

Newsblast

December 21, 2022

Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

A Message from VBFRC

In this season of quiet and darkness, we wish you nourishment, rest and connection. We are sharing our regular monthly news along with a featured poem for the season. We hope you enjoy. Happy Holidays and New Year to you and your family.

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 Highlight

The 23rd annual Virginia Biological Farming Conference will be held January 6-8 at the Hotel Roanoke and is Virginia's premier organic and sustainable agricultural conference! The Conference brings together farmers, gardeners, eaters, educators, industry professionals, and advocates of biological, sustainable, regenerative, and organic agriculture. The three-day Conference includes: 9 Pre-Conference intensive workshops, 60 concurrent sessions of workshops, presentations, and panel discussions, more than 40 tradeshow exhibitors, locally sourced farm meals and book sales with author signings. The Conference highlights include a Youth Program, a Silent Auction and networking opportunities including regional meetings and fireside chats, morning yoga for farmers and the Taste of Virginia Expo & Market.

Find more information on [their conference webpage](#).

Note: Green underlined text is a link

Snowy Night

By Mary Oliver

Last night, an owl
in the blue dark
tossed an indeterminate number
of carefully shaped sounds into
the world, in which,
a quarter of a mile away, I happened
to be standing.
I couldn't tell
which one it was –
the barred or the great-horned
ship of the air –
it was that distant. But, anyway,
aren't there moments
that are better than knowing something,
and sweeter? Snow was falling,
so much like stars
filling the dark trees
that one could easily imagine
its reason for being was nothing more
than prettiness. I suppose
if this were someone else's story
they would have insisted on knowing
whatever is knowable – would have hurried
over the fields
to name it – the owl, I mean.
But it's mine, this poem of the night,
and I just stood there, listening and holding out
my hands to the soft glitter
falling through the air. I love this world,
but not for its answers.
And I wish good luck to the owl,
whatever its name –
and I wish great welcome to the snow,
whatever its severe and comfortless
and beautiful meaning.

Announcements

The Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Course presented by the Fauquier Education Farm

The Fauquier Education Farm, one of our Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition partners, is offering the “Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Course,” an 8-week in-person course in January and February held in Warrenton, VA. The class meets Jan 3rd, 9th, 20th, 24th, 31st and Feb 11th, 15th, and 18th. Registration is \$100 per person or \$150 per couple. For more information, reach out to Ashley Goodwin at ashleyg9@vt.edu.

Organic Berry Farm Manager at River Ridge Organics in Grayson County, VA

River Ridge Organics, a 12 acre organic blueberry and blackberry farm in the middle of a 1500 acre cattle farm, is seeking a full time manager to oversee all aspects of the berry farm. This position requires extensive knowledge in horticulture / agronomy. This position is supported by seasonal harvest labor and part time employees to assist in the management of River Ridge Organics. The successful candidate will report directly to the General Manager. Find more information in the attached job description, linked in the title.

New Publication USDA SARE Bulletin: Scaling Up Your Vegetable Farm for Wholesale Markets

For direct market farmers, expanding your operation to capture local and regional wholesale markets can represent an opportunity. But such a shift brings with it many changes to how you run your farm because the expectations that wholesale buyers have is much different than your direct market customers. Scaling Up Your Vegetable Farm for Wholesale Markets guides you through the likely changes you'll need to take into consideration when planning to branch out into wholesale markets. These include business planning, working with wholesale buyers, and areas of production that range from increasing yield and produce quality, to harvest and postharvest handling, food safety and more.

New Report Farmers’ Perceptions of Information and Resources for Navigating Economic Hardship and Stress

The major goal of the project was to understand the experiences of financial and emotional distress among farm households in NC, SC, and VA. A specific goal was to identify the resources that farmers undergoing distress found useful in negotiating the stress process. Additionally, the project sought to differentiate these experiences based upon race so that culturally-relevant resources could be developed in the future.

