



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
AND LIFE SCIENCES  
VIRGINIA TECH.

CENTER FOR FOOD SYSTEMS  
AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

CENTER FOR FOOD SYSTEMS AND  
COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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*December 21, 2020*

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# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Overview and Aims.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Core Team .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Advisory Group.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Speakers and Events .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Programming and Education.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Projects and Initiatives .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Invited Center Talks and Presentations.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Publications .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>VCE Community, Local, &amp; Regional Food Systems Program Team .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2020 Grant Proposals and In-Kind Resources .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Outcomes and Impacts .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Website and Social Media Analytics .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2019-2020 Expenditures .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>COVID-19 Impact Statement .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Goals and Plans for 2021 .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Resource Needs.....</b>	<b>12</b>

## Overview and Aims

The Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation is an Extension/Outreach center based in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). The Center works at the nexus of food, community, and society to explore, build capacity, and catalyze new food system possibilities through a values-based and systems-approach. Our aims include:

- Developing partnerships, outreach, educational opportunities across Virginia Tech and the Commonwealth for improved collaboration among a diversity of stakeholders to address the complexity of food system issues with emphasis on social equity and community sustainability.
- Conducting community-based research initiatives that addresses historical and emergent issues related to healthy food access, farming systems viability, ecological sustainability, and producer/food worker justice and quality of life.
- Supporting university teaching and learning opportunities by leveraging existing, and creating new, service-based curriculum in the area of food, farming, and community transformation.

Our goals and activities emphasize a number of food system needs and issues, specifically: 1) the environmental sustainability of our food systems; 2) the quality of life of food system workers; 3) issues of food access, justice, and human health; and 4) the emancipatory potential for socially just food systems in advancing the human condition in Virginia and beyond.

## Core Team

Our core team comprises individuals who work together to achieve Center objectives:

**Kim Niewolny**, Center Director, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education

**Eric Bendfeldt**, Center Associate Director, Extension Specialist, Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems Community Viability Program, Virginia Cooperative Extension

**Katie Trozzo**, Center Associate, Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program Coordinator, Department of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education

**Garland Mason**, Center Associate, AgrAbility Virginia Program Coordinator, Department of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education

**Conaway Haskins**, Center Fellow, Extension Specialist for Economic Development, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

**French Price**, Center Fellow, Value Chain Coordinator, Virginia Cooperative Extension, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences

**Cyndi Marston**, SARE Education Support Specialist, Virginia Cooperative Extension

**Joyce Latimer**, Center Fellow and Advisory Board Member, Professor and Extension Specialist, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech

## Advisory Group

We are advised by a group of experts from across the state. We meet once annually to consult with our advisory group. Our advisory group includes:

**Jeanette Abi-Nader**, Executive Director, Cultivate Charlottesville; Member, Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative

**Dominic Barrett**, Executive Director, Shalom Farms; Virginia Food Systems Council

**C.L. Bohannon**, Assistant Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, Virginia Tech

**Jewel Bronaugh**, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Commonwealth of Virginia

**Leonard Githinji**, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, Sustainable & Urban Agriculture, Virginia State University

**Ellington Graves**, Assistant Provost for Diversity and Inclusion; Director, Africana Studies Program, Virginia Tech

**Robert “Bobby” Grisso**, Professor, Biological Systems Engineering, Virginia Tech

**Kathy Hosig**, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Population Health Sciences Department, Virginia Tech

**Max Stephenson**, Professor and Director of the Institute for Policy and Governance, School of Public and International Affairs, Virginia Tech

We currently have a position to fill and propose filling it with an VCE agent.

## Speakers and Events

We have hosted seven public talks that have been attended by 453 participants who represent university faculty and students, Extension field faculty, and community stakeholders.

### Launch Event with Dr. Alice Julier and Panel Discussion

Our offerings began in September of 2019 with our launch event. This event included presentations from Center director, Dr. Kim Niewolny and guest speaker, Dr. Alice Julier, Associate Professor, Food Studies Director, Center for Regional Agriculture Food and Transformation (CRAFT) at Chatham University. Additionally, the launch featured a student conversation with Dr. Julier and a panel discussion on the need for such a Center and the generative possibility embedded within its existence. The launch event was followed by a reception at the Hahn Horticulture Garden Pavilion. About 50 attended this in-person event.

