



Newsblast

February 4, 2025

Photo by Micheile Henderson

A Message from VBFRC

Love is in the air! This month, our NewsBlast is packed with program series, job opportunities, workshops, and conferences to help you grow and thrive in 2025.

Like a great Valentine's match, the right opportunity is all about connection—so explore, engage, and find what inspires you.

Wishing you a February full of possibilities and opportunities worth saying yes to!

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

2025 Women in Agriculture Gathering!

 March 28–29, 2025

 **The Meadow Event Park, Doswell, VA**

Join female farmers, landowners, and agriculture enthusiasts for networking, skill-building, and problem-solving to address the unique challenges women face in agriculture.

Topics include:

- Farm business basics
- Vegetable and small fruit production, canning, and food safety
- Beef, small ruminant, and poultry production and processing
- Networking with peers and local agencies

Registration opens January 15!

For more details, visit Virginia Cooperative Extension's website.

Note: Green underlined text is a link

Announcements

Extended Through February: Free Full Access to Canopy Compass!

Have you mapped your farm on Canopy Compass yet? Thousands of users have been actively planning their perennial crops, and we're excited to keep the momentum going! To support your efforts and help you continue making progress, we're extending full access to Canopy Compass for FREE through February. Take advantage of this opportunity to explore mapping tools, refine your farm plans, and join a growing community dedicated to the future of agriculture. Don't miss out—start mapping today!

Job Opportunities: Two Positions with American Farmland Trust's Mid-Atlantic Team

These positions offer a great opportunity to contribute to farmland conservation and regenerative agriculture efforts. Apply today and help support sustainable grazing practices in the Mid-Atlantic! *American Farmland Trust* is hiring for two exciting positions in the Mid-Atlantic region:

- [Livestock and Grazing Specialist \(Southwest Virginia\)](#) – A full-time role focused on supporting livestock producers with sustainable grazing practices and conservation initiatives.
- [Part-Time Grazing Network Coordinator](#) – A flexible position supporting grazing networks and outreach efforts in the region.

Now Hiring Apprentices at Weathertop Farm

Are you passionate about regenerative agriculture? Willing to work hard and ask questions? A team player? An initiative taker? Enthusiastic, flexible, and tenacious? Join the team at Weathertop Farm for an apprenticeship opportunity that offers hands-on learning, community engagement, and valuable experience in sustainable farming.

Adopt an Established Market Garden Near Charlottesville!

A rare opportunity awaits an experienced grower/entrepreneur to take over an established ¼-acre market garden—without land or major infrastructure costs! This unique arrangement allows the tenant farmer to grow and sell rent-free, retaining most of the net profits, with the goal of ensuring the garden's long-term sustainability. Key Features: Organic/regenerative practices required, including no/low-till methods, Fenced plot with irrigation in place, Well-established beds ready for cultivation, Ideal for a dedicated farmer looking to expand or establish their own market garden operation. If interested, please contact John Murphy at resolutionfarms@gmail.com.

Wholesale Market Producer Survey: Now Open (Online)

Black, Hispanic, and Tribal farmers and ranchers are invited to share their wholesale needs and experiences by participating in this important survey. Conducted by researchers from Virginia Tech and the Illinois Institute of Technology, this project aims to understand the distinct technical assistance needs of producers when accessing and scaling into wholesale markets. For more information or assistance, please contact Pratyoosh Kashyap at pratyoosh@vt.edu or Weslyne Ashton at washton@iit.edu.

We Want Your Feedback on the Virginia Quality Assured (VQA) Program!

Your input is vital to strengthening the Virginia Quality Assured (VQA) Program. Whether you currently sell through the program or not, your feedback will help shape its future and ensure it meets the needs of Virginia's beef producers.

33rd Annual Virginia Association of Forest Health Professionals Conference (Staunton, VA)

February 20–21, join the Virginia Association of Forest Health Professionals for their 33rd Annual

Conference, held at Hotel 24 in Staunton, VA. This event offers in-depth discussions, expert presentations, and networking opportunities for forestry and environmental health professionals

Landowner Woods & Wildlife Conferences (Blacksburg, VA, and Culpeper, VA)

February 22, join landowners, natural resource professionals, and outdoor enthusiasts for a day-long event exploring sustainable forestry and wildlife management practices. The conferences feature tours of private, public, and industry-owned lands. Two Locations:

- Squires Student Center, Virginia Tech, Southwest Virginia – Blacksburg, VA
- Daniel Technology Center, Germanna Community College, Northern Virginia – Culpeper, VA

March 1 – May 31, 2025, 9am – 3pm: Sustainable Urban Agriculture Certificate Program (Petersburg, VA and Available Online/ Virtual)

Increase your competence and marketability for a career in urban agriculture with the Virginia State College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension's *Sustainable Urban Agriculture Certificate Program*. This 12-week course runs from March 1 to May 31, 2025, with classes held on Saturdays from 9am to 3pm at the VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion. The program includes lectures and hands-on experiential learning sessions. Participants can also choose a virtual option, with the same kits for hands-on activities, educational materials, and certificates provided as those attending in person.