USDA Releases 2021 Organics Data

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) released the results of the 2021 Organic Survey, which show total sales of \$11.2 billion in organic products, an increase of \$1.28 billion, or 13%, from 2019. There were 17,445 certified organic farms, a 5% increase from 2019. [Read more on their website.](#)

2022 Census for Agriculture

The 2022 Census for Agriculture will begin being mailed out on November 22. Why respond?

- Combined responses show the value and importance of U.S. agriculture.
- Census data inform decisions about policy, farm and conservation programs, infrastructure and rural development, research, education, beginning farmer programs, and more.

- Response is required by federal law. The same law requires USDA to keep all personal information confidential.
- The Census of Agriculture is your opportunity to have a voice in the future of U.S. agriculture

A Taste of Farming

Are you aspiring to farm or just starting out with farming? If so, this series is for you. 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.

In this Series, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) agents and VSU Small Farm Outreach Program Associates post 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. Season 1 ran from October 2021 to March 2022 and videos are archived on [the VBFRC website](#). Season 2 is now live! Each month between October 2022 and March 2023 we will release two new Taste of Farming videos for you to watch. A few weeks after a moderated Q & A session will be held with the video presenters where you can hear more from them and have your questions answered. Check out our full schedule on [the website](#) and see below for our new videos and upcoming moderated Q&A Session.

- **[New Video: Christmas Tree Production](#)**
Hear from Ashley Edwards, Carroll County VCE Ag Agent, and Kevin Spurlin, Grayson County VCE Ag Agent, about Christmas Tree Farming.
- **[January Moderated Q&A Session: Thursday, December 18 from 7-8 pm ET](#)**
Hear more from Erin Small, Prince Edward VCE Ag Agent, on Floriculture, and Beth Sastre, Loudoun VCE Ag Agent, on Vineyard Establishment in this virtual Q&A session. Bring your questions!

4 the Soil Highlights



[Check out the New 4 The Soil Website!](#)

A new and improved 4 the Soil website has been launched complete with resources, blog posts, profiles of soil health champions and more.

[Podcast Episode 22-26: Happy Soil Biology with Jon Stika of Understanding Ag \(Part II\)](#)

What are the foundations of happy soil biology? Jon Stika of UnderstandingAg, a part-time research professional at North Dakota State University's Dickinson Research and Extension Center, and author of A Soil Owner's Manual shares his perspective on keeping soil biology alive and happy.

[Podcast Episode 22-25: Treat the Problem Not Just the Symptoms with Jon Stika of Understanding Ag \(Part I\)](#)

How does soil actually function? Jon Stika of Understanding Ag (recently retired from USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service) emphasizes that all of us as students, managers, and caregivers of soil need to understand how soil functions as a living ecosystem with biological, physical, and chemical processes. All of us must become students of what makes soil healthy. It's that simple and there are no shortcuts. Jon states from this starting point farmers, graziers, gardeners, and landowners will then be able to treat the problems limiting soil health and not just the symptoms.

[4 The Soil Blog: New posts every week!](#)

Have you visited the [4 The Soil Blog](#) yet? There are new posts every week on the four core principles, soil health champions across the state, and more. Check it out and share with your family, friends, and colleagues!

January Events

[January 6-8: 23rd Annual Virginia Biological Farming Conference \(Roanoke, VA\)](#)

The 23rd annual Virginia Biological Farming Conference is Virginia's premier organic and sustainable agricultural conference! The Conference brings together farmers, gardeners, eaters, educators, industry professionals, and advocates of biological, sustainable, regenerative, and organic agriculture. The three-day Conference includes: 9 Pre-Conference intensive workshops, 60 concurrent sessions of workshops, presentations, and panel discussions, more than 40 tradeshow exhibitors, locally sourced farm meals and book sales with author signings. The Conference highlights include a Youth Program, a Silent Auction and networking opportunities including regional meetings and fireside chats, morning yoga for farmers and the Taste of Virginia Expo & Market.