### Dr. Monica White

On February 20, 2020, the Center co-hosted Dr. Monica White for a roundtable discussion and public talk. Dr. White is an associate professor of Environmental Justice at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research engages communities of color and grassroots organizations that are involved in the development of sustainable community food systems as a strategy to respond to issues of hunger and food inaccessibility. Dr. White is also the author of *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*, which "expands the historical narrative of the black freedom struggle to embrace the work, roles, and contributions of southern black farmers and the organizations they formed." This event was presented in partnership with the Community Change Collaborative of the Institute of Policy and Governance, the CALS Diversity Council, as well as Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS). About 80 attended this in-person event.

## **Sipp Culture: Brandi and Carlton Turner**

In partnership with the School of Performing Arts, the Center co-hosted Brandi and Carlton Turner, directors of Sipp Culture, The Mississippi Center for Cultural Production. This talk on April 9<sup>th</sup> as part of the School of Performing Arts' Colloquium Series which included a series of talks and workshops on the power and practice of art and culture as essential elements of healthy communities. This event was initially scheduled as an in-person offering but was moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 75 participants attended this event.

## **Notes from the Three Sisters Manifesto, Ó:Nenhste - Corn with Mohawk Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey**

On Tuesday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, Mohawk chef, author, and Indigenous foods educator, Dave Smoke-McCluskey gave a presentation on corn as the first of a series of three on the significance of the three sisters in Indigenous agriculture and cuisine. The Center provided logistical support for this talk. This talk occurred virtually over Zoom due to the ongoing pandemic. This talk was attended by 71 participants.

## **Notes from the Three Sisters Manifesto, Osahé:ta - Bean: The Unsung Heroine with Mohawk Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey**

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey gave a presentation on beans as the second in the series of three on the three sisters system of growing in Indigenous agriculture. This talk was co-hosted by the Center in partnership with The American Indian and Indigenous Community Center, Native at VT, and the Community Viability Endowment. This talk occurred virtually over Zoom due to the ongoing pandemic and was attended by 57 participants.

## **Notes from the Three Sisters Manifesto, Onon'onsera - Squash: The Shadey One with Mohawk Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey**

On December 1<sup>st</sup> Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey gave a presentation titled 'Onon'onsera: Squash, the shadey one.' Both of these talks occurred online due to the ongoing pandemic. This talk was co-hosted by the Center in partnership with The American Indian and Indigenous Community Center, Native at VT, and the Community Viability Endowment. This talk occurred virtually over Zoom due to the ongoing pandemic and was attended by 60 participants. Participants made the following comments in the chat:

"Thank you. I can't wait to try some of these tips!"

"I'm new to watching and loved it!"

"Brilliant, great work!"

## **A Conversation with Chef Nephi Craig and screening of *Gather***

We co-hosted an online screening of the documentary film *Gather* on November 8<sup>th</sup> and a talk from Chef Nephi Craig, featured in the movie, on November 9<sup>th</sup>. Chef Nephi is a chef from the White Mountain Apache nation featured in the film for his work with indigenous food sovereignty and revitalizing Indigenous foodways. We co-hosted this event in partnership with The American Indian and Indigenous Community Center and Native at VT. This talk was hosted virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. The talk was attended by 60 participants. Participants made the following comments in the chat:

"I feel so blessed to have shared this time together. Thank you so much!"

"I don't think I will ever be able to think of food the same again."



## Programming and Education

Within our extension mission, we offer educational programming such as learning circles, community sessions, and extensive resource archiving and sharing.

### Learning Circles

Between March and September, we hosted monthly learning circle sessions on various themes related to food systems and community transformation. Learning circles are a space for conversation, peer-to-peer learning, and deep reflection around pressing issues related to the Center's work. The monthly learning circles provide an opportunity to engage with peers from across the university and connect with Extension and community practitioners working in the field. The Center's core team is responsible for organizing and facilitating monthly learning circles with the aim of encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue, relationship building, and collaboration toward the Center's aims.

#### **March Learning Circle: *Connectivity for Critical Transformation***

This learning circle occurred on March 27th, 2020 and was moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were invited to explore their joint interests in community transformation and food systems work, especially as it relates to the current pandemic crisis. We used the prompt: 'What are your experiences, hopes, and ideas for social connectivity, togetherness, "mutual aid" to address community food needs?' 22 people participated.

