



# Newsblast

January 12, 2026

Photo by Robin Edqvist

## *A Message from VBFRC*

As January opens the year, it offers a fresh starting point—a time to reset, refocus, and set intentions for the months ahead. While winter may slow activity in the fields, it creates space for planning, learning, and preparing for the growing season to come. For many farmers and growers, January is a time to clarify goals, evaluate resources, and make decisions that shape the year ahead. This month's newsletter features events and programs that support thoughtful planning, skill-building, and connection. Whether laying the groundwork for new ideas or strengthening existing operations, these opportunities are designed to support the season ahead. Here's to beginning the year with clarity, purpose, and optimism for what lies ahead.

*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 was sponsored by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Award #2023-49400-40885.*

## *Partner Highlight*

### 2026 Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program

Are you thinking of starting a production farm or diversifying an existing operation? The Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program (NPBFP) is a multi-class, in-person program designed to help aspiring and diversifying farmers make informed decisions about a new operation. The program's focus is: Introduction to farm planning, marketing, and farm business management. For more information, contact Jim Jankins at [faquieredfarm@gmail.com](mailto:faquieredfarm@gmail.com) or 540-336-43331.

The class will meet in person at the Fauquier Cooperative Extension, 24 Pesham St., Warrenton, VA. 20186. Free orientation to outline class goals will be on Feb 21<sup>st</sup> at 1:30 PM. Class meets weekly on Saturday from Feb 28<sup>th</sup> to April 24<sup>th</sup> at 1:30-3:00 PM. This course costs \$100 per person, \$150 per couple.

Note: Green underlined text is a link

## Announcements

### 2026 Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program

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### New Extension Graze 300 VA Website

A New Graze 300 VA website is now public!! Please register [here](#).

- The website shows contacts for all the "Lead Agent and Specialist Team." There are more agents who engage with grazing and forages, but needed to start somewhere and then grow.
- There is a place for upcoming educational meetings. Please add any educational meetings that include Forage education (Pasture Walks, sit-down meetings, online meetings, or anything you think is relevant).
- There is a "What's New Section," and presently it contains three videos that were created to address the barrier "Water Source Constraints" (one of five priority barriers). In the future, it should be replaced with a different thing that is a "What's New."

### USDA Sets January 15 Deadline for Regenerative Pilot Program Batching

USDA has announced a January 15, 2026, deadline for producers and partners to participate in the first batching window for the Regenerative Agriculture and Resilience Pilot. This pilot program is designed to help producers implement regenerative practices that build soil health, sequester carbon, improve water quality, and enhance resilience. Participants must submit their applications by January 15 to be considered in this initial batching round—opening the door to potential cost-share support and technical assistance for eligible conservation practices. Stay tuned for more details on how to participate and how RARP can support your soil health and regenerative management goals. Read the full announcement [here!](#)

### CattleCon 2026: The National Cattlemen's Beef Association's Annual Convention and Trade Show

Registration is now open for CattleCon 2026, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association's annual convention and trade show—coming to downtown Nashville, Tennessee, for the first time! CattleCon is where the beef industry gathers for education, innovation, and connection. Attendees can explore the latest in cattle production, animal health, and marketing while networking with producers and industry partners from across the country. Cattle producers attending are also eligible for the Rancher Resilience Grant, which reimburses registration costs and up to three nights of hotel stay. Applications must be submitted within 30 days of the event (February 3–5) to qualify. Learn more about CattleCon 2026 [here!](#) Apply for the grant [here!](#)

### Grant Opportunity: Chesapeake Bay Innovative Nutrient & Sediment Reduction

NFWF, in partnership with the EPA and the Chesapeake Bay Program, is now accepting pre-proposals for the 2026 Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants. These grants support collaborative efforts to reduce nutrient and sediment pollution and improve water quality throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Eligible applicants include nonprofits, local and state governments, tribes, and educational institutions working through established partnerships. Pre-proposal due: February 12, 2026. Prospective applicants are encouraged to attend a pre-proposal webinar and to participate in consultation opportunities as part of the process. Learn more and apply [here!](#). All projects must occur within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

# Series

## **Before You Buy the Farm: Land & Livestock Decisions That Matter**

Thinking about starting a farm or homestead, getting into livestock, or purchasing your own property? Join Virginia Cooperative Extension for a four-session Zoom series exploring the key considerations you should understand before you take the leap into farm ownership. The Zoom meeting will be from 7:00-8:00 PM. Please [Register](#) to attend.

- 1/22 — Dream, Plan, Farm  
Thinking through the future - set goals, budget time and money, and turn “the dream” into a practical plan!
- 1/29 — Finding Your Farm Fit  
Learn what to look for & questions to consider when shopping for properties to plan ahead for equipment and infrastructure needs
- 2/5 — The Grass Is Always Greener  
Learn what it takes to renovate and rehabilitate pastures for livestock, stocking rates, and more!
- 2/12 — The Livestock Lowdown  
Dive into livestock management and components of a successful farm, including finding a vet and how to plan feeding your animals year-round.

## **Out of the Woods: Growing Income from Your Forest**

Red Maple, Real Results: Yields, Flavor & Smarter Tapping Red maple isn't just a pretty canopy—it's a serious production opportunity. In this Out of the Woods webinar, Dr. Abby van den Berg breaks down current research on red maple yields, syrup flavor profiles, and tapping guidelines. They will cover site factors, timing, and trade-offs that producers actually face, then translate the findings into practical steps for woodwork and sugarhouse decisions. Whether you're expanding beyond sugar maple or pressure-testing your red maple strategy, come for clear takeaways and research-backed answers.

Time shows in Eastern Time (US and Canada)

- Jan 15, 2026 07:00 PM
- Feb 19, 2026 07:00 PM

## **Woods & Wildlife Conferences**

These long-running full-day conferences provide information, tools, and personal contacts to help private woodland owners keep their woods, and the wildlife that live in them, healthy and productive. A variety of topics is offered to appeal to owners of both small and large tracts, as well as to new and experienced owners. Online registration is open for both events.

