

Newsblast

January 15, 2025

Photo by Taylor Wright

A Message from VBFRC

It's a New Year and January greets us with fresh opportunities and crisp winter days. This month, we're excited to share a wealth of program series, grants, conferences, and opportunities in our NewsBlast. Start the year off with purpose—grab your coziest items, set your goals, and explore the resources that will help you thrive in 2025. Let's make this a year of growth and success together!

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 Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program

Join the multi-class program helps aspiring and diversifying farmers make informed decisions about their farming future. Topics include whole farm planning, marketing, and business management.

- Price: \$100 per person/ \$150 couple
- Orientation: January 30, 2025, at 7 PM.
- Weekly classes: February 6 to March 13, 2025, on Thursdays, 7–9 PM.
- Fauquier Cooperative Extension, 24 Pelham St, Warrenton, VA

**For more information Contact Jim Hankins
fauquieredfarm@gmail.com
540-336-4338.**

Note: Green underlined text is a link

Announcements

Black, Hispanic, and Tribal Producer Wholesale Marketing Survey

Virginia Tech and Illinois Tech invite Black, Hispanic, and Tribal farmers and ranchers to participate in the Wholesale Marketing and Technical Assistance Survey. This survey aims to identify the unique technical assistance needs, challenges, and best practices for scaling into wholesale markets. If you have experience selling wholesale or plan to access wholesale markets, your insights are invaluable. The survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and will help shape programs, policies, and services designed to support producers like you.

Agroforestry Assistance Opportunity

The Nature Conservancy and multiple partners, including Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD), have launched a 5-year project to catalyze significant private investments into agroforestry while increasing farmers' income and delivering environmental benefits. Eligible farmers in 29 states, including all Central Appalachia, will soon have an opportunity to apply for financial and technical assistance for agroforestry plantings. Applications will begin being accepted Friday, January 31, 2025.

Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grants

Recipients of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP) competitive grants, including community gardens and nonprofit farms, will increase food production and access in economically distressed communities, provide job training and education, and support the development of business plans and zoning proposals. The program offers grants for a wide range of activities, including planning and implementation. Planning activities focus on initiating or expanding efforts involving farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools, and other stakeholders in urban areas and suburbs. Implementation activities aim to accelerate existing and emerging urban, indoor, and other agricultural practices that benefit farmers and communities.

Technical Assistance Funding to Land-Grant Universities

The interagency agreement between NRCS and NIFA will fund the hiring of Urban Agriculture Conservation Extension Educators through cooperative extension programs at land-grant universities. These educators will work with NRCS employees in 27 cities nationwide that USDA has designated as urban priority locations, delivering technical assistance and linking producers to NRCS conservation planning and program opportunity.

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

Series

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

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 S4 - E26: A Regional Food System Perspective with Maureen and Mo of LEAP, Part II (Podcast)

Join us for 4 The Soil: A Conversation featuring Maureen and Mo from LEAP (Local Environmental Agriculture Project) in Part II of their discussion. This episode dives into the connections between regional food systems, local agriculture, and community development. In this engaging conversation, Maureen and Mo share insights on building resilient food systems, fostering community connections, and supporting local producers. Their perspectives highlight the importance of sustainable practices and local collaboration in strengthening food networks. **Tune in** to this enriching episode and explore the vital role of local food systems in fostering a healthier, more connected future.

Episode S4 - E25: A Regional Food System Perspective with Maureen and Mo of LEAP, Part I (Podcast)

What does a regional food system network look like? Join Maureen McNamara Best, executive director of LEAP (Local Environmental Agriculture Project), and Maureen "Mo" McGonagle, director of the Roanoke Foodshed Network, as they share their insights into food system relationships and community collaborations emerging in the Roanoke region of Virginia. In this episode, Maureen highlights the importance of stories and relationships in fostering connections between communities and farms, making these relationships more visible and tangible. Mo discusses how food system networks, like good soil health, cultivate change by encouraging choice, dignity, equity, and shared values both individually and collectively.

4 the Soil Blog

Check out the latest 4 the Soil blog!

January

January 16, 2025, 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM: Value-Added Agriculture Summit (Silver Spring, MD)

Come a day early for the Value-Added Agriculture Summit! As a proud supporter of the Cultivate + Craft Summit, we're excited to share this incredible event with you. Taking place at the same venue as our conference but a day earlier, the Summit is a must-attend gathering for anyone involved in Maryland's value-added agriculture, agritourism, and craft beverage industries.