#### **April Learning Circle: *Community Healing***

This learning circle took place on April 24th, 2020 with the theme of community healing in light of the COVID-10 pandemic. We used [Dori Midnight's poem, 'Wash Your Hands'](#) as a prompt for our discussion and we began the circle with a reading of the poem. 16 people participated.

#### **April Learning Circle: *Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge***

Throughout the month of April, we hosted three smaller discussions with Center fellows and community members aligned with themes from Food Solutions New England's 21-day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge, which was a national event. This series, along with the racial violence and uprisings in early summer, provided the impetus for our Summer Learning Circle Series, Racial Justice in the Food System. There were about 5 attendees in each of these meetings.

#### **May Learning Circle: *Land Sovereignty and Higher Education***

This learning circle was inspired by two articles: [Land Grab Universities](#) from High Country News and [Ask Who Paid for America's Universities](#) from the New York Times (both by Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone). For this learning circle on May 29th, we invited Dr. Bikrum Gill from the Department of Political Science to give a short talk introducing the topic and to help facilitate the discussion. 30 people participated.

#### **June-September Learning Circle Series: *Racial Justice in the Food System***

Framed by the [Food Solutions New England's 21-day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge](#) curriculum, we designed and facilitated a series of four learning circles related to Racial Justice in the Food System as an educational and outreach response to the increase concern and calls for racial justice nationally. These sessions included:

- ***Getting at the Roots of Whiteness and Anti-Blackness on June 29th (48 participants)***
- ***Structural Racism and New Narratives on July 23th (45 participants)***
- ***Sovereignty and Self-determination on August 13th (37 participants)***
- ***New Patterns, New Visions on September 14th (31 participants)***

Individuals were encouraged to attend all four sessions from June-September 2020. We had 161 participants in all the sessions combined. We led these discussions in partnership with the Cambium Collective. Participants in the series shared these reflections and comments:

“Thank you SO MUCH for letting me take part in this series. I learned a lot on all sorts of heart and mind levels.”--Learning circle participant

“Once again, I found that digging deeper and consciously into the roots of structural racism in our country is both encouraging and uncomfortable. Having to root through my unconscious biases is confusing but welcome. The Idea of "whiteness" as a continuum is fascinating for me from an autobiographical perspective. . . . I think you have done a fabulous job. I enjoyed the structure and format of the meeting. The small group work with clear prompts was helpful in facilitating feedback. I wish there was more time to get more deeply into the nitty gritty of food system specifics but...” --Learning circle participant

### **Soil, Conservation, and Place: A Conversation Series on Agroecology**

We designed and facilitated a series of conversations with farmers who exemplify agroecological values in their relationship with the land. This series was part of the *Soil, Conservation, and Place Project* and offered participants a chance to hear live from the farmers who were interviewed through a narrative inquiry process that documented farmer agroecological knowledge so it may inform social movement networking, policy recommendations, and field-based farming strategies for sustainability, conservation, and food justice. These four sessions were attended by 510 participants total:

#### ***Economics, Justice, and Systems Thinking from the Soil Up (December 1, 2020)***

A conversation on soil health, economic justice, transition planning, and systems thinking with Ira Wallace of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Robert Spiers of Spiers Farm, LLC., and Mike Phillips of Valley View Farms.

#### ***Mentors, Markets, and Evolving Adaptation (December 3, 2020)***

A discussion of mentorship, business planning, finding markets, optimizing soil health volunteers, and continual adaptation with Anne Geyer of AgriBerry Farm & CSA, Danny Boyer of Four Winds Farm, and Phil Witmer of Grazeland Dairy, Inc.

#### ***Equity, Dignity, and Health in Food and Agriculture (December 8, 2020)***

A session inspired by their agroecological stories, actions, and visions for community and systemic change with Renard Turner of Vanguard Ranch LTD., Jonathan McRay of Silver Run Forest Farm, and Janet Aardema of Broadfork Farm.

#### ***Soil Farming, Pollinator Habitat, and Engaging with Community (December 11, 2020)***

A session based on the experiences and journeys into soil and water conservation, biodiversity, soil farming, and community outreach with Amy Hicks of Amy's Organic Garden, CJ Isbell of Keenbell Farm and Gerald Garber of Cave View Farms.