[January 11-12: Virtual Shepard's Symposium \(Virtual\)](#)

The annual Virginia Shepherd's Symposium will be hosted virtually over Zoom on January 11-12, 2023 from 7-9 pm each evening. Please see attached flier (linked in title) for registration and details.

[January 12: Practical Cattle Health & Management \(Abingdon, VA\)](#)

Join us for dinner and an informational session on managing your cattle. Mr. Adam Wilson of Wilson Cattle Company will talk about his cow/calf operation and discuss practices that he has found beneficial. Chris Fletcher D.V.M., of Washington County Veterinary Service, will talk about Theileria, the emerging disease threatening local cattle producers—how we can best protect our cattle, identify sick animals, and treatment options. He will also inform us about upcoming changes to antibiotics in 2023 for all livestock producers. Finally, Emily Hoss D.V.M. will talk about normal calving, stages of parturition, when to call the vet, issues pre- and post-partum, and what you can and shouldn't do on your own. If you would like to come to this workshop, you must register by 5 pm on January 5, 2023.

[January 12-14: 24th Annual Future Harvest Conference \(College Park, MD\)](#)

Save the date! Now accepting workshop proposals for our 24th annual winter conference, which will take place in person January 12 - 14, 2023. The deadline to submit a proposal is September 15, 2022 and speakers will be notified by October 14, 2022.

[January 17: Small Farm Orientation \(Virtual\)](#)

This two-hour Zoom course is geared to new farmers with zero to five years of experience operating a farm. Herbert Brown, Assistant Director of the VSU Small Farm Outreach Program, will teach the course. He will walk attendees through the process of how to develop a productive and profitable farm. Participants will receive a Small Farm Orientation manual.

January 18: Regenerative Food Production: Healthy Soil, Ecosystems, and Communities (Virtual)

Join us for the fourth session of our Fall Virtual Learning Exchange Series, featuring food systems leaders in the Roanoke Foodshed Network. Our featured speakers will include Anna and Brent Wills of Bramble Hollow Farm and Adam Taylor of the Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center.

January 18: Finding Online Information (South Hill, VA)

If you're a small-scale farmer new to smart phones and web searches, this course is for you! Learn the basics from how to log on to a computer or smart phone to performing searches for precisely the information you need. Become more tech savvy to ensure you can find the information you need when you need it. Sign up today!

January 18: Recordkeeping on your Computer or Smart Phone (Virtual)

Farming is a business, and good recordkeeping is essential for a successful farming operation. Using the tools you have, you can keep thorough records. These records will provide valuable information on which methods work best on your farm. They can help plan a realistic forecast for the coming year and may also be a requirement for lending institutions. Greg Carter will lead this workshop. He grew up on a small farm but worked in the corporate world. After retirement, Greg returned to his roots and started a small diversified farming operation, using the lessons he learned in business. Now he shares this knowledge with other farmers.

January 18: Regenerative Food Production: Healthy Soil, Ecosystems, and Community (Virtual)

Join the Roanoke Foodshed Network for the fourth session of their Fall Virtual Learning Exchange Series, featuring food systems leaders in the Roanoke region. Featured speakers for this session will include Anna and Brent Wills of Bramble Hollow Farm and Adam Taylor of the Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center.

January 24: How to Write a Business Plan for Lenders (Virtual)

If you own a farm, you need a business plan. It is required by lenders if you are seeking loans for start-up or operational costs. Business plans are required by many government and non-government agencies with funding and cost-share programs for farmers. A business plan is part of your whole farm plan and allows you to assess your progress and show you when you are ready to grow or if you need to scale back your enterprises. Join us for a Zoom workshop with Clay Roberts, Regional Manager for Lending at Colonial Farm Credit. Clay will guide you through the process of writing a business plan and share his knowledge about how a lender uses a farm business plan.