Series

Every Other Friday, 12:15pm: Fifteen Minutes in the Forest (Online) – New Videos Begin February 28

Join Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension Foresters from across Virginia for *Fifteen Minutes in the Forest*, a 15-minute video series covering timely forestry topics. Videos return on February 28 and will air every other Friday at 12:15pm on Facebook Live and YouTube Premier, offering insights on forest management, landowner tips, and more.

Backyard Poultry Zoom Series: Now Open for Registration (Online)

Join us for this engaging Zoom series on backyard poultry care and management. Each session is free and will be held from 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM ET.

- Thursday, February 13, 2025: Anatomy, Nutrition, & Avian Influenza (H5N1)
- Thursday, March 6, 2025: Disease and Parasites
- Thursday, March 27, 2025: Housing, Pasture Grazing, and Predator Control
- Thursday, April 17, 2025: Humane Handling and Biosecurity
- Thursday, May 8, 2025: Going to the Market: Regulations & More

Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation Spring 2025 Fellows Speaker Series (Online)

Join the *Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation* for the Spring 2025 Fellows Speaker Series, featuring experts discussing key topics in food systems, sustainability, and community resilience. Each session will provide insights from research, practice, and lived experiences in food and agricultural systems. If you are an individual with a disability and desire accommodation, please contact Lia Kelinsky-Jones at kelinskyjones@vt.edu or (540) 231-1534 during regular business hours at least 10 days prior to the event. Upcoming Sessions:

- February 26, 2pm – 3pm ET
The Grassfed Beef Partnership: Linking Principles of Regenerative Agriculture and Adaptive Grazing with Local Economic Resilience Register: tinyurl.com/CFSCTFEBSERIES2025
- March 19, 2pm – 3pm ET
Results from the 2024 Virginia Tech Employee Food Access and Wellbeing Study. Register: tinyurl.com/CFCTMARSERIES2025

- April 23, 2pm – 3pm ET
Indigenous Climate-Food-Health Nexus: Insights from Community-Engaged Research in the Global North and South. Register: tinyurl.com/CFSTAPRSERIES2025
- May 29, 3pm – 4pm ET
Revisiting UVA's BIPOC Procurement Initiative: Successes, Challenges, and Opportunities to Wholesale Acquisition Register: tinyurl.com/CFSTMAYSERIES2025

Fifteen Minutes in the Forest: Now Streaming (Online)

Join us for the award-winning Fifteen Minutes in the Forest video series, featuring a wide array of topics. Videos premiere on the 4th Friday of each month at 12:15 PM ET on Facebook and YouTube.

- Friday, February 28, 2025: Stay Safe in the Woods
- Friday, March 28, 2025: The Woods in Your Backyard
- Friday, April 25, 2025: Bobcats in the Bush
- Friday, May 23, 2025: Brush Piles
- Friday, June 27, 2025: Before the Storm

FDA's FSMA Final Rule on Pre-Harvest Agricultural Water: Webinar Series Now Open for Registration

Join us for this informative webinar series on the FDA's FSMA Final Rule for Pre-Harvest Agricultural Water. Each session is free and will take place from 12:00 – 1:00 pm ET.

- **Monday, February 19, 2025:** Continuation of the discussion on the rule's implementation and helpful tools, featuring updates from VDACS and a Q&A session.
- **Monday, March 25, 2025:** A deeper dive into inspections, updates on implementation, and final Q&A for participants.

4 the Soil Highlights



Episode S5 - E1: Commitment and System Balance with Rick Clark (Podcast)

Join us for 4 The Soil: A Conversation with Rick Clark of Clark Land & Cattle and Farm Green Consulting. In this episode, Rick, a fifth-generation farmer from Warren County, Indiana, shares his insights into building soil health and achieving system balance through regenerative organic no-till farming. Rick grows a diverse array of crops, including corn, soybeans, wheat, milo, and cover crops, using a systems-thinking approach he calls "regenerative organic stewardship." Listen in as Rick highlights the importance of working with Mother Nature, fostering adaptability, and committing to sustainable farming practices. Rick also reflects on his role as a guest speaker at the Profitable Soil Health Field Day in Franklin County, Virginia. Don't miss this inspiring conversation!

