



SFOP Quarterly NEWSLETTER

FALL 2023

Igniting Change: How a Rediscovered Passion Became a Transformative Nonprofit for Hampton Roads Youth

By Amber R. Coles

There comes a time in everyone's life when an early passion takes a back seat to life. That was true for Georgia native Renee Foster. After serving in the U.S. Navy, Foster discovered a veteran-run agricultural non-profit that reminded her of her childhood on her grandfather's farm. Her passion for farming was reignited. Virginia State University helped fan those flames.

After completing VSU's International Agriculture Certification Program in 2019, Foster decided to share her passion for and knowledge of agriculture with the community as her grandfather had done with her in her childhood, so she created Hampton Roads Urban

-continued on page 2



Dear Small-Scale Farmers, Ranchers and Veterans,

We are excited to inform you that last season, the Small Farm Outreach Program partnered with Virginia Tech and two local Urban Ag producers to implement SFOP's Urban Ag initiative in Virginia. SFOP has also been tasked to lead the Farm Service Agency (FSA) National Urban Ag Initiative.

Urban agriculture operations are an essential part of a resilient, diversified food system that provides numerous benefits, such as providing healthful local food, encouraging economic development, providing employment, expanding community green spaces, fostering community collaboration and building climate and disaster-resilient communities.

Both projects will enable us to further our mission to provide outreach, training and technical assistance to small-scale, historically underserved, military veterans and limited-resourced producers and

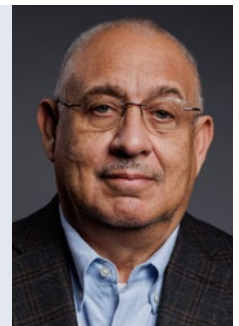
to enable farmers access to resources from service providers to help them improve and develop their operations.

If you are an Urban Ag producer, we would like to hear from you. You may sign up for our text alerts at <https://vsusmallfarms.com/sfop-text/>, or send us an email at smallfarms@vsu.edu.

As always, check out our Ag Tips and the Workshop/ Training sections of this newsletter. For additional resources, visit <https://www.ext.vsu.edu/small-farm-outreach-program> or vsusmallfarms.com.

VCE/VSU-SFOP keeping you informed,

William Crutchfield, SFOP Director



Igniting Change *continued from page 1*

Agriculture. She empowers food-insecure communities to understand where food comes from and how to create and maintain access to healthy food.

“Food has to come from somewhere and I’d rather know where my food comes from than have to figure it out,” Foster said. “Our farm is a learning environment for visitors, volunteers and community members of all ages. They gain hands-on educational experiences while helping us grow a variety of produce.”

One of the most unique aspects of the organization’s youth program is the use of drones. Drones add that extra element of adventure and fun to farming and allow the children to explore more of the farm up close without having to trek deep into the grounds.



In working with the youth, she’s noticed that being outside in nature calms students. It gives them a sense of peace that they might need at such a crucial time in their youth.

One of her fondest memories since starting this non-profit is of a visit to a detention center. As part of the lesson, two groups competed to build a raised bed. You would imagine that the team that finished first would celebrate their win, but the winning team did something that surprised Foster herself—they went to help the other team. Moments like this assure Foster that she, and all who volunteer and partner with the nonprofit,

are making strides to introduce and spread the knowledge of farming and are impacting the lives of the next generation.

“We build community and family here and we want to be sure that urban agriculture has a place to continue to grow a sustainable food program and system,” Foster said.

Hampton Roads Urban Agriculture has plans to expand to a new city, and to partner with a local food pantry and another school once they can acquire another vehicle.

For more information on Hampton Roads Urban Agriculture, visit hrurdanag.org. Follow them on Facebook at facebook.com/HamptonRoadsUrbanAgriculture.



This garden seat empowers those with limited mobility to continue gardening.



An array of different vegetables is being grown on the farm.

Farmers Have Rights, Too!

Dr. Sylvia M. Corbin Berry, VSU civil rights compliance officer

Did you know that as a farmer receiving any type of federal financial assistance you are protected from illegal discrimination? Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, provides that “...no person shall be discriminated against based on race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of an applicant or recipient receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any Agency thereof.”

Under Title VI, a private entity is also a “person” when it receives federal financial assistance from a recipient and may bring suit alleging discriminatory allocation of funds. Similarly, a private entity also is a “person” when it seeks to contract with a recipient.