January 24-27: Winter Forage Conference Series

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council invites you to join us for their 2023 Winter Forage Conference Series, Learn to Read: Stockmanship for Better Cattle & Grass. This year's conference will feature nationally-recognized stockmanship expert, Curt Pate, as he describes how to read and handle livestock in the field to improve your grazing and pasture management. Our other speakers will include fencing expert, Lewis Sapp, and Johnny Rogers of Rogers Cattle Co (Roxboro, NC), presenting on topics including designing a new grazing system or adding to existing fencing and watering infrastructure, and understanding and responding to growing conditions and livestock needs to optimize forage productivity. Programs will be offered from 9-3 pm in person in different locations throughout the state.

January 24: Wytheville Meeting Center in Wytheville, VA

January 25: Southern Piedmont AREC in Blackstone, VA

January 26: Fauquier Springs Country Club in Warrenton, VA

January 27: Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave, VA

January 25: Preparation for a Successful Growing Season (South Hill, VA)

The soil is your farm's most precious natural resource. Soil testing is the first step to unlocking your soil's

full potential. Tammy Holler, Nutrient Management Specialist with the Small Farm Outreach Program, will discuss the importance of having soil testing done to determine the necessary amendments needed for a successful growing season. She will discuss reading and understanding the test results and what steps are needed in order to improve your soil and have a productive yield.

January 30-21: Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course (Virtual)

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule is the first federally regulated standard for growing, harvesting, packing, and holding fresh produce in an effort to reduce microbial contamination and foodborne illness outbreaks. If you grow fruits or vegetables, attend a training for information about best practices, and regulatory requirements. The PSA Grower Training Course is one way to satisfy the FSMA Produce Safety Rule requirement. Cost \$25. Registration required.

February Events

February 9: Changes to Livestock Antibiotic Regulations in 2023 (Virtual)

Dr. Chris Fletcher D.V.M., a large animal veterinarian, will provide instruction for livestock producers on the following topics: 1) Brief history of antibiotic use in the U.S., including examples of antibiotic resistance, 2) Recent changes involving veterinary feed directive and using antibiotics, 3) New and upcoming changes to all livestock antibiotics in June 2023, and 4) Adopting good stewardship when using antibiotics. A question and answer session will wrap up the meeting.

February 15: DCR Information Session (Virtual)

Join us for a conversation with Darryl M. Glover, of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), who will explain DCR's cost-share programs. These programs are administered through local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). The goal is to improve water quality in our streams, rivers, and the nearby Chesapeake Bay. The cost-share programs support various practices in conservation planning to treat cropland, pastureland, hay land, and forested land. As an incentive, cost-share assistance is offered to implement Best Management Practices. Participation in the programs is voluntary, and the Conservation Districts offer their expertise at no cost. Funding is based on what each District has available and how your small-scale farm ranks compared to the other applications they receive. Funding is not guaranteed.

February 21: Small Farm Orientation (Zoom)

This two-hour Zoom course is geared to new farmers with zero to five years of experience operating a farm. Herbert Brown, Assistant Director of the VSU Small Farm Outreach Program, will teach the course. He will walk attendees through the process of how to develop a productive and profitable farm. Participants will receive a Small Farm Orientation manual.

February 21: Pruning Fruit Trees for Beginners (Unionville, VA)

Good pruning technique can increase the potential for quality fruit. Pruning is often neglected either due to a lack of skill or fear that improper pruning could lead to the injury or death of a tree. Pruning reduces overall tree size, improves structural strength, increases fruit production and improves the quality of fruit. Come and join us for this hands-on demonstration on pruning fruit trees for the beginner. Please feel free to bring any pruning tools that you may have for this workshop.

February 24: Let's Get Ready for your 2023 Farmers Market Display! (Virtual)

Success at the farmers market starts well before you get to the market. This online class is targeted to new and beginning farmers. VSU Small Farm Outreach Program's Dr. Theresa Nartea and Marilyn Estes will help you understand how to plan and set up an attractive market display. This workshop will cover

from harvest to market. First, we will suggest essential market items, second, we will give you handy harvesting and packaging tips, third, we'll talk about how to plan loading and unloading the truck. We will wrap up by discussing ideas on setting up your display for maximum sales potential!

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.