Participants in the discussion series shared this feedback:

“Thank you so much for this inspiring and informative discussion. I am preparing to purchase a small farm for organic gardening and animal care and product production. This is very helpful to orienting the needs and particularly network support. I plan on being in touch for further exploration and preparation. I am very grateful for this opportunity! Thank you.”

“Inspirational! thank you!!”

“Thanks to all of you for helping us to see into your thought processes and sharing your knowledge.”

## News and Article Annotations and Archive

Starting in April 2020, we have featured five articles (news, op-eds, and journal literature) on COVID-19 in the food system as well as equity and justice by people across the globe organized by theme that we annotate and send to our listserv (with over 235 members). We have sent five (or more) annotated articles weekly with the exception of three weeks where we either did not send articles or sent poems and art in lieu of articles. There are now over 160 annotated news and articles submission on food systems and community transformation organized by theme and compiled in the [news archive of our webpage](#).

## Projects and Initiatives

In 2020, we have been moving forward with existing projects as well as those that emerged as ways to support our community in the midst of our global pandemic. We engaged people through grant-driven project activity, online virtual events, university capstone projects, and cataloging resources and developing content on our website. More details are listed below for each project and initiative.

### The Food System and COVID-19 Compendium and Resources

When the Pandemic hit, the Center took leadership in developing a compendium, “COVID-19 and Food Systems” that is a collection of updated news, public and scholarly literature, position papers, and VCE and partners resources (locally, regionally, & nationally) that address or relate to the impacts COVID-19 has brought to the food system. We [cataloged these resources on our website](#). VCE’s Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (CLRFS) Program Team collaborated with the Center to create and disseminate this collection of partnership and timely resources.

### Soil, Conservation, and Place (Community Viability & Agua Fund, 2018-2021) (\$70,000)

This project aims to deepen community understanding of the importance of agriculture and soils to a sense of place, community, and culture. The project highlights the distinct voices and diverse farms of Virginia’s agricultural community who are protecting and conserving soil and water resources through a narrative inquiry framework. The project is funded and supported by a Community Viability grant from Virginia Tech’s Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education and the Agua Fund. Through this project, we created a series of twelve videos highlighting participating farmers’ stories of conservation and place-making, [eight of these are already archived on our website](#). We also submitted a journal publication and hosted a 4-session conservation series with farmer interviewees (see above).

### Catalyzing Agricultural and Educational Resources to Move the Local Food Value Chain Needle in the Shenandoah Valley and Northern Piedmont Regions of Virginia (USDA-AMS-LFPP funded, 2018-2021) (\$496,839)

Virginia Tech’s Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, in collaboration with Extension’s Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (CLRFS) Team, the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition (VBFRC), Virginia Fresh Produce Food Safety Team, and community project partners, worked to initiate and secure a 2018 USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service Local Food Promotion Program implementation grant. Project co-directors and collaborators from Virginia Tech and VCE include Eric Bendfeldt (PI), Dr. Joyce Latimer, Dr. Kim Niewolny, French Price, Conaway Haskins, Amber Vallotton, Kenner Love, Tim Mize, Beth Sastre-Flores, Jim Hilleary, Mark Sutphin, Cyndi Marston, and Jason Cooper. Project’s objectives are: 1) Increase promotion of small and mid-sized farms and food businesses to appropriate market channels in the Shenandoah Valley and Northern Piedmont Regions to increase market access and share in intermediated markets, 2) Advance producer-buyer relationships through directed promotion, educational training, concentrated vetting, and networking



activities specific to scale, 3) Enhance the distribution and delivery of local foods from farm to schools across the region, 4) Measure potential for market differentiation based on soil health and water quality farming practices, and 5) Evaluate gains in market access, share and logistics of regional value chain coordination. To learn more, visit: [www.foodsystems.centers.vt.edu/projects/LFPP](http://www.foodsystems.centers.vt.edu/projects/LFPP)

## Civic Agriculture and Food Systems Pathways Minor Capstone Projects

The Center partnered with the Civic Agriculture and Food Systems Pathway Minor Capstone course by working with Sara Deason and Rachel Hall, seniors in the minor, to complete their capstone projects:

**Sara Deason. *Food Systems Curriculum at Virginia Tech.*** Sara conducted a project cataloging courses at Virginia Tech directly addressing food, agriculture, and society to create a Food Systems Course Compendium. She also conducted interviews with three professors who teach food systems courses and three students who have participated in food systems courses. Her work will be featured as a new page on the Center's website as a resource for the Virginia Tech community.