What does this mean to you? If you believe that you have been discriminated against based on race, color, or national origin, you have the right to file a complaint alleging discriminatory allocation of funds.

Did you know that if you have Limited English Proficiency LEP (cannot read or speak English), you have the right to ask for language assistance? Recipients must take reasonable steps to ensure that LEP persons receive the language assistance necessary to afford them meaningful access to USDA programs and activities, free of charge.

Protect yourself, your family and your farm operation. Know your rights!

For more information, visit https://bit.ly/Federal_Assistance_Civil_Rights and <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/T6manual5>.



Photo courtesy of DCR.

RVA Urban Ag Kickoff Informs and Empowers Underserved Communities to be More Resilient and Self-Sufficient

By Briana Stevenson, coordinator, SFOP National Urban Agriculture Initiative

Members of the Richmond Community, its leaders, urban farmers and representatives from state and federal agencies gathered at Miles Jones Elementary School in August for the RVA Urban Ag Kickoff.

The initiative, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and SFOP, aims to create a sustainable and interconnected urban agricultural network to ensure equitable access to food, enhance community resilience, stimulate economic growth and improve overall health outcomes.

The two-part event included a private tour for dignitaries of Eden’s Community Garden and Sankofa Community Orchard to showcase their efforts, highlight their impacts and strengthen the USDA’s connection to Richmond’s urban producers.

Afterward, community producers, innovators, families and youth gathered for a fun and educational experience that included a panel of community experts exploring the growth, innovation and future of urban agriculture and local food systems. All attendees received a box of locally-grown produce.

In addition to co-hosting the RVA Urban Ag Initiative, SFOP was selected by the USDA to lead its National Urban Agriculture (NuAg) Initiative in 17 U.S. cities.



William Crutchfield, SFOP director, Sonya Shaw, Miles Jones Elementary School principal, and Janine P. Woods, VSU Extension administrator, distribute boxes of locally-grown produce to attendees at the RVA Urban Ag Kickoff.

VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program is Granted a Multistate License to Teach its Online Agribusiness Production & Financial Management Course to Empower Farmers beyond Virginia

By Michelle Burchett, senior editor, College of Agriculture

Virginia farmers!

Are you interested in applying for a USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan without paying private companies \$300-\$600 for an online course that fulfills FSA pre-application requirements?

Take SFOP's **FREE** online Agribusiness Production & Financial Management course that launched in the spring of 2023. Successful completion of the seven modules and quizzes meets the FSA prerequisites. This significantly reduces barriers to accessing FSA loans.

Designed for historically underserved farmers, the course helps develop essential financial-management and crop-production skills needed to increase farm profitability and income, such as record-keeping, accounting, estate planning, budgeting, valuations, cash management and more. A certified instructor is available to answer questions within 24 hours, should participants need assistance.

Originally licensed for use in Virginia only, the program received a three-year FSA license granting national authority to provide the course throughout the U.S. Farmers in any state who enroll in and pass the course will qualify to apply for FSA loans.

“Our goal is to create sustainability through accountability.”

—Darrell Tennie,
founder and CEO of The Tennie Agriculture Group

Darrell Tennie, founder and CEO of the Tennie Group, a nationwide tax and accounting firm, partnered with SFOP to monitor and respond to farmers' questions. This group focuses on sustainability in business development within historically underserved communities with an emphasis on agribusiness development.

