

VIRGINIA Beginning Farmer & Rancher COALITION PROGRAM

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Whole Farm Planning for Beginners: Seven Whole Farm Planning Programs Available in 2013

As 2012 comes to a close, we note that six of our seven whole farm planning teams have provided programming for a number of beginning farmers in Virginia. These programs are gaining attention for their effective, place-based approaches to beginning farmer education. These are not a "one size fit all" set of programs. Using the Coalition's Whole Farm Planning curriculum as their foundation, the teams focus on local needs and interests of their beginning farmer participants. They also work together, across the Coalition, to introduce new farmers to the service provider network. Face-to-face workshops, farm tours, field instruction, and self-study are just a few examples of educational methods used by the teams. Below are all seven teams and the names of their programs, which are either currently available or will be again for winter-spring 2013. Virginia Cooperative Extension agents are involved in several of the programs. For more details and contact information, visit us at www.vabeginningfarmer.org.

Certified Farm Seeker Program

VA Farm Bureau Young Farmers and the VA Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services— Virginia-wide

Whole Farm Planning for New Wineries and Vineyards

Attimo Winery — Christiansburg

Whole Farm Planning for Working Model Farm and Land-Based Learning Center in Floyd County

SustainFloyd — Floyd County

The Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program

Fauquier County Ag. Development Office, Fauquier Education Farm, and Virginia Cooperative Extension — Fauquier County

Whole Farm Planning in Southwest Virginia

Appalachian Sustainable Development and Virginia Cooperative Extension — Washington and Wise County

Beginning Farmer Support on the Blue Ridge Plateau

Grayson LandCare — Grayson and neighboring counties

Whole Farm Planning Farm School

VA Association for Biological Farming — Goochland County

Connecting through YouTube

Have you visited the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition YouTube Channel? It's been a huge success, receiving over 1000 hits! The channel currently highlights seventeen newly developed videos featuring six diverse farms across the Commonwealth of Virginia. This is a great way to learn from beginning farmers, in their own words, sharing their own experiences. See page two for more information and other social media links.



Coalition Building Continues: Collaboration and Networking to Support Beginning Farmers and Service Providers in Virginia



The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition (VBFRC) held its fall 2012 Coalition meeting at the Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave. The gathering was the largest yet, with 50 service providers and farmers in attendance. The meeting was a chance to learn about curriculum updates, lessons learned from our Whole Farm Planning Programs, and our farmer mentor network. The meeting also included opportunities for networking and strategic planning for future Coalition activity. The group concluded the meeting by generating a list of practical ideas and resource needs to accomplish those activities. An online survey is being generated by the management team to follow up on these plans. A focus on

documenting our public impacts will be included in the survey. Stay tuned for more information on this survey and other efforts to collectively generate Coalition impact statements.

We also want to acknowledge several winter 2013 events hosted by Coalition organizations:

-VA Forage and Grasslands Council Winter Conferences: Jan. 22-25

-VABF Annual Conference: Feb. 8-9

-VA Farm Bureau Young Farmers Winter Expo: Feb. 22-24

Visit our Coalition Calendar of Events online for more beginning farmer gatherings in 2013. Thank you for your continued support of the VBFRC. We look forward to seeing you this winter!

—Kim Niewolny, Project Director

Program Highlight: Virginia Association for Biological Farming (VABF) Farm School

With VABF's Lisa Dearden at the helm, the VABF Farm School ran for six intensive weeks this fall with over 30 beginning farmer participants. This program was offered in Central VA, and was designed for those with introductory to intermediate levels of farming knowledge and experience. This comprehensive program introduced participants to four of the Virginia Whole Farm Planning Modules: *Introduction to Whole Farm Planning*, *Marketing*, *Holistic Business Management*, and *Sustainable Farming Practices*. Two farm tours and a social networking session were included in the program. VABF is also planning a one-day Farm School prior to the VABF conference in early February and another six-week program in spring 2013. More information can be found at: www.vabf.org

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Whole Farm Planning Online: New Webinar Series

We are happy to announce a new webinar series to showcase and discuss topics important to Virginia beginning farmers. This webinar series aims to highlight the Coalition's many farmers and service providers who are primed to share their first-hand experiences with others. This will be an online, monthly webinar series.

With several webinars already under our belt, the series hopes to connect farmers and service providers together to address a number of start-up issues. Webinar topics currently include such issues as: obtaining farm loans, gaining access to farmland, and understanding GAP certification. A webinar calendar will be advertised broadly for a wide-ranging audience. All webinars will be "live" and then archived on the VBFRCPC website to be accessed at a later date. Stay tuned for webinar announcements.

Interested in presenting a webinar? Members of the VBFRCPC management team are seeking presenters for the 2013 season. The management team is prepared to set up and manage the online technology that is required for the webinar presentation. Ideally, the webinar will be structured in a format that allows folks to present information about a topic and address questions from participants. If you would like to be a part of this webinar series, please contact Matt Benson at mcbenson@vt.edu. In your email, please include your presentation topic and the potential month you would like to present. Teams of multiple presenters, to create a panel, are encouraged!

We look forward to hearing from you and highlighting your farm or organization.



Virginia's Farm Mentor Network: Making Connections!

The VBFRCPC has been gaining ground with the growth of the Virginia Farm Mentor Network with the recruitment of 30 farmer mentors. All Whole Farm Planning (WFP) program participants are eligible to apply to be matched with these and future mentors.



The Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program was the first to complete the first round of WFP programming. As a result, Jim Hilleary has been doing an exceptional job pairing graduates of the program with suitable mentors in the northern piedmont area.

Participation in the Virginia Farm Mentor Network is an informal educational opportunity where a new farmer/rancher can learn from an experienced person that has been working successfully in agriculture for several years. No two experiences will be the same. For more info, contact a Farm Mentor Coordinator in your area.

The Farm Mentor Network Coordinators, Jim Hilleary (Northern VA), CJ Isbell (Central VA), and Kelli Scott (Southwest VA) have been collaborating with established and beginning farmers in their regions. The team is also scheduled to attend several winter conferences, workshops, and expos promoting the Farm Mentor Network. All details can be found by visiting: www.vabeginningfarmer.org.

Social Media Links for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers:

- Visit us online at: www.vabeginningfarmer.org
- Virginia Beginning Farmer Connections, A Blog for Beginning Farmers: www.news.cals.vt.edu/vabeginningfarmer/
- Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition is on Facebook Like us!
- Virginia Beginning Farmers & Ranchers YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/VABeginningFarmers
- Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Flickr: www.flickr.com/photos/virginiabeginningfarmers

The Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition is a collaborative effort represented by beginning farmer stakeholders across Virginia. The project is housed in Virginia Tech's Department of Agricultural and Extension Education. Project funding is sponsored by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Award # 2010-49400. Contact Kim Niewolny, Project Director, at niewolny@vt.edu or 540-231-5784, for more information.

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