Episode S5 - E2: Understanding Context, Establishing Baselines with Rick Clark (Podcast)

Join us for 4 The Soil: A Conversation as we continue our discussion with Rick Clark of Clark Land & Cattle and Farm Green Consulting. In this episode, Rick delves into the importance of understanding context and establishing baselines to create systematic approaches to change for the right reasons. As a fifth-generation farmer managing over 6,000 acres of certified organic crops in Warren County, Indiana, Rick shares his journey in regenerative organic stewardship with no tillage. From reducing synthetic inputs to evaluating the return on investment of farm practices, Rick provides valuable insights into fostering sustainability and profitability. Don't miss this enriching conversation about transforming agriculture through thoughtful, regenerative practices!

4 the Soil Blog

Check out the latest 4 the Soil blog!

February

February 3 - 4: 2025 Advanced Soil Health Training (ASHT) in the Mid-Atlantic (Harrisonburg, VA)

American Farmland Trust is excited to launch the 2025 Advanced Soil Health Training (ASHT) program in the Mid-Atlantic, funded by the USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities program. In collaboration with Truterra/Land O' Lakes, AFT will sponsor and train soil health advisors to deepen their expertise and support their communities. This program is designed for experienced farmers and farm advisors, equipping them to share advanced soil health practices with a wider audience. For more information, contact gsalazar@farmland.org.

February 5, 8am – 12pm: Nutrient Management for Farmers (Petersburg, VA)

Join us at the VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion, 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA, for a workshop designed for new and beginning farmers. This session will cover essential nutrient management practices, including proper rates, timing, and placement of Nitrogen and Phosphorus, soil testing, and the addition of lime. Participants will also learn how these factors impact water quality and how different soils influence crop growth potential.

February 5, 6:40 PM – 8:10 PM: Pasture Renovation Part 2 (Online)

Join us for this virtual workshop on pasture renovation, designed to help farmers improve species composition and extend the productive life of their pastures. This session, a continuation of the October 16, 2024 workshop, will review the six critical steps for pasture renovation, including the renovation of feeding areas, grazing methods, and soil testing. Learn how proper care can prevent pasture decline over time, improve productivity, and make your efforts worthwhile.

February 6, 9am – 12:30pm: Tax Preparation for Farmers (South Hill, VA)

Join us at 118 East Danville St, South Hill, VA, for a workshop designed to help farmers understand essential tax information, even if they work with an accountant. Led by Darrell Tennie, founder and CEO of the Tennie Group, LLC, this session will cover key topics including new tax laws and changes, completing Schedule F, recordkeeping, reporting business expenses and deductions, managing enterprise sales, social security management, managing wages, and working with nonprofits.

February 12, 9am– 12pm: Precision Agriculture for Farmers (Petersburg, VA)

Join us at the VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion, 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA, for a workshop on Precision Agriculture designed for new and beginning farmers. Learn how precision practices can increase yields and profits, balance yields without additional inputs, and benefit both production and the environment.

This session will also cover how to adopt various precision practices that are cost-feasible and sustainable.

February 12, 2025, 9am – 4pm: Central Virginia Fruit School (The Nelson Center, Lovingson, VA)

Join us for the 2025 Central Virginia Fruit School, a full-day educational event designed for fruit growers, industry professionals, and enthusiasts. This year's program will feature expert presentations on the latest research, best management practices, pest and disease control, and innovative techniques in fruit production. Register by February 7th!

February 12, 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM: Agricultural Outreach Info Session (Lexington, VA)

Join us at the Jefferson Street Farmers Market in Lexington, VA, for an informational session focused on resources and opportunities for 1890's and underserved communities. Topics will include partnerships, educational resources, grants for farmers and producers, value-added producer grants, and the Rural Energy for America Program. Weather permitting, a booth will be available at the market to provide additional educational opportunities on various topics.

February 12, 6pm – 8pm: Grant Writing Basics for Farmers (Online)

Join farmer Anita Roberson of Botanical Bites & Provisional, LLC, for an informative Zoom workshop on grant writing. Gain confidence in applying for grants as Anita shares essential information on planning, developing budgets, understanding grant scoring criteria, and navigating the application process. Anita will also provide unique tips and insights from her experience as a grant reviewer.