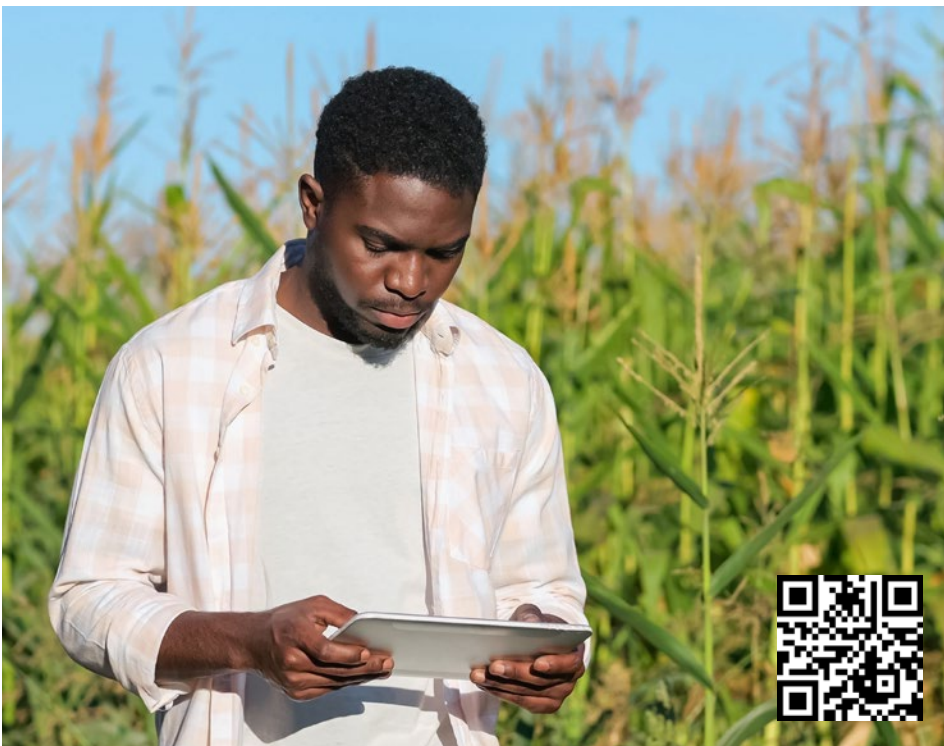
“Our goal is to create sustainability through accountability,” said Tennie. “We are delighted to partner with SFOP to provide answers when questions arise during the agribusiness course to ensure that farmers understand the material not only to pass their tests and meet FSA loan prerequisites but also to ensure they are better prepared to operate sustainable farms.”

To promote the program nationwide, SFOP is partnering with the Southern Risk Management Education Center at the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture,

one of four regional Extension Risk Management Education Centers located throughout the country and funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Ron Rainey, extension economist, professor, and assistant vice president for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture and Farm Foundation Round Table Fellow will spearhead these efforts.

“We are so excited to gain this approval from USDA to be a national vendor for this much-needed resource to assist underserved farmers in managing their risk,” said William Crutchfield, director of SFOP.

To sign up for the course, visit <https://bit.ly/SFOP-Online-Agribusiness-Course> or scan the QR code. For more information, contact Alston Hilliard at ahilliard@vsu.edu or 804-524-1021.



Fall Ag Tips from our SFOP Program Assistants

General Farming

- Sharpen your equipment blades, inspect belts and change oil, oil filters and air filters.
- Add fuel stabilizer to your small engine gasoline tank. Read the label and follow the instructions.
- Start your small engines once a month, this will ensure a quick start during the early gardening season.

Planning/Preparing/Planting

- Plan your 2024 garden plot(s), purchase seeds, take soil samples, rotate your crops and plant cover crops.
- Plan to plant at least one new variety of vegetables and flowers each season.
- Remember to control your water supply to Veggies during early fall. Use drip irrigation or soaker hoses to ensure your plants receive the proper amounts of water.

- Plant a diverse flower patch to attract pollinators.

Business Management

- Write a “ Love Letter “ to your spouse /significant other to let them know where your personal documents, will, keys and passwords are located.
- Stay in the know, read and participate in agriculture-related workshops in person or virtually.



Three Steps to Healthier, More Abundant Spring Crops

By James Gibson, SFOP program assistant

Fall is the ideal time to prep the soil for spring gardens. Testing the soil, adding compost and planting cover crops with help ensure you have healthier and more abundant crops.

Preparing your beds allows the compost to stimulate the soil prior to spring planting. In preparing the beds, add plenty of organic matter in the soil, such as fallen leaves and compost. In sandy soil, compost helps to retain moisture and in clay soil, it helps to drain moisture.

Organic matter is anything that occurs in nature. While the majority of plants and animal by-products can be used for composting, not all organic matter is useful. Do not use diseased and powdery plants from your summer garden.

Taking soil samples ensures your spring plants can get the necessary nutrients required to flourish. Knowing your soil's pH (a measure of acidity) will help you to know how to remediate it, if necessary.

Soil test kits are available for a modest fee from Virginia Cooperative Extension agriculture offices in each county. This investment will ensure you use the correct amount of fertilizer and lime for your plot to produce maximum yield.

