

Newsblast

March 15, 2024

Photo by Daniel Sessler on Unsplash

A Message from VBFRC

Hello everyone! We are excited to announce we received additional funding through USDA's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program for continued support of the Coalition. This funding will allow us to continue hosting regular Coalition networking events and will help us launch a new 12-month beginning farmer certification program. We will be opening nominations soon for our advisory group, which will meet quarterly to guide Coalition activities. Stay tuned for more de-

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 Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program is pleased to offer, An Introduction to Getting Your Hands Dirty. This is a 6-week course with two Saturday labs at the Fauquier Education Farm. The course is intended for serious gardeners and Beginning Farmers who want to sharpen their production skills by broadening their basic level of knowledge of the tools and concepts of professional crop production. Classes run April 3 to May 8. Cost is \$100 per person or \$150 per couple. For more information, contact Jim Hankins at fauquieredfarm@gmail.com or 540-338-4338.

Find more information on [their flyer](#).

Note: Green underlined text is a link

Announcements

2022 Census of Agriculture Released

The findings from the 2022 Census of Agriculture have been unveiled. Ag Web highlighted several key points derived from the data, such as the decrease in the number of farms and agricultural land, increased farm expenses, and higher farm income. In relation to soil health, Cover Crop Strategies delved into the implications of the data regarding the use and adoption of cover crops.

Glade Road Growing Farm Crew Position

Glade Road Growing is a small, family farm in Blacksburg. We grow certified naturally grown vegetables year-round as well as pasture-raised pork and poultry, and sell directly to the public through our farm stand and farm share. Besides ourselves, we hire 3-7 additional people to help us. Many of our employees return for multiple seasons. Our farm business provides a livelihood for our family and our staff, which we take seriously. Like most small farms, ours is a continual work in progress.

Vegetable Production Farmer at CarrollWood Farms

Carrollwood Farms is a family estate farm of over 4,000 acres in North Carolina's Stokes and Rockingham Counties. In addition to the vegetable farming division we also have an agronomy division, a building division, a grounds division, and a sitework and grading division. A hospitality division is being developed. In 2023, we donated over 2200 pounds of produce from the garden. This position is responsible for vegetable production in six acres of deer-fenced gardens as well as in a 3,000 square foot greenhouse.

Oatlands Smith Preserve Agricultural Land Available for Lease

The National Trust seeks proposals from qualified agricultural producers to lease one to six lots of various acreage of land known as Smith Preserve Parcel for agricultural purposes beginning in spring 2024. The National Trust has a desire to receive proposals from agricultural producers that will engage in responsible stewardship of the agricultural land. The area to be licensed includes six total lots (SP1-SP6 see map above), all of which are accessed from Gap Road. Successful applicants will propose an agricultural use consistent with the National Trust's desired agricultural practices. It is anticipated that the initial lease will be for a five-year term.

Southern Piedmont Climate-Smart Project

Southern Piedmont Climate-Smart Project is working with diverse vegetable farmers and farmers markets in the Southern Piedmont area to promote the adoption of climate-smart farming practices and expand markets for the sale of climate-smart commodities through an enhanced incentives program. This project is part of a historic multibillion-dollar investment by the USDA to expand markets for America's climate-smart commodities, leverage the greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart commodity production, and provide direct, meaningful benefits to production agriculture. 50 conventional and 50 organic farms will enroll a portion of their land (1–10 acres each) and manage it according to the program for four years.

Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture

This grant offers \$100/acre or animal unit to implement one Climate-Smart practice, selected from a list of eligible practices seen below, for one year. All interested producers with 2+ acres in production within the project boundary are encouraged to apply! To register, see the link below. Online applications will open at www.allianceforcsa.org until March 20.

Request for Proposals for Farmer-Led Innovations in Cover Cropping

The goal of the Farmer-Led Innovations in Cover Cropping project is to improve water quality, soil health, and crop production goals by expanding the acres of cover crops planted in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay watershed, especially those planted after soybeans. To achieve this goal, Sustainable Chesapeake is collaborating with Innovation Roundtable farmer participants and other partners (Virginia Soil Health Coalition, Virginia Tech, Virginia Natural Resources Conservation Service, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and TWI) to demonstrate and evaluate the performance of innovative cover crop technologies that reduce time, tractor passes, fuel use, or other input costs, and otherwise expand adoption of cover cropping systems.

Series

An Introduction to Getting Your Hands Dirty (Warrenton, VA)

This program is offered by the Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program and is a 6-week course with 2 Saturday labs at the Fauquier Education Farm. The course is intended for serious gardeners and Beginning Farmers who want to sharpen their production skills by broadening their basic level of knowledge of the tools and concepts of professional crop production. Classes run April 3 to May 8. Cost is \$100 per person or \$150 per couple.

