



SFOP Quarterly NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2023

Dear Small-Scale Farmers, Ranchers and Veterans,

Please join me in welcoming our new assistant director, Alston Hilliard, who assumed the role after Herbert Brown Jr., became the USDA 1890 Liaison for VSU College of Agriculture. Alston was the unit coordinator for on-farm demonstrations at Virginia State University's Randolph Farm. Prior to graduating from the College of Agriculture, he also served as an SFOP student intern.



Alston Hilliard

It's SPRINGTIME!

Time to prepare your land for planting. I trust that you have already reached out to your Small Farm program assistants to help you with your farming enterprise. If you haven't, please

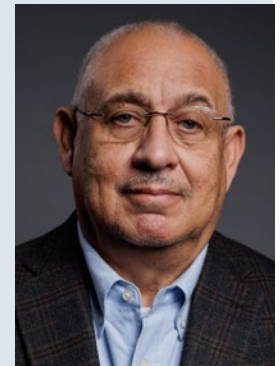
do so. Remember, we are here to assist you through the process with outreach, training and farming assistance.

If you are not sure where to start, take a look at the Spring Ag Tips and the Workshop/Training sections of this newsletter.

You'll find additional SFOP online resources at <https://www.ext.vsu.edu/small-farm-outreach-program> and at the Small Farm Resource Center at vsusmallfarms.com.

Until next season...

VCE/VSU-SFOP keeping you informed,
William Crutchfield, SFOP Director



Spring is in the Air and the Soil

By Grace Summers, SFOP program assistant and high tunnel expert

It's that time of year. The outdoors and your farms are calling. The last three months of cold and rainy weather should have allowed ample time for all your spring planning and supply gathering. Seeds should have been ordered and labeled already by planting dates based on a planting guide for your area of the state and planting zone. Maintaining a second planting guide that lists your planting dates and field locations greatly helps your recordkeeping.

The early spring warm up can have advantages and disadvantages. Growers currently planting onions, potatoes and other spring brassicas or cole crops are taking a risk. March and April weather is a gamble. If the weather remains mild, the risk pays off with earlier harvests, but if it brings frost, you could lose your crops. Farmers should always have backup plans. Start out your crops with succession planting. Then if there is a weather-



Seedlings

-continued on page 2

Spring is in the Air *continued from page 1*

related crop failure you don't lose everything. Have a good supply of row covers for sudden temperature drops. We are almost sure to get a late freeze in April. Black plastic



Seedlings growing in a high tunnel.

mulch and woven landscaping fabric on raised beds are proven season extension techniques that help to keep soil and soil-surface temperatures a couple of degrees warmer than bare ground rows. Using both of these methods together increases your chances of getting a crop to maturity a few weeks before average bare soil growers.

High tunnel growers should be well into their winter crop production of leafy greens and spinach. If growers skipped growing these crops, then the first week of March is ideal for getting the early tomato crop in. This planting date, along with intense management of your tunnel's ventilation, watering and fertilizer should put a grower on track for the start of a late-April or early-May tomato crop. If the early bird gets the worms, they won't be eating your tomatoes, instead all of your happy customers will. Happy spring planting.

Nutrient Management Plans Optimize Yields, Maximize Profits and Protect Natural Resources.

Make wiser investments in your farm using proven, data-driven techniques.

By Tim P. Sexton, licensed professional soil scientist, VSU-SFOP

The **Nutrient Management and Nutrient Management Planning** program helps growers and farmers achieve the best yields by explaining how to apply the necessary nutrients for plant growth at the proper rate, time, manner and location.

Based on VSU's land grant university research and on recent soil test results (those taken within the last three years), farmers can optimize their crops and help protect valuable water resources. When producers apply phosphorus and potassium at optimum rates in locations where plants can easily access the nutrients, they not only maximize their yields but also prevent runoff; thereby protecting the water quality in nearby streams, rivers and ultimately, the Chesapeake Bay.

How do I obtain a nutrient management plan and how will it help me? First, SFOP connects you

with a Virginia Certified Nutrient Management Planner.

Second, your planner will schedule a visit with you at your farm to assess your needs. By understanding your crop systems, rotation plans for the next three years, and the past yields of your crops or hay fields, the planner can better serve you.