Planting cover crops stymies the growth of unwanted weeds when cover crops are incorporated into the soil during spring tillage. It also adds biomass, increases fertility and prevents erosion from wind or water.



Farmers, gardeners, eaters, educators & advocates of biological and organic farming and gardening: Virginia's premier organic and sustainable agricultural conference just got better!

Save the date!

You won't want to miss the inaugural Virginia Association for Biological Farming-Small Farm Outreach Program Summit! This power-packed event offers more than ever before. You'll reap the best benefits of two farming conferences in one dynamic summit: the 24th Annual Virginia Biological Farming Conference and the VSU Small Farm Outreach Program Annual Conference.

When: Friday-Sunday, January 19-21, 2024 **Where:** Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center.

The three-day event includes:

- Full- & half-day pre-conference intensive workshops
- 50+ sessions, workshops, presentations & panel discussions
- 40+ trade show exhibitors
- Locally sourced farm meals
- Book signings & a silent auction
- Networking opportunities
- Taste of Virginia Expo & Social
- Farm Tour
- SFOP Annual Awards

For more information, contact Catherine Bolling at 540-330-9481 or coordinator@vabf.org; or Cartelius Travis at 804-524-2551 or ctravis@vsu.edu.

Rooted in Positive Change

SFOP-DCR Field Days in May showcase conservation triumphs across Virginia

By Rebecca Jones, Department of Conservation and Recreation

Farmers and the farming-curious saw best management practices at work at four farm field days held throughout Virginia in May. The series, sponsored by VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, featured four host farmers who opened their operations to visitors to demonstrate how conservation farming methods they've employed have improved their soil and water quality, farm yields and profitability.

The series kicked off in Remington, Virginia, where Joe Gray, owner of Piedmont Ag, led a field tour showing how he implements his cover crop program. Gray uses both rye and clover for a cover crop mix that promotes biodiversity and resilience to weather extremes.

The next stop was Louisa, Virginia. Participants took a hayride across Albert McGee's livestock operation to discover how exclusion fencing and alternative watering systems help him keep animals out of waterways to reduce erosion and stream contamination. Rotational grazing and wooded buffers further prevent soil erosion.

In Penhook, Virginia, Tonja and Anthony Martin treated visitors to a cookout featuring burgers made from their own farm-raised beef. After enjoying a scrumptious lunch, visitors walked the fields with their hosts to take a closer

look at their newly installed fencing and the clear-running streams just beyond the conservation buffers.

Surry, Virginia, was the final stop on this best-practices excursion. Longtime farmer and retired Virginia Cooperative Extension agent Glenn Slade led a tour through his fields, where he discussed the financial benefit of cover crop practices. "I mainly do it for the money," he said, explaining that the cover crops attract nutrients that he has already put in the soil and hold them in place for the next crop.

Reggie and Noelle Lipscomb, who recently started Full Life Journey Farm in Culpeper, Virginia, attended multiple events in the series.

"While we've done a lot of research online, there's nothing like getting out here and interacting with other farmers," Noelle said. "For me, it's really helpful just to be able to ask specific questions that will be relevant to our circumstances."



Hayride

Albert McGee (left) led a hayride tour of his V.S. Richardson, Sr. Memorial Farm, one of four farm field days hosted by SFOP and DCR in May. Participants viewed a host of livestock best management practices including rotational grazing, exclusion fencing and alternative watering systems.

5 Priorities of Soil Health Management

By Sarah Koth, 4 The Soil communications specialist, Virginia Cooperative Extension at Virginia Tech

4 The Soil focuses on the four core principles of soil health management: keep the soil covered, minimize disturbance, maximize living roots and energize with diversity.

The four principles are meant to start the conversation. “Keep the soil covered” will look different farm to farm, field to field and garden to garden.

So what do these principles look like in your world?

We can look at the five priorities of soil health, outlined by Chris Lawrence of Virginia-Natural Resources Conservation Service, to explore the possibilities.

- 1 Eliminate erosion.
- 2 Match land use to landscape.
- 3 Build soil organic matter.
- 4 Build soil biology.
- 5 Systems, not shortcuts.

For example, if you want to maximize living roots in your soil, we can use the five principles to help contextualize and specify what might work well. Do you have erosion issues where plants might have a hard time growing, or areas where plants could help eliminate the erosion? What species would make sense on your land? And so on.