February 18 - 20: Remote Pilot (Drone) Certification Test Prep Workshops (Virtual)

Join this 2-day virtual workshop designed to prepare participants for the FAA Remote Knowledge Aircraft Test (Part 107). This course provides essential knowledge on federal regulations, best flight operational strategies, and safety procedures to help you successfully obtain your drone certification.

February 19, 1pm – 3pm: Small Farm Orientation (Gainesville, VA, or Online)

Join us for a two-hour workshop designed for new farmers with zero to five years of experience operating a farm. Attend in person at 15850 Sunshine Ridge Lane, Gainesville, VA, or join virtually via Zoom. This session will be led by Ben Dukes and Derrick Gooden, regional program assistants for the VSU Small Farm Outreach Program, and Dr. Nartea, extension specialist for the VSU Integrated Marketing Program. Learn the steps to building a productive and profitable farm, and receive a Small Farm Orientation manual to support your journey.

February 20, 6pm – 7:30pm: Trees For Shade – Silvopasture Landowner Workshop (George Washington Carver Agricultural Research Center, Rapidan, VA)

Join the *Rappahannock River Roundtable* for an informative workshop introducing the Trees for Shade Silvopasture Program! This new initiative provides agricultural producers with technical assistance and flexible cost-share funding to support the planning, design, and implementation of silvopasture systems—bringing shade to pastures while enhancing grazing operations. This workshop will feature expert presentations, discussions, and resources on silvopasture practices, conservation funding, and sustainable land management. Attendees will gain practical knowledge, connect with technical staff from conservation organizations, and network with fellow landowners and industry professionals. This event is open to producers and technical partners in the Rappahannock region, with program resources also available for those in the York and Rappahannock River basins. Light refreshments will be provided.

February 22: Landowner Woods & Wildlife Conferences (Blacksburg & Culpeper, VA)

Join fellow landowners, natural resource professionals, and outdoor enthusiasts for the *2025 Landowner Woods & Wildlife Conferences* on February 22nd. These day-long tours will explore sustainable forestry and wildlife management practices across private, public, and industry-owned lands.

- Squires Student Center, Virginia Tech, Southwest Virginia - Blacksburg
- Daniel Technology Center, Germanna Community College, Northern Virginia – Culpeper

February 25, 1pm – 3pm: Urban Forestry (Petersburg, VA)

Join us at VSU Randolph Farm, 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA, to learn about the care and management of trees in urban settings and their role in improving the urban environment. This workshop will cover the importance of urban forestry, best management practices in Virginia, and resources developed by the USDA Southeast Climate Hub and partners to support climate-smart forestry in urban areas.

February 27, 3pm – 5pm: Farm and Homestead Financing (Petersburg, VA)

Join the Small Farm Outreach Program for an informative workshop on agricultural and rural lending practices. Representatives from First Bank and Trust Company will provide an overview of financing options available for farms and homesteads of all sizes. Learn about the requirements for obtaining loans and ask questions to help you prepare your business plan during the dedicated Q&A session. Don't miss this opportunity to gain valuable insights into securing financing for your farming or homesteading needs!

March

March 5-6, 2025 Advanced Soil Health Training (ASHT) in the Mid-Atlantic (Central MD)

American Farmland Trust is excited to launch the 2025 Advanced Soil Health Training (ASHT) program in the Mid-Atlantic, funded by the USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities program. In collaboration with Truterra/Land O' Lakes, AFT will sponsor and train soil health advisors to deepen their expertise and support their communities. This program is designed for experienced farmers and farm advisors, equipping them to share advanced soil health practices with a wider audience. For more information, contact gsalazar@farmland.org.

March 5 - 7: Remote Pilot (Drone) Certification Test Prep Workshops (Virtual)

Join this 2-day virtual workshop designed to prepare participants for the FAA Remote Knowledge Aircraft Test (Part 107). This course provides essential knowledge on federal regulations, the best flight operational strategies, and safety procedures to help you successfully obtain your drone certification.

March 13, 2025, 6:30pm – 8pm: “ How to Make the Woods Work for You” (Orange, VA)

Gain insights into agroforestry practices and learn how to optimize your wooded spaces. Topics include Shiitake inoculation, ginseng and goldenseal cultivation, silvopasture, and crop tree management.

