking the farm research plots. This is a shiny new public facility for the University system and it gets rave reviews.

Syngenta Seedcare Institute will showcase premier R&D at its seed treatment facility at Stanton, MN. With three locations in North America, it tests active ingredients to ensure they stay on the seed, reducing dust-off and improving plantability. It tests seed treatments in various field planter equipment (including mechanical and pneumatic systems) across all environmental conditions to ensure optimal performance and ease of use.

3. University Research Pays Off – Group B (south to north)

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U of M St. Paul Campus is the last stop where you'll start with a visit to the Raptor Center, which rehabilitates around 1,000 sick and injured raptors each year. The Raptor Center trains veterinary students and veterinarians from around the world to become future leaders in raptor medicine and conservation. You'll see eagles and hawks up close and personal. Then it's off to the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab with an inside look at how it can safely handle highly infectious and foreign animal diseases. For those with strong stomachs, watch as students perform a necropsy demonstration conducted in a special teaching lab. Next, updates from crop plot research and the long-standing weather station.