Soil Principles: The 6 Ps

*Broader applicability,
but more conceptual*

*More practical, but more
context- and site-specific*

Paradigms (Mindset)	Purpose (Strategy)	Principles (General steps)	Priorities (Targets)	Practices (Techniques)	Plan (Specific steps)
Longer-term return-on-investment (ROI) horizons Regeneration/ restoration Holistic / systems not symptoms Empowerment / be your own doctor	Mimic nature to capitalize on soil system's inherent efficiencies Optimize conditions for underground employees who work while you sleep	Keep soil covered Minimize soil disturbance Maximize living roots Energize with diversity	Eliminate erosion Match land use to landscape Build soil organic matter Systems, not shortcuts	No defined list. Many choices of practices depending on land use, crop type, operation scale, farming style	Site specific action plan adapted to needs of farmer, farm, field



Some actions we take can help fulfill multiple priorities and principles. For instance, planting a mixture of cover crops protects the soil from erosion, helps build soil biology while living, and then adds organic matter to the soil once terminated.

Cover Crop Coach Steve Groff prioritizes systems, not shortcuts: “I caution farmers that with soil health you cannot look at an annual basis like we are used to doing with everything else in agriculture. You have to look at it as a ten-year plan: ‘Can I make this work? What is my strategy for ten years?’...You have to think bigger than one year, and I think that is important for people to understand if you are looking to jump in this regenerative agriculture movement. It’s a long-term commitment.”

Soil health management practices are difficult to condense into four short principles. Thinking about the five priorities helps us explore the practical steps to help build soil health where we live, play and work.

Join us as we explore the five priorities of soil health management through the upcoming blog series at <https://www.4thesoil.org/blog/>

Do you already practice the principles, priorities and/ or advocate for soil health? Take the pledge at <https://www.4thesoil.org/take-the-pledge> and show how the movement is growing!

SFOP Workshops: October–December 2023*

Date	Workshop	Time	Location	Program Assistant	Limit
10/3/23	Introduction to Permaculture	10 am–noon	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Road, Petersburg, VA	James Gibson	
10/4/23	Farm Pond Management	1–3 pm	Burkeville, Virginia	Marilyn Estes	20
10/5/23	Cooking with Fresh Herbs	3:30–5 pm	The Garden House, MacCallum Moore Museum and Gardens 603 Hudgins Street, Chase City, VA	Wanda Johnson	20
10/7/23	Fundamentals of Planting and Growing Garlic	10 am–noon	Unionville, Virginia	Roland Terrell	
10/11/23	Bringing Basic Solar Energy to Your Farm	2–4 pm	Fredericksburg, Virginia	Michael Carter Sr.	20
10/11/23	Winterizing Beehives	9 am–noon	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Road, Petersburg, VA	Dennis Hatch	
10/13/23	Tour of Slade Family Farm	10 am–1 pm	Surry, Virginia	Tim Sexton	50
10/17/23	Small Farm Orientation	9–11 am	Virtual	Derrick Cladd	40
10/18/23	Small Fruit Production	4:30–6 pm	Atlee Branch Library 9212 Rutlandshire Drive Mechanicsville, VA	James Gibson & Forrest Hobbs	
10/18/23	Diversifying Streams of Revenue on your Farm	6–8 pm	Virtual	Roland Terrell	
10/20/23	Converting Cropland to Pasture for Sheep	1–3 pm	Kilmarnock, Virginia	Tammy Holler	20
10/21/23	Lambing & Kidding Skills for Success	11:30 am–2:30 pm	Abingdon, Virginia	Mandy Fletcher	50
10/24/23	Chestnuts 101	10 am–noon	Virginia Chestnuts 5990 Wheelers Cove Road Shipman, VA 2297	Forrest Hobbs	
10/25/23	What is Heirs Property 101	10 am–noon	Wedgewood Golf Center 2131 Mountain Road, Halifax, VA	Clifford Somerville	
10/25/23	Preparing A Small Farm for Winter	1–4 pm	Foster, Virginia	Ben Dukes	
10/26/23	High Tunnel Vegetable Production	5:30–8:30 pm	Bland, Virginia	Brent Noell	15
11/2/23	High Tunnel Vegetable Production	5:30–8:30 pm	Patrick, Virginia	Brent Noell	15
11/8/23	Estate Planning For Farmers	10 am–noon	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Road, Petersburg, VA	Derrick Cladd	30
11/14/23	Small Farm Orientation	9–11 am	Virtual	Derrick Cladd	40
11/15/23	Vegetable Marketing Information Session	9 am–noon	Wedgewood Golf Center 2131 Mountain Road, Halifax, VA	Clifford Somerville	20

*For more information and to register, visit www.ext.vsu.edu/calendar.