March 16 - 17: 2025 Mid-Atlantic Grain Fair & Conference (Leesburg, VA)

The Mid-Atlantic Grain Conference will be March 17, 2025, at Riverside on the Potomac, bringing together grain practitioners and enthusiasts from across the Mid-Atlantic grain value chain, from breeders and farmers to millers and distributors, to bakers, pasta-makers, brewers, maltsters, distillers, and other grain artisans.

March 25–26, Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training (Online)

Virginia fruit and vegetable farms, don't miss the opportunity to attend the Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training at a highly discounted rate of just \$50 for Virginia farms, thanks to VDACS funding. This course fulfills the Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule training requirement, and the certificate you receive is valid for life. Encourage attendance before rates increase to \$200–\$300. This is an invaluable opportunity for farms to meet compliance requirements and enhance produce safety knowledge.

March 25 - 26, 1pm – 5pm: PSA Grower Training Course (Online Zoom Event)

Gain insights into FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule) compliance through this comprehensive training. Topics include hygiene, agricultural water safety, postharvest handling, and more.

March 28–29: Central Virginia Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat (Appomattox, VA)

Join the Virginia Department of Forestry and Virginia Cooperative Extension for the *Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat*, designed for landowners new to forest management. This retreat provides valuable insights into both hardwood and pine forest management while offering opportunities to connect with natural resource professionals and fellow landowners. Participants will gain hands-on experience with tree identification, forestry equipment, and more, as well as receive essential information on estate planning, management planning, and certification. Don't miss this opportunity to learn practical strategies for managing your woodland!

March 28–29, 2025: Women in Agriculture Gathering (The Meadow Event Park, Doswell, VA)

Get excited for the 2025 Women in Agriculture Gathering (WAG)! This event is designed to equip female farmers, landowners, and agriculture enthusiasts with opportunities to network, hone technical skills, and explore solutions to the unique challenges they face. Highlights Include:, Farm business basics Vegetable and small fruit production, canning, and food safety, Beef, small ruminant, and poultry production and processing, Networking with peers and local agencies. Register by March 15th!

Late Spring

May 5 - 6, 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM: Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training (Online)

Virginia fruit and vegetable farms can now access the highly discounted Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training, fulfilling the Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule training requirement. Thanks to VDACS funding, the registration fee is currently only \$50 for Virginia farms, and participants will receive a lifetime certificate.

May 7–9: Virginia Forestry Summit (Hotel Roanoke, Roanoke, VA)

Join forestry professionals, landowners, and natural resource experts for the *Virginia Forestry Summit*, a premier event featuring discussions on forestry management, conservation, and industry trends. This three-day gathering offers educational sessions, networking opportunities, and a special Urban Forestry Tour exploring the green spaces of Roanoke and Salem.

May 9, 12:30pm – 4:30pm: Urban Forestry Tour (Roanoke, VA)

Experience an in-depth tour of Roanoke's urban forestry efforts, including: Lunch and a guided tour at the historic Fishburn Mansion, featuring insights on Missouri Gravel Beds, tree propagation, and community gardens. A visit to Virginia Western Community College, a Bee Campus USA, with a guided tour of their arboretum. A stop at Sherwood Memorial Park in Salem to learn about Virginia's Big Tree Program, see the Champion Atlas cedar, and discuss efforts to protect urban ash trees from the emerald ash borer. Registration opens in March. Contact Jennifer Gagnon, jgagnon@vt.edu, 540-231-6391 for more information.

May 30–31: Southwest Virginia Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat (Southwest Virginia 4-H Educational Center, Abingdon, VA)

Join the Virginia Department of Forestry and Virginia Cooperative Extension for the *Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat*, designed for landowners new to forest management. This retreat provides valuable insights into both hardwood and pine forest management while offering opportunities to connect with

natural resource professionals and fellow landowners. Participants will gain hands-on experience with tree identification, forestry equipment, and more, as well as receive essential information on estate planning, management planning, and certification. Agenda and registration will be available in March. Stay tuned for more details!

Summer

July 21–23, 2025: Beef Cattle University (The Inn at Virginia Tech & VT German Club, Blacksburg, VA)

We are thrilled to announce Beef Cattle University 2025, a premier event bringing together beef producers, industry leaders, and experts for three days of education, networking, and innovation. This all-inclusive experience will feature engaging educational sessions on herd health, marketing, nutrition, business management, reproduction, and meat science. Attendees will have the opportunity to explore the latest advancements in beef industry technology through a vibrant trade show, connect with fellow producers during entertainment and networking opportunities, and gain valuable insights to empower and inspire their work in the beef industry.

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