- February 21
  - [Squires Student Center](#), Blacksburg
  - [Agenda](#)
  - Register by mail coming soon
- February 28
  - [Daniel Technology Center](#), Germanna Community College, Culpeper.
  - [Agenda](#)
  - Register by mail coming soon
- [Register online](#)

### **Landowner Retreats**

Beginning Retreats provide information on hardwood and pine forest management, legacy planning, management planning, and more. Beyond the Basics Retreats take a deep dive into a specific forest management topic. All Retreats combine classroom instruction, field trips, and hands-on activities. Registration opens 10 weeks before events.

- Beyond the Basics Woodland Owner Retreat: Managing Your Forest for Timber Income
  - March 13-14
  - [Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center](#), Appomattox
- Southwest Virginia Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat
  - May 8-9
  - [Southwest Virginia 4-H Educational Center](#), Abingdon
- Southeast Virginia Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat
  - September 11-12
  - [New Kent Conference Center](#), Providence Forge

Visit the [Blue Ridge PRISM](#) website for programs on non-native invasive species.

### **Virginia Master Cattlemen's Program 2026**

Virginia Cooperative Extension will be offering the Virginia Master Cattlemen program online in Spring 2026. The program will consist of seven sessions that provide essential information for beef producers in Economics, Genetics, Reproduction, Nutrition, Forages, Herd Health, and Marketing. Participants will receive a certificate as a Virginia Master Cattleman upon successful completion of all seven program sessions. The goal of the program is to build foundational knowledge that can be applied to advanced beef educational programs. This program will be held on Zoom weekly from 6:30 to 8:30 pm on Thursdays from February 12 to March 26. All participants will receive a hard copy course notebook. Internet access and email are required for this course. Registration deadline is February 5, 2026. For more information, contact Phil Blevins at the Washington County Extension Office, Phone: (276)676-6309 or by email: [pblevins@vt.edu](mailto:pblevins@vt.edu). Please register for the program [here](#).

# 4 the Soil Highlights



## **S6 - E1: Rooted in a Passion for the Earth, Soil, and the Bioeconomy with Ms. Fatema Mohajir**

A desire and passion for caring for the earth, soil, and the natural environment can start at a young age. Fatema Mohajir and her family are from the Bamyan province in central Afghanistan. As a child, Fatema's family lived in Iran, where her father worked at a large-scale vegetable farm. Fatema's father and older brother inspired her interest in soil science and farming. Fatema studied at Kabul University and graduated in 2020. As a part of her studies, Fatema participated in a year-long Permaculture Program led by Rosemary Marrow from Australia. After graduating, Fatema received a scholarship to study in Uzbekistan, where she focused on bioeconomy and irrigation. Fatema moved to the United States in 2023 and has been working at the Farm at Willow Run in Harrisonburg for the past two seasons. Fatema shares about her interest in organic farming and her overall aim to be a role model for others in caring for the earth, soil, and the bioeconomy.

## **S5 - E26: Flowers, Pollinators, Health, and Peace with Dr. Christine Mahoney, Pt. II**

How can we care for the soil and farm for better health outcomes? Dr. Christine Mahoney of the [University of Virginia's Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy](#) and [Wayflowering Flower Farm](#) joins Mary and Eric for a conversation about soil health, regenerative farm design, and organic flower farming. Dr. Mahoney shares how better outcomes, such as health, peace, and tranquility, can be achieved through enriching the soil, enhancing biodiversity, sequestering carbon, strengthening local ecosystems, and supporting pollinator habitats. For Dr. Mahoney, caring for the soil and creating an incredible place for flowers, bees, butterflies, and other pollinators is foundational and inspirational.

**4 the Soil Blog** Check out the latest 4 the Soil blog!

## January

### **January 13, 9:00 -11:00 AM: Introduction to Rabbit Farming (Virtual Meeting)**

Join Royal Roots Farm, a Prince George Rabbitry to learn the fundamentals of rabbit production, including breeds, housing, feeding, and marketing. This workshop provides a complete introduction to raising rabbits as a profitable and low-maintenance livestock option for small and beginning farmers. Participants will learn about breed selection, housing systems, feeding requirements, reproduction cycles, record-keeping, and basic health and biosecurity practices. The session will also cover marketing opportunities, including direct sales, value-added products, and integration into diversified farm enterprises. Whether you aim to produce meat, breeding stock, manure for gardens, or student project animals, this training offers practical tools to confidently begin or expand your rabbit operation at home or on the farm. Ideal for beginners seeking to add efficient, low-cost livestock to their operation. For more information, please contact Tabitha Bugg at 804.892.2997 or [tbugg@vsu.edu](mailto:tbugg@vsu.edu).

**January 14, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM: Aerial Imagery for Small Farms (South Hill, VA)**

January is a great time to learn how aerial imagery can assist farmers in the upcoming growing season by enabling early detection of disease and pests, determining plant health, and identifying skips and overlaps in nutrient application, herbicide application, and planting. Imagery can also benefit other producers and herdsman by helping them scout pastures to check on livestock. For more information, contact Tim Sexton at 804.524.1028 or [tsexton@vsu.edu](mailto:tsexton@vsu.edu).

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**January 14, 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM: Soil Sampling for Farmers (South Hill, VA)**

Tammy Holler, Soil Nutrient Management Specialist, will discuss the importance of receiving regular soil sample results to ensure maximum performance for your crops. She will discuss proper techniques for taking soil samples, procedures for preparing them, and where to send them for results. She will also discuss how to read the test results and recommendations to improve crop production. For more info, contact: Marilyn Estes at 804.481.0485 or email at [mestes@vsu.edu](mailto:mestes@vsu.edu).