The Woods in Your Backyard Online Course

This course promotes the stewardship of small parcels of land for the personal enjoyment of the owners and improved environmental quality for society. If you own 1 to 10 acres in the Eastern United States that is forested or has unmowed natural areas, this course is for you. It is for you if you have a mowed lawn area that you want to turn into a woodland. It is also for you if you are a land manager or part of a group that manages natural areas, such as a preserve or a community woodland. This course runs April 8 to June 17.

4 the Soil Highlights



Episode 24-6: For the Love of Soil with Bill "Pops" Patterson of Virginia USDA-NRCS Part 1

A love and curiosity for soil sparked a fifty-year career in soil and natural resources conservation. Mary Sketch Bryant and Eric Bendfeldt talk with Bill Patterson, retired district conservationist and present grazing specialist with Virginia USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, about his career and to hear his insights on soil health and grazing. Bill is affectionately called "Pops" and has served as a mentor for many farmers and soil conservationists. Bill was recently recognized at the Virginia Farm to Table

Conference for his lifetime achievement with the 2023 Carl Luebben Soil Health and Water Quality Award.

Blog: The 5 Priorities of Soil Health Management

How do you build soil health in your environment? Of course, it depends on what the soil needs.....

March Events

March 16, 10:00-12:00 pm: Laying Plastic Mulch in Your Operation (Providence Forge, VA)

Be a few steps ahead of the growing season by adding plastic mulch to your farming operation. This demonstration will include laying plastic on 3-foot-wide rows (with drip tape for irrigation). This season-extending farming method includes crowned beds to assist in water runoff, raising the soil temperature 10 degrees Fahrenheit, and ensuring irrigation is localized directly to the root zone. Light snacks, coffee, and water will be provided. The rain date is March 23, 10 am-noon.

March 16, 1:00-5:00 pm: Basic Beekeeping (Salem, VA)

Bee ownership is more than just the sweet taste of honey! Join us for the opportunity to see the inner workings of a beehive. This workshop will give you a basic understanding of what it takes to start your own hive, from site location to queen management, including an overview of what kinds of tools and equipment you need and the knowledge to treat pests and diseases. This workshop will be held near several working hives. The use of perfume, cologne, or scented body lotion is strongly discouraged in order to maintain a calm and docile environment for the bees. Please wear light-colored clothing and closed-toe shoes.

March 18, 10:00-12:00 pm: Pruning Fruit Trees for Beginners (King George, 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 to this workshop.

March 19, 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, will walk attendees through the process of how to develop a productive and profitable farm. Participants will receive a Small Farm Orientation manual.

March 19: Panel and Premiere of “Common Ground” (Richmond, VA)

Join Climate System Solutions for a screening of Common Ground, the second film on soil health and regenerative agriculture produced by Kiss the Ground. The screening will be followed by a CSS panel discussion focused on the successful uses of soil health and the Ag industry leaders—led by farmers—who are bringing these practices to fruition and into market.

March 19, 11:00-3:00 pm: VSU AgFest Block Party – National Ag Day Celebration (Petersburg, VA)

Join us at VSU AgFest, an annual celebration of agriculture and community spirit hosted by the Virginia State University College of Agriculture! At VSU AgFest, we come together to honor National Ag Day and showcase the vital role agriculture plays in our lives and communities.

March 21: Soil Health and Nutrient Management for Spring Production (Petersburg, VA)

VSU Nutrient Management Specialist Tammy Holler will discuss practices to help you increase your chances for success with spring crop production.

March 22-23: Beyond the Basics Advanced Landowner Retreat (Appomattox, VA)

Landowner Retreats are co-hosted by the Virginia Department of Forestry and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Retreats provide information on hardwood and pine forest management, legacy planning, management planning, and more. They combine classroom, field trip, and hands-on activities to teach concepts of sustainable woodland and wildlife management.

March 22-24: Gather to Grow: A Conference to Honor the Past and Shape the Future of Forest Farming

The Appalachian Beginning Forest Farmer Coalition's (ABFFC) Gather to Grow multi day Forest Farming Conference will be held in Roanoke, Virginia from March 22-24, 2024 and feature learning, networking, and strategic planning programs that will shape the future of forest farming of woodland crops such as botanicals, mushrooms, and decorative products in Appalachia and beyond.

March 22: Building Resilient Soils Field Day (Broadway, VA)

Join the Smith Creek Watershed Partnership on the farm in Broadway, VA for a field day discussing composting, cover crops, and grazing. RSVP by March 15th to Caitlin Worsham at cworsham@shenandoahalliance.org or 823-395-3320. Free to all!