SFOP Workshops: October–December 2023*

Date	Workshop	Time	Location	Program Assistant	Limit
11/15/23	Filing Farm Taxes	9 am–3 pm	Makers Market 100 W Danville Street, South Hill, VA	Marilyn Estes	
11/15/23	Taking the Mystery out of Organic Farming	10 am–noon	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Road, Petersburg, VA	Grace Summers	
11/15/23	Holiday Gifts from the Garden	11 am–1:30 pm	Estes Community Center 316 North Main Street, Chase City, VA	Wanda Johnson	20
11/16/23	Soil Testing	10 am–noon	Virginia Beach, VA	Ben Dukes	
12/5/23	Most Common Pests in Vegetables and Fruits in Virginia	6–8 pm	Buckingham County Extension Office 54 Administration Lane Buckingham, VA	Tammy Holler	
12/6/23	Growing Food and Flowers for Profit	1–3 pm	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Road, Petersburg, VA	Marilyn Estes	
12/5/23	High Tunnel Vegetable Production	5:30–8:30 pm	Franklin, Virginia	Brent Noell	15
12/6/23	Using High Tunnels for Vegetable Production for the Fall & Winter	9 am–4 pm	Wedgewood Golf Center 2131 Mountain Road, Halifax, VA	Clifford Somerville	
12/7/23	QuickBooks for Farmers	7–9 pm	Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, 1 Partnership Circle, Abingdon, VA 24210	Mandy Fletcher	
12/12/23	USDA Information Session	4–6 pm	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Road, Petersburg, VA	James Gibson	
12/13/23	Holiday Gifts from the Garden	11 am–1:30 pm	Estes Community Center 316 North Main Street, Chase City, VA	Wanda Johnson	20

Don't be late: save the date!

More thrills await. Plan to attend the N.C. State Fair during its run from Thursday, Oct. 12 through Sunday, Oct. 22, at 4285 Trinity Road, Raleigh, NC. For more information, visit ncstatefair.org/2023.