**January 14, 7:00 - 8:15 PM: Small Ruminant Webinar Series - Nutrition and Feed Efficiency (Virtual)**

Join for an engaging and informative monthly webinar series dedicated to small ruminant production and management. Designed for farmers, extension agents, educators, and industry professionals, this series covers a wide range of topics critical to the success and sustainability of sheep and goat operations. Each session features expert speakers, practical insights, and opportunities for Q&A. Whether you're just starting out or looking to refine your practices, this series offers valuable tools and knowledge to support your success. For more information, contact Jessica Harris at 804.524.5964 or [jharris@vsu.edu](mailto:jharris@vsu.edu).

**January 14, 1:00 - 5:00 PM: Tree Crop Workshop (Columbia, MO)**

Join for a professional development opportunity that brings together leaders in sustainable agriculture and tree crop industry innovation. This workshop is designed for growers, natural resource professionals, entrepreneurs, and enthusiasts seeking to advance their expertise in tree crop management and in integrating agroforestry. Participants will gain valuable insights from distinguished industry leaders, leading researchers, and innovative farmers. This workshop will host structured breakout sessions to foster meaningful dialogue and learning in small-group settings. Come prepared with your questions.

**January 15, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM: 2026 Agroforestry Symposium: Growing Opportunities in Emerging Tree Crop Industries (Columbia, MO, OR online via Zoom)**

Join the Center for Agroforestry for our 17th Annual Agroforestry Symposium! This year, they will bring together farmers, researchers, industry professionals, and stakeholders to explore tree crop production and agroforestry systems. The symposium features expert panels on farm-level management and economics, regional development opportunities, and mixed species agroforestry systems.

Whether you're interested in scaling tree nut industries, exploring specialty crop development, or learning about sustainable farming practices, this hybrid event offers both in-person networking opportunities and virtual participation options to dig deep into these intertwined subjects. More details and registration coming soon!

**January 15, 6:00 - 7:00 PM: Biosecurity & Common Health Concerns for Small Ruminant Producers (Virtual)**

This talk will focus on providing small ruminant producers with tools and practices to help prevent disease spread. Focus will be on common areas and practices on your farm that can be easily modified to help prevent disease introduction. There will also be discussion on common health concerns seen in a small ruminant production system. The discussion will focus on ways to mitigate these issues and practical treatment options. For more info, contact: Amanda "Mandy" Fletcher 804.892.0108 | [afletcher@vsu.edu](mailto:afletcher@vsu.edu)

**January 17, 10:00 AM -12:00 PM: Nutrient Management (Warfield, VA)**

If you are thinking about starting a homestead, farm, or just want to sharpen your farming skills, this workshop is for you. Learn how to take your own soil samples and interpret soil test results. Also, learn about a variety of nutrient sources. Please dress appropriately for the weather; this is an outdoor event. For more info, contact: Tammy Holler 804.895.9472 | [tholler@vsu.edu](mailto:tholler@vsu.edu)

**January 17, 6:00 - 8:00 PM: Grant Writing For Small - Scale Farmers (Virtual)**

Build confidence in applying for grants by joining farmer Anita Roberson of Botanical Bites & Provisional, LLC, as she shares basic grant writing information. Anita will discuss what is needed to help farmers secure multiple grant awards. She will share information on planning, developing budgets, and understanding grant scoring criteria. She will also share some unique tips and talk about her experience as a grant reviewer. For more info, contact: Michael Carter Sr. 804.481.1163 | [mcarter@vsu.edu](mailto:mcarter@vsu.edu)

**January 19, 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM: AgriMeals for Change (Petersburg, VA)**

The AgriMeal for Change Packaging Event unites community members, organizations, and volunteers to support food security by packaging and distributing nutritious, shelf-stable meals for individuals and families in need. With a dedicated team of 200 volunteers, this event goes beyond meal preparation—it fosters community building, provides hands-on education, and strengthens service-oriented partnerships. Together, volunteers will produce thousands of healthy meals in a short period, delivering meaningful impact to local food banks, shelters, and households experiencing food shortages.

**January 19, 9:00 AM 1:00 PM: VSU - VCE Youth Day of Service (Petersburg, VA)**

Excited to have you join on January 19th from 9:00 AM–1:00 PM at Virginia State University. This year, there will be partnering with AgriMeal for Change to prepare healthy, shelf-stable meals that help reduce hunger in our communities. Together, we'll package thousands of meals that will support local food banks, shelters, and families in need. Please wear comfortable shoes, as there will be standing for about an hour during the meal-packing activity. After our service project, lunch will be provided, followed by an inspiring session on 4-H leadership, officer roles, and exciting travel opportunities.

**January 20, 8:30 AM -1:00 PM: Vegetable Production Update (Phenix, VA)**

Vegetable production in Central Virginia faces challenges in planning, production, processing, and marketing. The latest scientific production information will help address the needs of the area's produce auctions, local farmers' markets, and the new communities. Specialists from VCE and industry will be the focus of the program. For more info, contact: Forrest Hobbs 804.892.5310 | [fhobbs@vsu.edu](mailto:fhobbs@vsu.edu)

**January 20, 9:00- 11:00 AM: Small Farm Orientation (Virtual)**

This two-hour Zoom course is for new farmers with zero to five years of experience operating a farm. Ben Dukes, regional program assistant for the VSU Small Farm Outreach Program, and Dr. Nartea, extension specialist for VSU Integrated Marketing Program, will walk attendees through the process of how to develop a productive and profitable farm. Participants will receive a Small Farm Orientation manual. For more info, contact: Ben Dukes 804.731.7916 | [bdukes@vsu.edu](mailto:bdukes@vsu.edu)

**January 20, 6:00 - 7:30 PM: Forage Improvements for Small Ruminants (Virtual)**

Join for this valuable virtual session to learn more about forages and how LeeDer Farms uses them in their Katahdin sheep operation. Lee Holcomb, from LeeDer Farms, has nearly 20 years of professional experience visiting farms throughout North Carolina and advising livestock producers on forage management. He has worked for both Soil & Water Conservation Districts and USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the Piedmont of North Carolina. Being a sheep producer himself, he has learned about the management of both cool- and warm-season forages and the benefits they can add to your livestock operation. Topics will include the implementation of Prescribed Grazing and temporary fencing solutions to improve forage utilization. For more info, contact: Amanda "Mandy" Fletcher 804.892.0108 | [afletcher@vsu.edu](mailto:afletcher@vsu.edu)