March 23, 1:00-3:00 pm: Seed Starting Workshop (Warrenton, VA)

It all must start somewhere. Come join us for a seed starting workshop to find out everything you need to know about seed starting.

March 24-30: NC Cooperative Extension Small Farms Week (NC)

NC Small Farms week, new paths to profit.

March 27, 10:00-12:30 pm: Jamaican Sorrel Workshop (Petersburg, VA)

Jamaican sorrel (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*), also known as Florida cranberry, roselle, or just sorrel in the Caribbean, is a plant that dates back 6,000 years. Learn how to prepare, produce, process, and market the blossoms of this plant. This plant has incredible health benefits. According to Whole Foods, it is one of the top 10 food trends for 2022, and according to Forbes, "Hibiscus or Sorrel will be the biggest flavor of 2022." This plant is small-crop and backyard-friendly due to its harvest needs. The first 50 registered participants will receive a sorrel plant upon attendance on March 27.

March 27: Virginia Soil and Water Board Meeting (Cumberland, VA)

The Soil & Water Board will hold their first of their spring meeting sequence at Bear Creek State Park in Cumberland, VA. All Soil & Water Board meetings are open to the public.

March 27, 6:0-8:00 pm: Managing Silvopasture and Alley Cropping in Diversified Systems (Virtual)

Are you wondering how to manage complex Agroforestry systems like Silvopasture and Alley Cropping? Join us and learn from a pro! Adam Taylor manages Virginia Tech's Catawba Sustainability Center farm, which implements all kinds of Agroforestry projects and practices. If you're a farmer or land manager - this one's for you!

March 30, 10:00-12:00 pm: High Tunnel Maintenance and Repair (Rapidan, VA)

When growing vegetables in a controlled environment, you need a strong and safe structure for you and your vegetable crop. Now is the time to prepare your high tunnel for spring planting. The high tunnel must be planned, designed, and constructed from a manufactured kit with directions. Periodically inspect and repair the high tunnel as needed to maintain a strong structure. This workshop teaches you how.

March 30: Pasture Lambing Workshop (Petersburg, VA)

The half day workshop introduces sheep producers to pasture lambing, and provides hands-on exposure to activities associated with lambing. The research flock at VSU consists of 70 Barbados Blackbelly and St. Croix ewes. Peak lambing activity is projected for the day of the workshop.

April

April 2, 2:00-4:00 pm: Introduction to Permaculture (Petersburg, VA)

Permaculture is more than a new system of recordkeeping and urban agriculture. It is an ecological design system based on systems found in nature. Patrick Johnson, of Nanih Farm and Garden, Inc., will lead this workshop. Come learn about the key concepts surrounding the broader aspects of permaculture: care for people, care for the earth, and fair share.

April 3, 6:00-8:00 pm: Woods and Wildlife Management (Stuart, VA)

Join us for an engaging conversation with the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDoF). VDoF officials from the local area will share the agency's programs and opportunities for forestland owners.

April 6, 1:00-5:00: Health Fair at Carter Farms (Unionville, VA)

Health food demonstrations and cooking classes, pre and post natal workshops, vegan food, natural health discussions, health screenings, moon bounces, kite flying, face painting, and more.

April 9, 1:00-4:00 pm: Cut Flower Workshop (Gloucester, VA)

In this workshop, we will hear from Brent and Becky Heath and Jay and Denise Hutchins, experienced business owners and cut-flower experts. From their 28-acre farm in Gloucester, VA, they operate as flower bulb suppliers, garden writers, photographers, lecturers, consultants and educators. The property includes 8+ acres of educational, Chesapeake Bay-friendly gardens. This educational workshop will consist of harvesting, handling, and in-field bouquet-making demonstrations.

April 12, 12:00-2:30 pm: Hemp Dos and Don'ts (Virtual)

This course will review some of hemp's basic dos and don'ts. The workshop is excellent for folks interested in hemp but unfamiliar with what they should and should not do to be successful. The discussion will include the different types of industrial hemp, growing conditions, genetics, and post-harvest processing. A representative from VDACS Industrial Hemp will be on site to cover the dos and don'ts from a legal perspective.

April 13, 10:00-1:00 pm: Amplifying Indigenous Women's Perspectives for Healthy Soil and Water (Leesburg, VA)

Join for a day at Oatlands to support healthy soils and water by bringing our circles together and amplifying Indigenous perspectives. We will hear from three Indigenous women leaders, Dr. Lyla June Johnston, Rene' Locklear White, and Victoria Persinger Ferguson, who will share about Indigenous land management and foodways that support soil and water health. Each speaker will present their work and then they will engage in dialogue with one another and the audience, in a cross cultural exploration. Family friendly activities and networking will follow with educational and resource booths on soil and water stewardship available to explore.