Third, they'll walk your land with you and take soil samples of each field or area where you will be growing a crop, hay or pasture forage to gain an understanding of how your fields and streams or other bodies of water relate to one another. You'll have an opportunity to explain any problem areas you may have and your ultimate goals.

This plan adjusts to your changing needs. Once you have your plan in place, you can consult your planner at any time to inform him of changes you

are making due to weather or market changes. The planner will update your plan to remain consistent with your actual production work.

What will I learn from my plan? You will find that not all soils on your farm have the same potential to produce similar yields. There may be soil constraints, such as the depth of hard rock, flooding risks, a shallow water table or other issues. Areas consisting of steep slopes and those that are subject to flooding may be prone to erosion which results in the loss of precious topsoil and phosphorus.

Your plan will contain goals either based on past yields or on the maximum potential of your soils using land-grant research. All fertilizer recommendations will be based on your operation and locally available sources.



Boots to Roots 3



★★★Carving Out Opportunities★★★

Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Carver Center

9432 N James Madison Hwy, Rapidan, Virginia

8 am-1 pm · **FREE!**

Spring Ag Tips from SFOP Program Assistants

Planting

- Start seeds indoors 30 days before transplanting them outdoors, and never transplant before your last average frost date. To determine the last frost date for your area, visit <https://rebrand.ly/frostzones>.
- Consider setting up an irrigation system to ensure your plants get the optimal amount of water in the desired locations.
- Plant your Irish seed potatoes under black plastic between late March and mid-April. The plastic can warm the soil temperature up to 8 degrees, giving the potatoes a great start. Remove the plastic when daytime soil temperatures at the tuber zone get above 70 degrees.
- Identify your source for sweet potato slips now. Plan to plant them between mid-May and the end of June.

- Start your seeds in a high-quality potting mix. Do not fertilize until the plant has four true leaves.
- Take the time to research the livestock manure you use. Do not use livestock manure on your crops unless you know it was not sprayed with the herbicide Grazon. Because Grazon does not break down in the digestive or urinary tract and can remain active in the manure for several years, it can be harmful to your crops.

Poultry/Livestock

- Have your chick brooder already set up, redundant heat lamps tested, and chick probiotics and electrolytes on hand before you bring home your chicks.
- Use large-flake pine shaving. Never use the fine pine shaving, as chicks will eat it and harm their digestive systems.

- When choosing a grazing method, remember that on average, you can double the carrying capacity of a continuously grazed pasture by converting it to a rotational system. Here's why: **In a continuously grazed pasture**, about one-third of the annual forage produced is consumed. **In a 5- to 7-day rotated pasture**, about two-thirds of the annual forage produced is consumed. For more grazing information, visit <https://rebrand.ly/USDA-NRCS-Grazing-Best-Practices>.



Conserving Soil, Dollars and a Family's Farming Legacy

Working with SFOP, his Soil and Water Conservation District and Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share, farmer Joe Gray is enriching his soil and his yields.

By Rebecca Jones, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

For crop farmer Joe Gray, the soil is personal, part of something bigger than himself.

On land that his ancestors farmed for more than a century, he grows corn, soybeans and wheat in rotation. "Conservation is my philosophy of farming," he said.

He is extending his family's farming legacy with a soil conservation regimen that keeps his land fertile and productive today – and for generations to come.

Gray has been working with the Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program, his local Soil and Water Conservation District and the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share program to implement – and fund – agricultural best-management practices that have steadily improved his soil and his bottom line.

"I've worked with SFOP for the last four or five years," he said. "They are good at helping you find resources for your operation." SFOP has helped Gray in numerous ways, including helping him locate outlets for what he produces.

"And they come to you, which is great because, on the farm, time is money," he added. "In fact, [SFOP program assistant] Michael Carter Sr. was just here last week to drop off an emergency safety kit."

Of his often erosion-prone land, Gray said, "I farm some tough ground." With funding from the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share program, which he accessed through his district, he plants cover crops that have delivered more productive soils with minimal costs.

His land benefits from every stage of his cover crop's life cycle, Gray said. The living plants hold the soil in place between harvest and planting seasons, while the roots they put down loosen the deeper ground for better absorption all year. This means "dollars gained from water and nutrient retentions," he said.