**January 21, 1:30 - 4:30 PM: Chesapeake Herbshed Gathering & Organoleptics Taste Testing (Silver Spring, MD)**

Join members of the Chesapeake Herbshed, a peer-to-peer network of regional herb growers, buyers, and product makers, for a three-hour, hands-on community session. Participants will engage in comparisons and tastings of regionally grown and dried herbs through organoleptic testing—using the senses of taste, touch, smell, and sight. Guests are invited to bring samples of Chamomile, Calendula, Lemon Balm, Peppermint, Ashwagandha, or Burdock to contribute. Connect with fellow farmers and hear from local apothecarists about their sourcing considerations when buying herbs directly from growers. The session will also include guidance on herbal product regulations from Henriette Van Ouden of UMES and a tea tasting led by Bettina Perry of Charmington Holistic, comparing locally grown and globally sourced herbs. Tickets to this event are also available as an add-on to our [27th Annual Winter Conference: Pivot, Care, Grow](#), taking place in the same building on Thursday, January 22, and Friday, January 23.

**January 21, 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm: Ethical Seed Farming Intensive (Silver Spring, MD)**

Grow your skills—and your seeds! This Seed Farming Intensive offers a comprehensive, hands-on exploration of seed production, guiding participants through every stage of the process and equipping them with the knowledge needed to confidently integrate seed stewardship into their farm.

Activities include:

- Live demonstrations of seed-processing techniques, including threshing, winnowing, screening, fermentation, drying, storage, and germination
- Presentations on the plant life cycle, flower and seed production, and the history of human collaboration in developing food crops
- Discussions on key topics in the seed world, including community- and cooperative-based seed work, the consolidation of seed businesses, and seeds as tools of empowerment
- Self-reflective storytelling centered on seeds and food.

**January 21, 1:30 - 4:30 PM: Fermentation 101: Preserving the Harvest with HEX Ferments (Silver Spring, MD)**

Join Meaghan Carpenter — Co-Founder and Head Food Alchemist at HEX Ferments — for a delicious dive into the world of vegetable fermentation. Explore the rich history of fermented foods and discover how these age-old traditions support modern wellness. In this interactive, small-group workshop, you'll create a seasonal vegetable ferment from scratch and learn how to care for it at home. You'll leave with a jar of your creation, the recipe, and the skills to keep the magic bubbling in your own kitchen. All tools and ingredients are provided. Hands-on. Limited to 15 participants. Light chopping is involved. Tickets to this event are also available as an add-on to our 27th Annual Winter Conference: Pivot, Care, Grow, taking place in the same building on Thursday, January 22, and Friday, January 23.

**January 21, 3:00 - 5:00 PM: Urban Tree Selection for Aesthetics and Longevity (Petersburg, VA)**

People sometimes choose a tree to plant in an urban area because it looks good at the nursery. However, choosing a tree because it looks good is not the same as choosing a piece of furniture for your home. If the correct tree species are selected and maintained, the potential for enjoyment will last for generations. Join for our Urban Forestry workshop where the discussion will focus on proper tree selection for the site and to where it will be planted. An additional workshop will detail the proper planting and maintenance of urban trees. For more info, contact: James Gibson 804.720.6826 | [jegibson@vsu.edu](mailto:jegibson@vsu.edu)

**January 22-23, 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM: Future Harvest's 27th Annual Conference: Pivot, Care, Grow (MD)**

Get ready to learn, create, and nourish yourself at the 2026 Conference. Whether you want to improve your marketing, deepen your soil care, rethink your business model, or explore healing food traditions, there's something to meet you right where you are. Explore hands-on and thought-provoking offerings like Herb & Fruit Drying and Processing for Market, Documenting Foodways, Let's Talk About Farmer Cooperatives, The Happy CSA Farmer, Cultivating Community: The Agrovillage Model, Wool in the Soil, and Growing for Diversity. Check out the full agenda and speakers in the [Program Preview](#), now live online. With more than 30 sessions, including Farmer Meet-ups, there's something for everyone—from new growers to seasoned producers. [learn more & register](#). More than 30 sessions on a range of topics for advanced and beginning farmers, activists and educators, two keynote addresses, farmer-to-farmer chats & more!

**January 24, 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM: Harvesting Hope – A Mental Health Initiative for Farmers (Petersburg, VA)**

Agricultural producers encounter a distinct set of mental health challenges arising from operational uncertainties, financial volatility, environmental pressures, and the demanding nature of production agriculture. These stressors can significantly impact personal well-being, decision-making capacity, and long-term business sustainability. This Mental Health Training Class is designed to provide producers with a structured foundation in mental health awareness, emphasizing the identification of stress indicators, early signs of mental health concerns, and appropriate response strategies. The curriculum integrates evidence-based practices with producer-relevant scenarios, promoting practical skills in stress management, communication, and peer support within agricultural operations. In addition, the program addresses the persistent stigma associated with mental health in rural communities and highlights available professional and community resources. By strengthening mental health literacy among producers, this training aims to enhance resilience, support healthier work environments, and contribute to the overall stability and sustainability of agricultural enterprises. For more info, contact: Yowel Peralta, 804.892.0282 | [yperalta@vsu.edu](mailto:yperalta@vsu.edu)

**January 26, 1:00 - 3:00 PM: How To Find and Apply For Grants For Your Small Farm (Virtual)**

This webinar is for small farmers new to grant search and application. You will learn about: where to find grants (private, corporate, government, and non-government, and community foundations), how to determine eligibility, and learn to write proposals, if needed. Other topics to be discussed include a notice of funding availability and a general call for applications. For more info, contact: Ben Dukes, 804.731.7916 | [bdukes@vsu.edu](mailto:bdukes@vsu.edu)

**January 26, 4:30 - 6:30 PM: Meat Producers Listening Session (Shared Freezer Storage) (Roanoke, VA)**

There will be a Farmer Listening Session around the Shared Freezer Storage of Meat Producers on Monday, January 26th, from 4:30 - 6:30 at Golden Cactus Brewing in Roanoke. Food will be provided by Crystal Springs Grocery and Yard Bull Meats. Conversations will be about Location, Policies & Management, Operations, Risk, and Possibilities. Please distribute the attached flyer accordingly. Feel free to reach out to me with any questions. Location Golden Cactus Brewing, 214 5th St. SW, Roanoke, VA 24016.