April 13, 1:00-5:00 pm: Edna Lewis Birthday Celebration (Unionville, VA)

Learn about Chef Edna Lewis, enjoy some of her favorite recipes from local chefs and local farmers, moon bounces, storytelling and more.

April 16, 9:00-1:00 pm: Heirs Property 101 (Emporia, VA)

What is Heirs Property 101? Estate planning, land transition, land access and land succession. This training will equip extension staff with the tools to provide education, training and outreach to underprivileged producers and landowners to improve their understanding of Heirs Property at the community level. The workshop will also offer land inheritance education and resources to disadvantaged landowners and their heirs. Special guest presenter Lillian “Ebonie” Alexander, the Executive Director of the Black Family Land Trust, Inc., lives on her family farm in rural Southside Virginia. She will discuss the challenges families face in retaining land and family communication surrounding land inheritance. She will also share resources and steps for successful family land assets building and succession. The VSU Heirs Property team consists of the Small Farm Outreach Program, The Black Family Land Trust, The Tennie Group, S. Miller Law Firm and our Virginia Tech Extension Partners. The VSU-SFOP Heirs Property Train-the-Trainer model will be used to educate other extension professionals who work with landowners and underserved communities.

April 17, 10:00-12:00 pm: The Buzz about Beekeeping on Small Farms (Warrenton, NC)

Join us for the opportunity to see the inner workings of beehives. This workshop will give you a basic understanding of bee anatomy, pollination, queen management, how to start a hive, equipment needed, and the importance of bees to agriculture. Participants should avoid wearing perfume, cologne, or scented lotions for safety. Also, please wear light-colored clothing and closed-toe shoes.

April 20, 12:00-4:00 pm: Mother’s (Earth) Day (Unionville, VA)

Discover climate conscious techniques, practices, and solutions in farming and your community.

April 22, 10:00-12:00 pm: Alpaca Familiarization (Moyock, NC)

Alpacas are members of the camel family, domesticated by the people of the Peruvian Andes about 6,000 years ago for food, fuel (dung), and fiber. Prized for their fleecy coats, they boast a variety of 22 coat colors. Familiarization will include information about breeding techniques, standard diet, socialization and demeanor, lifespan and lifecycle. A short walk around the farm will conclude this workshop.

April 23-25: Virginia Forestry Summit (Charlottesville, VA)

Join landowners and natural resource professionals from across Virginia for this educational and networking event.

April 24, 9:00-12:00 pm: Aerial Imagery for Farmers (Petersburg, VA)

This workshop will provide farmers and gardeners with an excellent opportunity to learn about the history of aerial imagery, how it has been used, how to apply it to profitable agriculture production, how it can assist in making real-time decisions on disease and insect issues, and how it can have an impact on forestry management and herd health.

April 25, 12:00-4:30: A Tour of Urban Wood in Hooville (Charlottesville, VA)

Take a walk on the urban side and learn how trees and wood are used in an urban setting. On this tour of Charlottesville, we will eat lunch at, and tour, the tallest mass timber building on the east coast, the Apex Plaza. This is a 187,000 rentable square footage cross-laminated timber mixed-use building above a concrete parking garage at 120 Garrett Street in Charlottesville. The project represents the first large-scale mass timber project in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and one of only a handful in the United States.

April 30, 10:00-12:00 pm: Spring Floral Design (Goochland, VA)

Want to learn more about floral design? Join us for a make-and-take course!

Summer

May 2, 1:00-3:00 pm: Farm Transition Planning – Transferring Your Farm to the Next Generation (Goochland, VA)

This workshop will provide information and guidance on the decisions you can make today to help you plan and achieve financial and personal goals for the future of your farm. This workshop will explain essential provisions you need to include in your documents to accomplish your objectives during your lifetime, when disabled, and upon your death. You will also learn probate avoidance, cost-saving, conflict-reduction, and privacy-enhancing techniques.

May 3-4: Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat (Abingdon, VA)

Landowner Retreats are co-hosted by the Virginia Department of Forestry and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Retreats provide information on hardwood and pine forest management, legacy planning, management planning, and more. They combine classroom, field trip, and hands-on activities to teach concepts of sustainable woodland and wildlife management.

May 18, 8:00-5:00 pm: Agroforestry Field Day (Harrisonburg, VA)

Join for this agroforestry field day to learn about agroforestry and see examples in the Harrisonburg area.

June 15, 12:00-4:00: Juneteenth at Sweet Vines Farm Winery (Unionville, VA)

Libation ceremony, ancestor acknowledgment, presenting of the colors, vegan food options, moon bounce, community discussions, business networking and community building.

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, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.