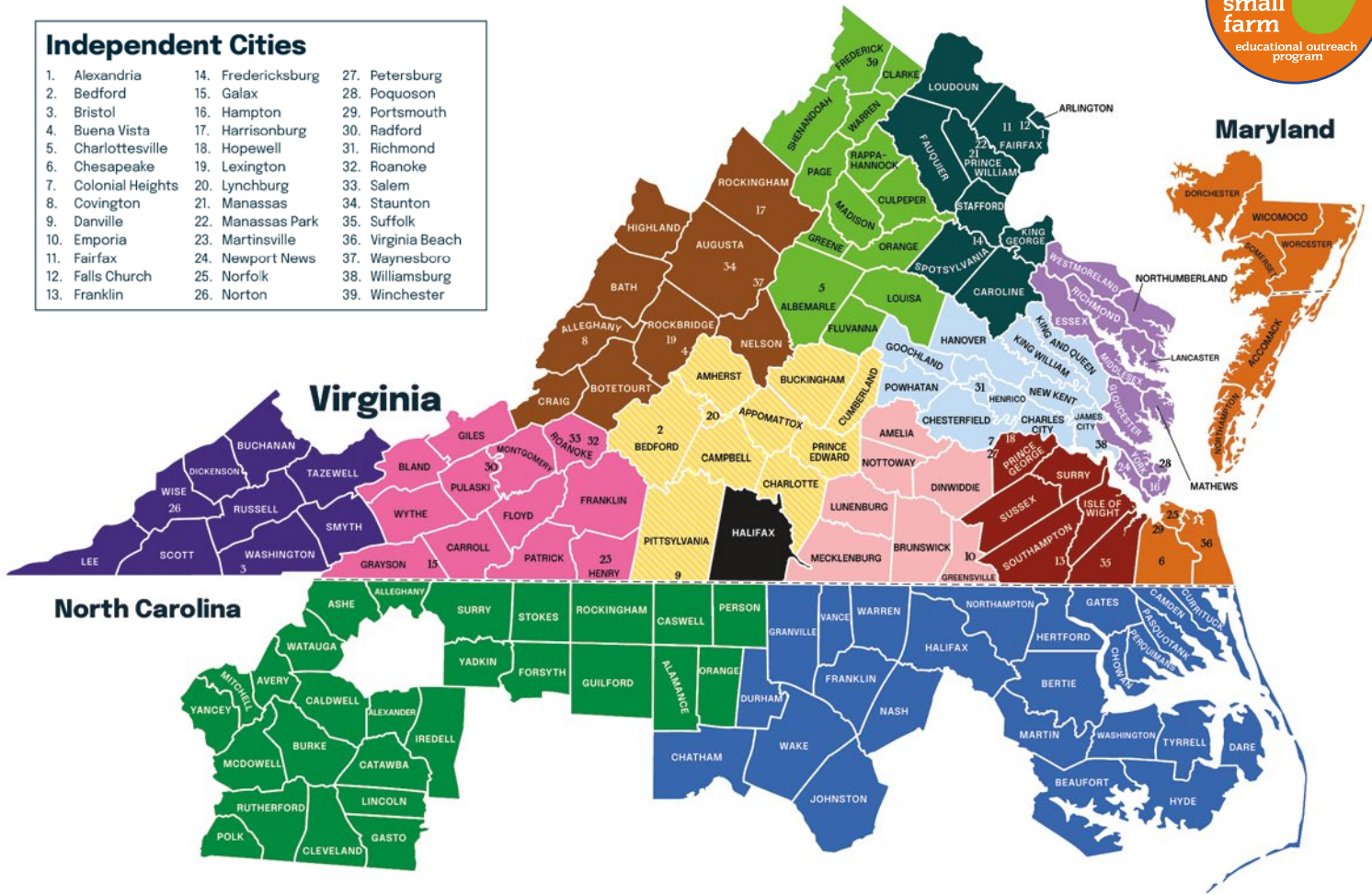
*For more information and to register, visit www.ext.vsu.edu/calendar.

Contact Our Program Assistants



Independent Cities

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Alexandria | 14. Fredericksburg | 27. Petersburg |
| 2. Bedford | 15. Galax | 28. Poquoson |
| 3. Bristol | 16. Hampton | 29. Portsmouth |
| 4. Buena Vista | 17. Harrisonburg | 30. Radford |
| 5. Charlottesville | 18. Hopewell | 31. Richmond |
| 6. Chesapeake | 19. Lexington | 32. Roanoke |
| 7. Colonial Heights | 20. Lynchburg | 33. Salem |
| 8. Covington | 21. Manassas | 34. Staunton |
| 9. Danville | 22. Manassas Park | 35. Suffolk |
| 10. Emporia | 23. Martinsville | 36. Virginia Beach |
| 11. Fairfax | 24. Newport News | 37. Waynesboro |
| 12. Falls Church | 25. Norfolk | 38. Williamsburg |
| 13. Franklin | 26. Norton | 39. Winchester |



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Wanda Johnson | 434-632-9701 | wjohnson@vsu.edu
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■ **Grace Summers** | 804-712-0093 | gsummers@vsu.edu
NRCS, SFOP High Tech Tunnel

Small Farm Outreach Program Office hours: Monday–Thursday, 8 am–5 pm, Friday, 8 am–noon. 95% of SFOP is out in the field.

*If you have any difficulty figuring out which region is yours, please call 804-524-3292 for clarification.



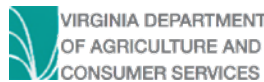
VIRGINIA SMALL FARM RESOURCE CENTER

Where Virginia's small and beginning farmers and ranchers access comprehensive resources to help make their farm businesses profitable and sustainable.

vsusmallfarms.com

Education & Training Resources · Diverse Models of Farm Production & Operation · Ag-Related News & Events · Federal, State & Local Agency Contacts
Agro-Equipment Rental Programs · Expert Advice Online or by Phone
...and More

The Virginia Small Farm Resource Center is developed and supported by Virginia State University's Small Farm Outreach Program.



If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact the Small Farm Outreach Program office at smallfarm@vsu.edu or call 804-524-3292/TDD 800-828-1120 during business hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. to discuss accommodations five days prior to the event.

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