**January 26, 6:30 PM- 8:00 PM: Seed Keeping and Seed Breeding (Virtual)**

Join for a webinar panel featuring prominent seed keepers and seed breeders from Virginia and Pennsylvania: Edmund Frost of Commonwealth Seeds, Jason Myers-Benner of Tanglywoods, and Owen Taylor of True Love Seeds. Learn seed-keeping basics, and hear about the ground-breaking work that these farmers are doing to adapt and develop new vegetable seed varieties for our region. The panelists will also discuss the cultural significance of keeping seeds and passing down the stories that they carry. For more info, contact: Marian Dalke. 540.232.6010 | [mdalke@vt.edu](mailto:mdalke@vt.edu).

**January 27, 8:00 AM: 2026 Forage Conference-Wytheville (Wytheville, VA)**

Registration begins at 8:00 am - 8:50 am, with the conference itself beginning at 8:50 am. Join for a discussion about managing for healthy animals and healthy soil on grazing operations. Learn how to improve soil and animal performance and lower long-term input costs on your grazing operation! Dr. Terry Swecker, DVM, PhD, is retired from the VA-MD School of Vet Medicine, where he spent 44 years in teaching, research, and practice. Doug Peterson is retired from NRCS, where he served for over 30 years, and most recently as the Regional Soil Health Specialist for Missouri and Iowa.

**January 27, 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM: Grazing Management and Herd Health Small Farmers (Virginia Beach, VA)**

January is the perfect time to prepare for the upcoming year by calving and improving pastures. There will be discussions on how to improve the forage quality to improve herd health and weight gains, and therefore increase profits. There will be a discussion on alternative forages to help deal with drought stress, winter freezes, and other management issues. For more info, contact: Tim Sexton (804) 524-1028 | [tsexton@vsu.edu](mailto:tsexton@vsu.edu)

**January 28, 8:00 AM: 2026 Forage Conference-Catham (Catham, VA)**

Registration begins at 8:00 am - 8:50 am, with the conference itself beginning at 8:50 am. Join for a discussion about managing for healthy animals and healthy soil on grazing operations. Learn how to improve soil and animal performance and lower long-term input costs on your grazing operation! Dr. Terry Swecker, DVM, PhD, is retired from the VA-MD School of Vet Medicine, where he spent 44 years in teaching, research, and practice. Doug Peterson is retired from NRCS, where he served for over 30 years, most recently as the Regional Soil Health Specialist for Missouri and Iowa.

**January 28, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM: Herd Health and Forage Improvement for Animal Production (South Boston, VA).**

Animal producers who attend will discover how to improve soil health, which improves forage health and quality and therefore improves herd health, and how to produce optional forages during times of stress or drought and weight gains, which means higher profits. There will be discussions on methods that enable to have pastures to be grazed more efficiently and the needs of different forage species For more info, contact: Tim Sexton, (804) 524-1028 | [tsexton@vsu.edu](mailto:tsexton@vsu.edu)

**January 30- February 1, 8:00 AM- 3:00 PM: Junior MANRRS Leadership Institute - AI/STEM Track (Petersburg, VA)**

The Jr. MANRRS Leadership Institute is an exciting, youth-centered experience designed to bridge that gap. Through interactive workshops, team challenges, and real-world problem solving, participants explore emerging technologies, agricultural innovation, and leadership development. Teens will connect with professionals, mentors, and peers who share their curiosity and drive to make a difference. This event empowers youth to: Discover how science, technology, and leadership intersect in the modern workforce; Develop critical digital and career-ready skills through engaging, hands-on sessions. Demonstrate confidence, collaboration, and creativity as future leaders. For more info, contact: Nicole Swinson, (804) 524-3084 | [nswinson@vsu.edu](mailto:nswinson@vsu.edu)

**January 29, 8:00 AM: 2026 Forage Conference-Warrenton (Warrenton, VA)**

Registration begins at 8:00 am - 8:50 am, with the conference itself beginning at 8:50 am. Join for a discussion about managing for healthy animals and healthy soil on grazing operations. Learn how to improve soil and animal performance and lower long-term input costs on your grazing operation! Dr. Terry Swecker, DVM, PhD, is retired from the VA-MD School of Vet Medicine, where he spent 44 years in teaching, research, and practice. Doug Peterson is retired from NRCS, where he served for over 30 years, and most recently, as the Regional Soil Health Specialist for Missouri and Iowa.

**January 30, 8:00 AM: 2026 Forage Conference-Weyers Cave -Livestream (Weyers Cave, VA)**

Registration begins at 8:00 am - 8:50 am, with the conference itself beginning at 8:50 am. Join for a discussion about managing for healthy animals and healthy soil on grazing operations. Learn how to improve soil and animal performance and lower long-term input costs on your grazing operation! Dr. Terry Swecker, DVM, PhD, is retired from the VA-MD School of Vet Medicine, where he spent 44 years in teaching, research, and practice. Doug Peterson is retired from NRCS, where he served for over 30 years, and most recently, as the Regional Soil Health Specialist for Missouri and Iowa.

