



Newsblast

December 7, 2021

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A Message from VBFRC

Greetings! We hope you, your farm, family, and community as the cold weather set in. This newsblast features a number of announcements, workshop series, and events coming up.

We send the newsblast out at the beginning of each month. If you would like your event added to our listserv, newsblast, and website, send an email with the event details to the coalition coordinator, Katie Trozzo, at ketrozzo@vt.edu

The Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition is a state-wide and coalition-based Extension program, housed in Virginia Tech's Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education. Funding is sponsored by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Award #2020-49400-32326. This funding is led by VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program.

Partner Highlights

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council is pleased to invite you to this year's winter forage conference, *The Green Side of Beef: Defending Grassland Agriculture*. The conference will explore the challenges faced by the livestock industry as it seeks to be-and be understood as-part of the solution to our global environmental problems. The keynote speaker will be Nicolette Hahn Niman, a former vegetarian turned rancher. The conference series will be held in four locations:

- Jan 18. Wytheville
- Jan 19. Chatham
- Jan 20. Rapidan
- Jan 21. Weyers Cave

For more information or to register, visit the [VAForages Website](#).

Note: Green underlined text is a link

Announcements

Mobile Processing Unit Certification Program – Winter/Spring Course 2022

VSU's small ruminant program has designed and built a mobile processing unit as a resource to the state's sheep and goat producers. To be able to utilize this resource, producers/clientele will need to complete a 5-module certification program. Only certified users will be able to process their sheep and goats on the MPU. Modules will include MPU design and usage, sheep and goat harvesting and carcass fabrication, regulations (state and federal), marketing your products and hands-on training on operating the MPU and all steps that should be taken to ensure everything is running and functional before processing, during processing, carcass cooling/hanging and fabrication.

Second round of the Virginia Food Access Investment Fund (VFAIF) program opens on December 1, 2021 and closes February 22, 2022.

The Virginia Food Access Investment Fund (VFAIF) is a statewide program that focuses on equity and justice in local food systems by investing in new or expanding food retailers that address food access issues in the Commonwealth. VFAIF offers grants and loans to fund the business development, construction, rehabilitation, equipment upgrades and expansion of grocery stores, small food retailers, and innovative food retail projects in historically marginalized communities.

A Taste of Farming: An Online Series for Aspiring and New Farmers

We designed this "learn as you go" online series so you can get a taste of different farming practices and concepts to help you explore your interests, gain a basic understanding of many different farming topics, avoid common pitfalls, and get to know the Extension professionals in Virginia who are here to assist you. From October 2021 to March 2022, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) agents and Small Farm Outreach Program Associates will be posting short videos (15-20 min) highlighting key information and considerations about different farming practices and concepts on topics they have had years of experience helping aspiring and new farmers navigate. A week after each video is posted, the VCE professional will offer a live-time Q & A session by Zoom where aspiring and new farmers can ask their questions directly and discuss their needs with the agent.

Graze 300 Survey

This survey was developed by the VCE Graze 300 team in partnership with the VA Tech Department of Sociology. The goal of this survey is to gather information to evaluate various factors that influence farmers' attitudes toward adoption of rotational grazing. The survey is designed for all producers, whether they practice rotational grazing or not. The survey can be completed online:

<https://tinyurl.com/Graze300VT>

Special 4 the Soil episode: The Wisdom and Soil Health Insights of Ira Wallace of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange

In preparation and celebration of World Soil Day on December 5, 2021, 4 The Soil and the Virginia Soil Health Coalition offer a special episode to hear and learn from the wisdom and insights of Ira Wallace of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange. In this episode, Ira shares about the importance of soil health to vegetable and food production, but specifically how soil health is relevant to seed saving, heirloom varieties, and land ownership. Mary Sketch and Jeff Ishee share their own excitement about different seed and heirloom varieties ranging from peanuts to kale. You can also learn how Ira and her colleagues at Southern Exposure Seed Exchange started to build soil health and renovate the soils early on in the

history of their farming operation, which included multi-year cover cropping rotations and never leaving the soil bare during a fallow between crops.

December Events

December 4-9: Reynolds Homestead to host Smithsonian exhibition examining change in rural America

“Crossroads: Change in Rural America” will showcase how rural small towns continue to creatively focus on new opportunities for growth and development. The exhibition is part of the Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street program.

December 6-9: National Grazing Lands Conference

The conference promotes grazing land sustainability by bringing together hundreds of land managers from across the nation for education and technological advancements. Attendees will have the opportunity to gain the latest information in scientific and applied research, and practical, workable applications for building partnerships. The conference will focus on management methods that are successful in bridging agricultural needs with environmental and social benefits.

December 7: 4 the Soil Episode 5: Caring for the Organizational Ecosystem and Soil with Ari Weinzweig of Zingerman's Community of Businesses Part 1

In this episode, Jeff Ishee, Eric Bendfeldt, and Mary Sketch speak with Ari Weinzweig, CEO and co-founder of Zingerman’s Delicatessen and Community of Businesses in Ann Arbor Michigan. Ari is a successful entrepreneur, leader, writer, and visionary. In this episode, we move away from the technical aspects of soil health and hear from Ari on how healthy organizations are like healthy soils. In his thinking and writing, Ari explores and explains why cultural soil health is important to an organization's ecosystem and the broader community, particularly as people seek to better align their lives and values.