Cover crops also soak up residual fertilizers from the previous year so, when they die back, those nutrients



Joe Gray in his tractor

return to the ground. And, come the dog days of July and August, he added, "you're glad you have that carpet of cover crop residue to really hold in moisture."

Gray also uses Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share to fertilize his commodity crops more efficiently – and economically. Instead of applying all the nutrients up front, he now puts down nitrogen three times between late March and mid-June. He likens this process to "spoon-feeding," so that more nutrition goes to the plants and fewer nutrients (and dollars) are washed away.

When talking with other farmers, Gray has become something of an evangelist about conservation, cost-share and collaboration.

"If people go to their district office for one hour, they're probably going to find five to 10 [cost-share] programs for their operations," he said. "Some may even be things they're already kind of doing."

The bottom line? "Just do it," Gray said of working with SFOP, his district and Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share. "It's no money out of your pocket, and your yield is going to improve."

Learn more about Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share here: <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/costshare>.

Meet Joe Gray, see his farm and meet his ancestors in this video: <https://rebrand.ly/SFOP-DCR-JoeGray>.

SFOP Workshops: April–June 2023*

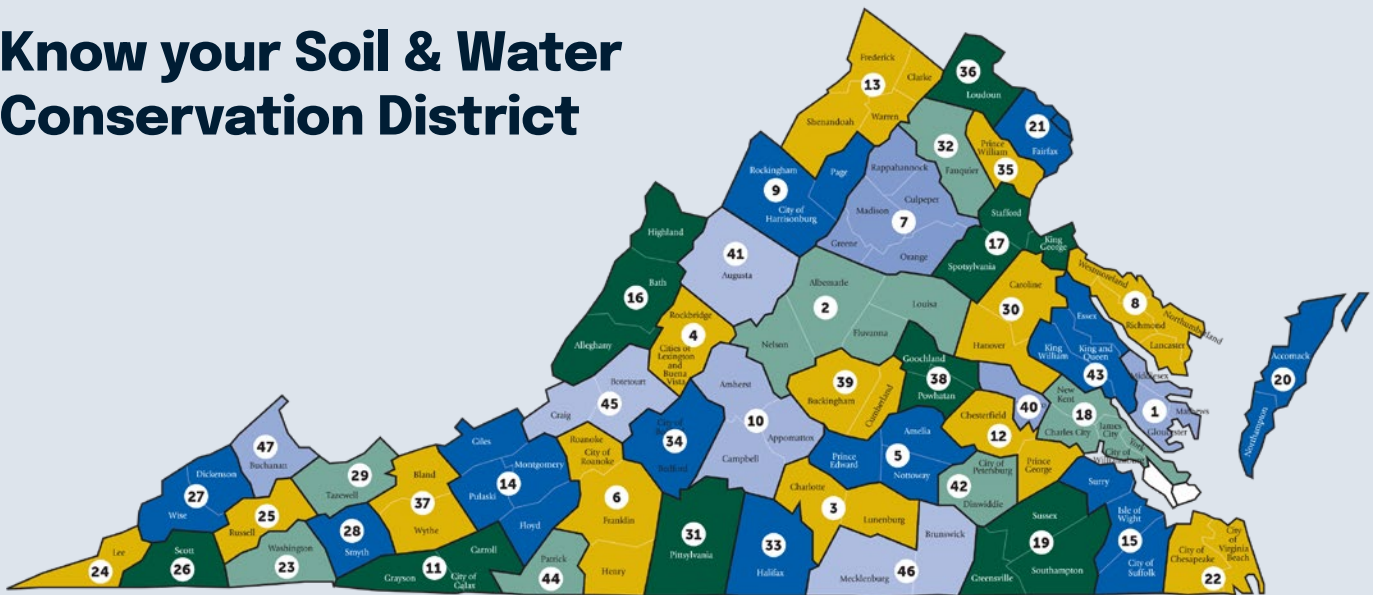
Date	Workshop	Time	Location	Program Assistant	Limit
4/5/23	Drones In Agriculture	9 am–noon	Norwood, Virginia	Leonel Castillo & Michael Carter Sr.	40
4/12/23	Introduction to Permaculture	4:30–6:30 pm	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA 23803	James Gibson	
4/12/23	Filing Farm Taxes	9 am–3 pm	Carver Center 9432 N James Madison Hwy Rapidan, VA 22733	Roland Terrell	
4/13/23	Spring Vegetable Marketing Tour Raleigh State Farmers Market	7 am–5 pm	Meet at VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA 23803	Derrick Cladd	
4/13/23	Successful Lambing in the Southside	10 am–noon	Meet at Dollar General 8255 Patrick Henry Hwy, Green Bay, VA	Leonard Elam	15
4/18/23	Small Farm Orientation	9–11 am	Virtual	James Gibson	40
4/18/23	Vermicomposting 101 for Flowers and Vegetables	2–4 pm	Fredericksburg, Virginia	Michael Carter Sr.	25
4/18/23	Emergency Preparedness	6–8 pm	Caroline County Community Center 17202 Richmond Turnpike, Milford, VA	Michael Carter Sr.	