**January 30, 6:00 PM: 2026 Growers Academy Kickoff (Warrenton, VA)**

Join Fauquier Education Farm for the kickoff of the 2026 Growers Academy season. This in-person session will walk participants through the full calendar year in the garden, including suggested planting dates, vegetable varieties grown, and the practices used at the farm. The event will also introduce the topics and schedule for other upcoming free workshops in the Growers Academy series. This event is free and open to the public, and no registration is required. For more information, contact Jim Hankins at [fauquieredfarm@gmail.com](mailto:fauquieredfarm@gmail.com).

## February

**February 3, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM: Aerial Imagery for Small Farms (Suffolk, VA)**

Farmers and Growers will learn how aerial imagery can be useful for small farmers and also economical. Learn how it can save time and money through early detection of disease and pests, as well as other environmental issues. By analyzing imagery, you may be able to incorporate other precision agricultural practices. For more info, contact: Tim Sexton, (804) 524-1028 | [tsexton@vsu.edu](mailto:tsexton@vsu.edu).

**February 3, 1:30 – 3:00 PM: Virginia Urban Agriculture and Small Acreage Landowner Information Session (Fairfax, VA)**

You are invited to join an in-person information session with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service to learn about the financial, cost-share, and technical assistance programs and resources that are available through the USDA. The session will provide urban agriculture and small-acreage farmers with details on how and where to get started. Please RSVP and register for the information session at: <https://forms.gle/uC2DPMK7nuQ7LDvr8>

**February 3, 5:30 - 7:00 PM: Grant Writing for Farmers (Harrisonburg, VA)**

Learn tips and tricks from the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center about how to apply for grants to support your farm. This workshop will also cover available grant opportunities from federal and state agencies, as well as foundations that can give your farm a financial boost to become successful. Hear from a farmer's testimony about her experience applying for and managing a grant. For more info, contact: Marian Dalke, (540) 232-6010 | [mdalke@vt.edu](mailto:mdalke@vt.edu).

**February 4, 10:00 AM -12:00 PM: Herd Health and Forage Improvement (Rapidan, VA)**

February is the perfect time to prepare for the upcoming year by calving and improving pastures. There will be discussions on how to improve forage quality to enhance herd health and weight gains, thereby increasing profits. There will be discussions on alternative forages to help deal with drought stress, or winter freezes, and other management issues. For more information, please contact Roland Terrell at (804) 892-4612 or [rterrell@vsu.edu](mailto:rterrell@vsu.edu)

**February 4, 12:00 - 1:00 PM: The Phenology of Southwestern Virginia Farms and Landscapes (Virtual)**

This workshop will explore how the climate and microclimate of southwestern Virginia drive a continuous flow of repetitive cycles and rhythms in which the natural world operates. Anyone wishing to grow and raise anything on a farm, or in their backyard, will benefit from this high-level overview of these amazing natural interactions. Ideas for working in harmony with these natural rhythms and for modifying them to benefit production will be discussed. While tailored to the three-dimensional, complex terrain of the Virginia mountains, concepts can be applied to any location. For more information, please contact Wayne Browning at (804) 760-3932 or [wbrowning@vsu.edu](mailto:wbrowning@vsu.edu)

**February 5, 12:00 - 1:00 PM: VSU SFOP Beginning Farmers - Lunch and Learn - How do you price your farm products ( Virtual)**

This workshop will explore how the climate and microclimate of southwestern Virginia drive a continuous flow of repetitive cycles and rhythms in which the natural world operates. Anyone wishing to grow and raise anything on a farm, or in their backyard, will benefit from this high-level overview of these amazing natural interactions. Ideas for working in harmony with these natural rhythms and for modifying them to benefit production will be discussed. While tailored to the three-dimensional, complex terrain of the Virginia mountains, concepts can be applied to any location. For more information, please contact Michael Carter Sr at (804) 481-1163 or [mcarter@vsu.edu](mailto:mcarter@vsu.edu)

**February 6, 10:00 - 12:00 PM: High Tunnel Soil Preparation for Spring Planting (Petersburg, VA)**

This workshop will demonstrate to farmers how to manage nutrients. There will be lessons about the proper rates, timing, and placement of Nitrogen and Phosphorus, soil testing, the addition of lime, and how soil nutrients affect the water quality of our groundwater and surface waters. There will be lessons on why soils vary in their ability to grow a particular crop. Dress appropriately; this is an outdoor event. For more information, please contact Tammy Holler at (804) 895-9472 or [tholler@vsu.edu](mailto:tholler@vsu.edu)

**February 7, 10:00 - 11:00 AM: High Tunnel Soil Preparation for Spring Planting (Warfield, VA)**

This workshop will demonstrate to farmers how to manage nutrients. There will be lessons about the proper rates, timing, and placement of Nitrogen and Phosphorus, soil testing, the addition of lime, and how soil nutrients affect the water quality of our groundwater and surface waters. There will be lessons on why soils vary in their ability to grow a particular crop. Dress appropriately; this is an outdoor event. For more information, please contact Tammy Holler at (804) 895-9472 or [tholler@vsu.edu](mailto:tholler@vsu.edu).