December 8: Farmer’s market – USDA (SNAP & EBT) Lunch and Learn Session

Small farmers, farmers’ market vendors and market managers, be sure to join us for an informative session as we learn about the basics and benefits of becoming authorized to accept EBT transactions. Joni Garcia, from USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), will be presenting the SNAP program overview and discussing how to enroll to become authorized to accept EBT and obtain a free EBT card reader.

December 8: Food Supply Chain Innovators, featuring Michelle Ajamian, involved in Appalachian Staple Foods Collaborative, Shagbark Seed & Mill, and the Artisan Grain Collaborative

The webinar at 1 pm is part of the NAFSN Voices from the Grassroots series. Michelle is principal owner of Shagbark Seed & Mill, an organic grain processing facility in Athens, Ohio, that she and her partner, Brandon Jaeger, started in 2010. She is a 2015 recipient of the Outstanding Woman in Innovation award. Michelle and Brandon founded the Appalachian Staple Foods Collaborative (ASFC) in 2009, an informal network that led to the launch of Shagbark Seed & Mill. Michelle brought ASFC to Rural Action in 2019, to support new enterprises and advance high-nutrition staple crops on a regional scale. The webinar will provide ample opportunity for interactive learning from Michelle as an accomplished business owner and activist.

December 8: Exploring the Use of Blockchain Technology to Improve Food Security Through African Indigenous Vegetables in Western Kenya

Blockchain technology is heralded for its ability to improve traceability, trust, and trust in agri-food value chains. For the optimist and the skeptic of blockchain, we explore the complexities of using this emerging technology to strengthen agri-food value chains to create social and nutritional impacts. This 1-hour talk will explore results and lessons from the field in Western Kenya as to how blockchain might be used as a tool to improve food and nutrition security, women's leadership, and youth engagement within the value chains for African indigenous vegetables.

December 17: Horse Management 101 Virtual Q&A Session

As part of our [Taste of Farming Series](#), hear from Carrie Swanson, Albemarle County's Animal Science Extension Agent, who will share a basic overview of horse management in her video. Then join for the virtual Q&A session to talk directly with Carrie to answer any questions you bring.

December 21: 4 the Soil Episode 6: Building Cultural Soil with Ari Weinzweig of Zingerman's Community of Businesses Part 2

In this episode, Jeff Ishee, Eric Bendfeldt, and Mary Sketch continue their conversation with Ari Weinzweig of Zingerman's Delicatessen and Community of Businesses. In Part 2, Ari builds on his metaphor of building our cultural soils, discussing the importance of playing the long game of fostering a healthy organizational ecosystem. To read Ari's recent reflections on the metaphor, please visit <https://www.zingtrain.com/blog/the-importance-of-organizational-culture/>

January Events

January 14: Pumpkins Virtual Q&A Session

As part of our [Taste of Farming Series](#), hear from Joanne Jones, Charlotte County's Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent, who will share about pumpkin production in her video. Then join for the virtual Q&A session to talk directly with Joanne to answer any questions you bring.

January 13-14: The 23rd Annual Future Harvest Conference (Online)

This year's keynote address is titled, "NEW AGE AGRARIANISM: Growing for a Regenerative, Sustainable, and Equitable Planet" by Renard Turner, Co-Owner of Vanguard Ranch in Louisa County, VA.

January 18-21: 2022 Winter Forage Conference: The Green Side of Beef: In Defense of Grassland Agriculture

This year's winter forage conference series will explore and challenge the common claim that beef is bad for the planet. From issues like water quality to climate change, our speakers will show how well-managed grasslands can produce healthy meat and be part of the solution to the environmental issues we face. This one-day in person conference is held in four different locations across the state.

January 21: Forestry Virtual Q&A Session

As part of our [Taste of Farming Series](#), hear from Neil Clark, Southampton County's Natural Resources Extension Agent, who will share an introduction to forest management as part of whole farm planning and management in his video. Then join for the virtual Q&A session to talk directly with Neil to answer any questions you bring.

January 22-24: 22nd Annual Virginia Biological Farming Conference

The three-day Conference includes: Pre-Conference intensive workshops, 48 sessions, presentations and panel discussions, 50 tradeshow exhibitors, locally sourced farm meals and book sales with author signings. The Conference highlights include a Silent Auction and networking opportunities including regional meetings and fireside chats, morning yoga and the Taste of Virginia Expo & Social.

January 28: Grazing Math Virtual Q&A Session

As part of our [Taste of Farming Series](#), hear from Carl Stafford, Culpeper County's Agriculture and Natural Resources Senior Extension Agent, who will share principles driving the flexible management of natural systems needed by grazing livestock in his video. Then join for the virtual Q&A session to talk directly with Carl to answer any questions you bring.

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.