January 17th - 18th: 26th Annual Future Harvest Conference (Silver Spring, MD)

Join us for two days of workshops, lectures, farmer-to-farmer chats, farm-fresh meals, and networking at our 26th annual conference. Early bird registration, which saves you \$25, is open until December 14. Scholarships and work trade opportunities are available. Conference speakers, sponsors, exhibitors, and

participants in the 2024 or 2025 Agricultural Leadership Development Initiative will receive a code for a complimentary ticket.

January 18, 2025: VT Beef Cattle Health Conference (Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA)

The VT Beef Cattle Health Conference offers essential insights for cattle producers, featuring sessions on dart gun use, mineral supplementation, fly control, colostrum management, and more. Hands-on labs will focus on preventing chute injuries, managing colostrum, and selecting genetics for strong hooves. For more information, contact Lisa McCormick at (540) 231-2792. Registration is \$20 (cash or check only), and the deadline is January 16, 2024.

January 19, 9am – 3pm: Produce Safety Rule Grower Training (Silver Spring, MD)

Stay an extra day on Sunday, January 19, 2025, for the Produce Safety Rule Grower Training offered by the Maryland Food Safety Network. This training, held at the Civic Building, provides valuable insights into produce safety and compliance with the Produce Safety Rule.

January 21: 9am – 11am: Small Farm Orientation (Online)

Join us for a two-hour Zoom course designed for new farmers with zero to five years of experience operating a farm. Led by Ben Dukes and Derrick Gooden, regional program assistants for the VSU Small Farm Outreach Program, and Dr. Nartea, extension specialist for VSU Integrated Marketing Program, this session will guide you through the steps to develop a productive and profitable farm. Participants will receive a Small Farm Orientation manual to support their journey.

January 22: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM: Basic Soil Fertility for Farmers (Petersburg, VA)

Join us for an informative workshop at the VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion, 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA, designed for new and beginning farmers and gardeners. This session will provide a foundational understanding of essential elements for plant growth, how nutrients become available to plants, their movement in soil and plants, and tips for identifying and troubleshooting nutrient deficiencies

January 22, 4pm - 5pm: Expanding Agroforestry Project Town Hall Meeting (Online)

Join The Nature Conservancy's Expanding Agroforestry Project (EAP) for a Town Hall Meeting. Topics include an overview of the EAP Incentive Payment Program, the latest updates, and answers to frequently asked questions.

January 23, 1pm – 3pm: Fruit Tree Pruning for Beginners (King George, VA)

Learn the basics of fruit tree pruning in this hands-on workshop at 15267 James Madison Hwy, King George, VA 22485. Proper pruning techniques can improve structural strength, increase fruit production, and enhance the quality of fruit. This demonstration is perfect for beginners looking to develop their skills and confidence in tree pruning. Participants are encouraged to bring their own pruning tools for practice during the workshop.

January 28 - 29, 1pm – 5pm: PSA Grower Training Course (Online Zoom Event)

Participate in this essential training to comply with FSMA standards. Learn about compliance requirements, food safety practices, and strategies for managing risks in farm operations.

January 28–31: 2025 Winter Forage Conference (Various Locations, VA)

Join the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council (VFGC) for the 2025 Winter Forage Conference, focusing on making, buying, and using quality hay and baleage. Featured speakers include Chris Teutsch, Extension forage specialist with the University of Kentucky, and Jessica Williamson, hay and forage specialist for Massey Ferguson, alongside local producers from each conference location.

January 28–29: 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.

January 31, 9:30am – 11:30am: Grain Elevator Tour (Perdue Agribusiness, Chesapeake, VA)

Explore the Perdue Agribusiness Grain Facility, home to the East Coast's only deep-water grain bulk terminal and one of two deep-water soybean crushing plants in the U.S. This tour highlights Perdue's role in supporting over 700 Virginia farmers, offering a strong local market for crops while supplying soybean products, wheat, and corn to markets worldwide.

January 31, 2pm – 3:30pm: Exploring Agrivoltaic Applications in NREL's Free System Advisor Model (SAM) Software (Online)

Join us for an educational webinar exploring agrivoltaic project scenarios using NREL's free System Advisor Model (SAM) software. This session will feature Pardis Akbari, PhD Candidate at Virginia Tech, Paul Gilman from the NREL SAM Development Team, and Brian Mirlletz, a researcher at NREL's Accelerated Deployment and Decision Support Center. Topics include an overview of agrivoltaic-related programs, example outputs from agrivoltaic applications, and a deeper dive into SAM features for analyzing the technical and economic feasibility of renewable energy projects.

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, 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 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 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.

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 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 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.

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.

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.