**February 7, 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM: Growers' Protections under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) Part I (Virtual)**

As a grower, you are protected under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA). The PACA protects growers and businesses dealing in fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables by establishing and enforcing a code of fair business practices and by helping companies resolve business disputes. Learn how the PACA provides a forum where firms that buy and sell fruits and vegetables can settle commercial disputes outside civil courts by understanding your rights and responsibilities. In addition, PACA, you will broaden your understanding of trade terms, payment requirements, federal inspection certificates, and more. This is part 1 of a two-part series. For more information, please contact Yowei Peralta at (804) 892-0282 or [yperalta@vsu.edu](mailto:yperalta@vsu.edu)

**Feb 07, 12:00 – 2:30 PM: Master Gardener Series: Pruning Trees & Shrubs (Monterey, VA)**

Join at The Village as there will be hosting of Master Gardener Emeritus Pamm McDowell for a series of educational workshops. It may be cold and blustery outside, but it is a great time to prune your fruit trees and shrubs, so bundle up! In this workshop, Pamm will teach you the best tools to use, how to care for your tools, and how to prune different types of fruit. This will be a hands-on class, so be prepared to prune as you learn the four Ds of pruning! Please contact us if you need financial support to attend the event. Lodging options are available for those traveling long distances... or those who just want to spend the night at The Village! To discuss lodging options, contact our Executive Director, Tim, for more information. You can reach him at: [tim@amivillage.org](mailto:tim@amivillage.org)

**February 9-11, 9:30 AM - 12:30 PM: Care Farming Network National Conference (Gaithersburg, MD)**

Join for the 2nd Annual Care Farming Network National Conference — February 9–11, 2026, at the Gaithersburg Marriott Washingtonian Center in Maryland! Be part of a one-of-a-kind gathering of care farmers, practitioners, and advocates from across the country as coming together to learn, connect, and grow. This year's event will feature: Dynamic speakers and sessions to inspire care farmers of all levels with new ideas; A special farm tour at Red Wiggler Care Farm; A welcoming reception to kick off the conference in the community; Unparalleled opportunities to connect with care farmers and allies nationwide. Check out the Agenda at a Glance on our website for a detailed schedule. Stay at the Gaithersburg Marriott Washingtonian Center for a seamless, connected experience. Attendees receive a discounted hotel rate and enjoy the added benefit of being right in the heart of the action — sharing morning coffee, evening conversations, and those spontaneous connections that make this gathering so memorable.

**February 10, 1:00 - 3:00 PM: Pruning your Grapes for Improved Production (Warfield, VA)**

Are your grape or muscadine plants not producing the fruit you want ?? Forrest Hobbs will teach attendees proper techniques for pruning their grape/muscadine vines to improve production. Cutting back the old wood makes room for new growth and reduces disease, improving fruit production. He will discuss which parts of the plant need pruning and the proper tools for pruning your plants successfully. For more information, please contact Marilyn Estes at (804) 481-0485 or [mestes@vsu.edu](mailto:mestes@vsu.edu).

**February 11, 9:00 AM -12:00 PM: Irrigation and Soil Moisture Management For Farmers (South Hill, VA)**

February is a perfect time to learn about irrigation options and how to determine when the soil and the plants need supplemental irrigation. You will learn about the moisture availability of different soils, how to use irrigation methods to reduce pests and disease, and how it can also assist with nutrient application. For more information, contact Tim Sexton at (804) 524-1028 or [tsexton@vsu.edu](mailto:tsexton@vsu.edu)

**February 11, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM: Agriculture, Floriculture & Greenhouse Systems Student Tour (Petersburg, VA)**

This tour introduces students to agriculture, floriculture, greenhouse systems, and career pathways within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). Students will meet faculty and staff, learn about USDA scholarships, internship opportunities, MANRRS, and careers in agricultural sciences. Demonstrations include drone technology for pasture management, indoor production in Cropbox units, aquaculture greenhouse activities, trolley talks, and hands-on experiences such as weeding or hydroponic transplanting. The visit also includes an overview of academic majors, success stories of former students, scholarships, and admissions guidance. Ideal for schools exploring agriculture careers, STEM pathways, and hands-on learning. For more information, contact Tabitha Bugg at 804.892.2997 or [tbugg@vsu.edu](mailto:tbugg@vsu.edu).

**February 11, 3:00 - 5:00 PM: Fruit Tree Pruning (King George, VA)**

Good pruning techniques 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 tree's injury or death. Pruning reduces overall tree size, improves structural strength, increases fruit production, and improves the quality of fruit. Come and join 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. For more information, contact Michael Carter Sr. at (804) 481-1163, or [mrcarter@vsu.edu](mailto:mrcarter@vsu.edu). or Forrest Hobbs at (804)892-5910 or [fhobbs@vsu.edu](mailto:fhobbs@vsu.edu).

**February 11, 5:00 -7:00 PM: Basic organic urban gardening and composting (Petersburg, VA)**

Urban gardening is the practice of growing plants, fruits, and vegetables in urban environments, using spaces such as balconies, rooftops, community plots, and vacant lots. It encompasses a wide range of activities from small-scale container gardening to large urban farms and offers benefits such as improved access to fresh food and environmental sustainability. For more information, contact James Gibson at (804) 720-6826, or [jegibson@vsu.edu](mailto:jegibson@vsu.edu)

**February 17, 9:00 - 11:00 AM: Small Farm Orientation (Norfolk, VA)**

This two-hour Hybrid (In Person and Virtual) course is for new farmers with zero to five years of experience operating a farm. Ben Dukes, regional program assistant for the VSU Small Farm Outreach Program, and Dr. Nartea, extension specialist for the VSU Integrated Marketing Program, will walk attendees through the process of developing a productive and profitable farm. Participants will receive a Small Farm Orientation manual. For more information, contact Ben Dukes at (804) 731-7916 or [bdukes@vsu.edu](mailto:bdukes@vsu.edu).

**February 17, 9:00 AM -11:00 AM: Agriculture Business Structure Planning Workshop (Norfolk, VA)**

Agriculture and rural businesses will have the opportunity to review different business structures. Planning correctly will protect individuals from personal liability for business debt and reduce some of the financial risk involved in agriculture. Specialists will present multiple options for agricultural businesses to choose from when planning their business structure. For more information, contact Forrest Hobbs at (804) 892-5310, or [fhobbs@vsu.edu](mailto:fhobbs@vsu.edu).