4/20/23	Specialty Crops Using High Tunnels	6–7 pm	Unionville, Virginia	James Gibson	
4/22/23	Laying Plastic Mulch in Your Operation	10 am–noon	Carver Center 9432 N James Madison Hwy Rapidan, VA 22733	Roland Terrell	
4/27/23	Southwest Virginia Friends & Farmers Breakfast	8:30–10 am	Sugar Hollow Park 23261 Sugar Hollow Rd, Bristol, VA 24202	Mandy Fletcher	
4/27/23	Making Dollars and Sense Out of Backyard Poultry	10 am–noon	Virtual	Leonard Elam	
5/3/23	Farm Tour	10 am–noon	Brodnax, Virginia	Marilyn Estes	12
5/3/23	Creating Flower Container Gardens and Hanging Baskets	10 am–noon	Virtual	Roland Terrell	
5/15/23	Filing Farm Taxes	9 am–3 pm	Lake Country Advanced Learning Center 118 E. Danville St, South Hill, VA 23970	Marilyn Estes	
5/16/23	Small Farm Orientation	9–11 am	Virtual	Roland Terrell	40
5/17/23	Boots to Roots III Carving Out Opportunities	9 am–1 pm	Carver Center 9432 N James Madison Hwy Rapidan, VA 22733	Roland Terrell & James Edwards	100
5/18/23	How to Start an Ecological Farm	4:30–6:30 pm	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA 23803	James Gibson	
5/23/23	Drones In Agriculture	9 am–noon	North Carolina	Leonel Castillo & Leonard Elam	
5/23/23	Bringing Basic Solar Energy to Your Farm	2–4 pm	Fredericksburg, Virginia	Michael Carter Sr.	25
5/23/23	Ag & Conservation Partners Expo	6–9 pm	Southwest VA Agricultural Research & Extension Center, 12326 VPI Farm Rd Glade Spring, VA 24340	Mandy Fletcher	
5/24/23	Urban Forestry–the Riparian Buffer	10 am–1 pm	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA 23803	Derrick Cladd	30

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

SFOP Workshops: April–June 2023*

Date	Workshop	Time	Location	Program Assistant	Limit
5/25/23	DCR Information Session	10 am–1 pm	Surry, Virginia	Derrick Cladd	
5/25/23	Emergency Preparedness	4–6 pm	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA 23803	James Gibson	
5/30/23	Drones In Agriculture	9 am–noon	Appomattox, Virginia	Leonard Elam and Leonel Castillo	
6/7/23	Filing Farm Taxes	9 am–3 pm	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA 23803	James Gibson	
6/8/23	Exploring Organic Certification	9 am–1 pm	VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion 4415 River Rd, Petersburg, VA 23803	James Gibson	
6/8/23	Southwest Virginia Sheep & Goat Farmer Gathering	6–9 pm	Glade Spring, Virginia	Mandy Fletcher	
6/8/23	Drones In Agriculture	9 am–noon	Amelia County, Virginia	Leonard Elam and Leonel Castillo	
6/20/23	Small Farm Orientation	9–11 am	Virtual	Derrick Cladd	40
6/21/23	Dug In Farms Tour	1–3 pm	White Stone, Virginia	Tammy Holler	25