**February 18, 9:30 AM -12:30 PM: Farm Tax Preparation (South Hill, VA)**

Filing your farm taxes is one of the most important skills for successful farming! Join Darrell Tennie from the Tennie Group to gain the knowledge needed to maximize your tax refund by learning how to correctly file your Schedule F. He will also discuss the benefits and requirements of setting up the different tax entities of an LLC, Soil Proprietorship, etc. For more information, contact Marilyn Estes at (804) 481-0485, or [mestes@vsu.edu](mailto:mestes@vsu.edu)

**February 18, 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM: Pine Bark Beetle (Courtland, VA)**

Pine bark beetles are insects that attack and breed in the inner bark of pine trees, often killing them by introducing a symbiotic fungus that disrupts the flow of nutrients while usually targeting stressed and weakened trees. Some species, like the Southern pine beetle, can cause major damage during outbreaks, which are exacerbated by factors such as drought and warmer winters. For more information, contact Garry Banks at (804) 760-3615, or [gbanks@vsu.edu](mailto:gbanks@vsu.edu)

**February 18, 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM: How to Plant A Tree the Right Way (Petersburg, VA)**

Sometimes, digging a hole and dropping a young sapling in it will suffice, and your tree will survive. However, to increase the odds of the sapling living and becoming mature, there are correct planting steps that will increase the likelihood of it reaching its full potential and will be enjoyed for generations to come. For more information, contact James Gibson at (804) 720-6826, or [jegibson@vsu.edu](mailto:jegibson@vsu.edu).

**February 19, 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM: Hands-On Rabbit Processing Demonstration (Petersburg, VA)**

This live demonstration walks participants through each step of ethical rabbit processing, from safe handling and dispatch to skinning, evisceration, sanitation, cooling, and packaging. The training emphasizes proper technique, food safety requirements, and efficiency for both home use and small-scale on-farm sales. Participants will observe professional methods, ask questions in real time, gain confidence, and prepare rabbits in a respectful, efficient manner. This session is ideal for producers who want to build self-sufficiency, improve processing skills, or expand value-added opportunities within their livestock and homestead operations. For more information, contact Tabitha Bugg at (804) 892-2997, or [tbugg@vsu.edu](mailto:tbugg@vsu.edu)

**February 20, 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM: Shenandoah Valley Small Farm Celebration (Harrisonburg, VA)**

Gather with other small farmers in the Valley to celebrate your successes over the past year and prepare for the season ahead. In addition to networking, this event will feature an interactive program titled "A Farmers' History of the Shenandoah Valley." Come add your farm's history to the timeline and help develop this community resource that farmers can build on year after year. For more information, contact Marian Dalke at (540) 232-6010 or [mdalke@vt.edu](mailto:mdalke@vt.edu).

**February 23, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM: Chowan Basin Board Meeting (Courtland, VA)**

Join the Chowan Basin Soil & Water Conservation District's monthly board meeting for updates on conservation planning, producer assistance, and priority watershed activities in the region. Board members review participation in cost-share programs and ongoing conservation practices, such as cover cropping, rotational grazing, riparian buffers, and waterwise management. Attendees can learn how district decisions support soil health, protect waterways, and enhance local agricultural sustainability. This meeting is a great opportunity for producers and residents to stay connected with conservation efforts, voice local concerns, and understand emerging opportunities for technical or financial support throughout the Chowan Basin service area. For more information, contact Tabitha Bugg at (804) 892-2997, or [tbugg@vsu.edu](mailto:tbugg@vsu.edu)

**February 26, 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM: Piedmont SWCD Board Meeting (Farmville, VA)**

Attend the Piedmont Soil & Water Conservation District Board Meeting to gain an in-depth look at agricultural and conservation initiatives serving Amelia, Nottoway, and Prince Edward counties. Discussions typically include cost-share program updates, best management practices, landowner outreach, watershed priorities, forestry and grazing initiatives, youth education, and upcoming workshops. Attendees gain insight into district decision-making, project planning, and local resource concerns. Producers, educators, and community members are encouraged to attend to learn about opportunities for partnership, conservation funding, and technical assistance that support farm productivity, soil health, and water quality across the region. For more information, contact Tabitha Bugg at (804) 892-2997, or [tbugg@vsu.edu](mailto:tbugg@vsu.edu)

## Spring

**March 11, 10:00 - 11:00 AM: Web Soil Survey Basics (South Hill, VA)**

Learn the benefits of using the USDA online program, Web Soil Survey. WSS provides soil data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey. The soil survey is a detailed report on the soils of more than 95 percent of the nation's counties. It has maps with soil boundaries, photos, descriptions, and tables of soil properties and features. This will be a hands-on computer workshop. Using the Web Soil Survey program, you will look at each farmer's farm soil data. For more information, contact Tammy Holler at 804.895.9472 or [tholler@vsu.edu](mailto:tholler@vsu.edu).

**March 11, 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM: Web Soil Survey Basics (South Hill, VA)**

Come learn the benefits of using the USDA online program, Web Soil Survey. WSS provides soil data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey. The soil survey is a detailed report on the soils of more than 95 percent of the nation's counties. It has maps with soil boundaries, photos, descriptions, and tables of soil properties and features. This will be a hands-on computer workshop. Using the Web Soil Survey program, you will look at each farmer's farm soil data. For more information, contact Tammy Holler at 804.895.9472 or [tholler@vsu.edu](mailto:tholler@vsu.edu).

**April 23-24: 2026 Women in Ag Gathering - Save the Date!**

Dear Women in Ag Network and Ag Extension Agents, SAVE THE DATE for Women in Ag Gathering 2026 - "Exploring Agritourism in the Shenandoah Valley." This year's event is all about Agritourism! The event will be held on April 23-24, 2026. Day 1 includes: Learning how to work with local government; Networking with fellow women farmers and ranchers and learn how to leverage your online presence; Learning how to develop a risk mitigation plan or review and improve what you already have; Hearing from fellow producers about their experiences in agritourism. Day 2 takes participants on 1 of 3 tours, covering horticulture, livestock, and fruit and vegetable production. Tours and accommodations will take place in and around Rockingham and Page Counties. Registration will be shared in the New Year. Don't forget to follow along on [Facebook](#) or contact your local [Extension Office](#) for more information.

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