Know your Soil & Water Conservation District



- | | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 – Tidewater | 12 – James River | 24 – Daniel Boone | 37 – Big Walker |
| 2 – Thomas Jefferson | 13 – Lord Fairfax (Winchester) | 25 – Clinch Valley | 38 – Monacan |
| 3 – Southside | 14 – Skyline | 26 – Natural Tunnel | 39 – Peter Francisco |
| 4 – Natural Bridge
(Buena Vista, Lexington) | 15 – Peanut (Suffolk) | 27 – Lonesome Pine | 40 – Henricopolis |
| 5 – Piedmont | 16 – Mountain (Covington) | 28 – Evergreen | 41 – Headwaters
(Staunton and Waynesboro) |
| 6 – Blue Ridge (Roanoke) | 17 – Tri-County/City (Fredericksburg) | 29 – Tazewell | 42 – Appomattox River
(Petersburg) |
| 7 – Culpeper | 18 – Colonial (Williamsburg) | 30 – Hanover-Caroline | 43 – Three Rivers |
| 8 – Northern Neck | 19 – Chowan Basin | 31 – Pittsylvania | 44 – Patrick |
| 9 – Shenandoah Valley
(Harrisonburg) | 20 – Eastern Shore | 32 – John Marshall | 45 – Mountain Castles |
| 10 – Robert E. Lee (Lynchburg) | 21 – Northern Virginia | 33 – Halifax | 46 – Lake Country |
| 11 – New River (Galax) | 22 – Virginia Dare
(Chesapeake, Virginia Beach) | 34 – Peaks of Otter (Bedford) | 47 – Big Sandy |
| | 23 – Holston River | 35 – Prince William | |
| | | 36 – Loudoun | |

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



The Agribusiness Production & Financial Management Course Is Now Online!

SFOP's Agribusiness Production & Financial Management course is now online. Learn about financial management, balance sheets, cash flow, income statements and more.

Those who successfully complete the course, which consists of seven modules plus quizzes, qualify to apply for an FSA loan since VSU is licensed to conduct this FSA prerequisite training

To sign up for the course, visit <https://rebrand.ly/VSU-SFOP-Agribusiness-Course> or scan the QR code.



For more information, contact Alston Hilliard at ahilliard@vsu.edu or 804-524-1021.

Attention Virginia Farmers:

Do you sell produce that you grow? Do you participate in local farmers' markets? If so, this program may be for you!

The Farm Market Fresh program is Virginia's Senior & WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (S/FMNP). Farm Market Fresh distributes checks to low-income seniors and WIC families; providing them with coupons to purchase locally grown, fresh produce at farmers' markets across Virginia!

The Farm Market Fresh for older adults is expanding! Local Area Agencies on Aging distribute the checks to its older adults, and then farmers collect the checks in exchange for eligible produce at the market! This program is expanding this year into new regions across Virginia, and approximately 70,000 more seniors will be able to participate than in previous years!

To learn more about this program, and to become an authorized Farm Market Fresh farmer/vendor, apply here: vda.virginia.gov/FarmMarketFresh.htm. For market and regional information: <https://bit.ly/Nutrition-Program>. Email sfmnp@dars.virginia.gov with your completed Application and Farmer Agreement, or with any questions you may have.



FARMERS: THE SENIOR & WIC FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM IS COMING TO YOUR MARKET!



The S/FMNP offers low-income seniors & families an opportunity to purchase your fresh produce!

Collect SFMNP checks from shoppers while at the market!

Become an authorized farmer to accept S/FMNP checks at your booth for the next two years!

Contact your Market Manager or apply online: <https://vda.virginia.gov/FarmMarketFresh.htm>

<https://vafma.org/senior-produce-vouchers-program-expanding-across-virginia/>

Return Applications & Agreement to: sfmnp@dars.virginia.gov





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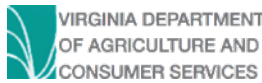


Where Virginia's small and beginning farmers and ranchers access comprehensive resources to help make their farm businesses profitable and sustainable.

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.



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 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 am. and 5 p.m. to discuss accommodations five days prior to the event.

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

8K 3/2023

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