**Rachel Hall. *Stories of the Food System in the Pandemic.*** Rachel took over writing vignettes as part of our Food Systems and the Pandemic Story Collection Project. She completed two vignettes that are featured on our website and she will be continuing this into the Spring semester as she finishes her capstone credits.

## Invited Center Talks and Presentations

The following are invited seminars, conference presentations, course lectures, and news articles focused on the work of the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation:

- **Virginia's United Land Trusts, 2020 Land Conservation & Greenways Virtual Conference. Dr. Kim Niewolny Invited Speaker, August, 2020**
- **ALS 4244, Global Food Security and Health Pathways Capstone Course, Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Lecture, October 2020**
- **ALS 2204, Introduction to Civic Agriculture Course, Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Lecture, November 2020**
- **National Farm Medicine Center, Marshfield Clinic, Seminar Series, Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Speaker, December 2020**
- **WSLS News, [Food Justice: What it is and how can we fix it](#), News Article, Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Interviewee, October 2020**

## Publications

As a team, we have generated a number of publications relevant to community, local, and regional food systems and COVID-19 and the food system. We have submitted two peer-reviewed journal articles, a repository of white papers, and a series of vignettes that capture themes of food systems resilience and mutual aid during the pandemic.

## Journal Articles

Niewolny, K., Bendfeldt, E., Latimer, J., MacAuley, L. (under review). Community, local, and regional food systems: Recommendations for statewide program development. Submitted to the *Journal of Extension*.

Bendfeldt, E., McGonagle, M., & Niewolny, K. (under review). Rethinking farmer knowledge from soil to plate through narrative inquiry: An agroecological food systems perspective. Submitted to the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community, Development*.

## Food System and COVID-19 White Papers

We have created [a repository of Center articles](#) that Center staff and associates have written about food systems, resiliency, and the pandemic. The titles of these papers include

- *Struggle and Adaptation During COVID-19 Food Systems Disruptions*
- *Hope in Times of Crisis*
- *The Significance of Local and Regional Food Systems for Community Resilience: If Not Now, Then When?*
- *Farm Stress and Grief in the Time of COVID-19*
- *Mutual Aid for Food Systems Change in the Time of COVID-19*

## Food Systems Stories in the Pandemic

In an effort to capture and share stories of hope and resilience in Virginia's Food System amidst the pandemic, our team identified news articles to uplift and conducted interviews with stakeholders in our food system to hear more about how they are responding and adapting to the pandemic. Through this, we created a series of [19 vignettes](#) that highlight food systems resilience across Virginia. Extension efforts have been highlighted in these vignettes.

## VCE Community, Local, & Regional Food Systems Program Team

**In-Service Training Series.** Offered a two-part in-service series titled “Food & Farm Connections” designed to train and equip VCE personnel about the food value chain, food system coordination, and connecting people and businesses in Virginia’s food value chain. Eric Bendfeldt, French Price, & Conaway Haskins led these in-service trainings on April 22 and 29, 2020, which were recorded and are available at <https://youtu.be/Tn1Ud3ghXCA> and <https://youtu.be/eYZckHSuuWI>. 149 people attended.

**COVID-19 Resources and Content.** VCE CLRFS collaborated with the VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation to create a “COVID-19 and Food Systems Compendium” that is a collection of a news, public and scholarly literature, position papers, and VCE and partners resources (locally, regionally, & nationally) that address or relate to the impacts COVID-19 has brought to the food system.

**Emergency Produce Distribution.** CLRFS team members continued to partner with the Emergency Produce Distribution statewide team led by Virginia Fresh Match and the Virginia Farmers Market Association.

**Virtual Virginia Farm to Table Program.** Partnered with VCE agent, Lenah Nguyen, to provide CLRFS published resources and outreach support for new Virginia Virtual Farm to Table program that brought a number of agents and program team members together to showcase the agricultural diversity of Virginia and the diversity of VCE work in the Commonwealth (farm, community, cooking, food safety, and youth education). <https://fauquier.ext.vt.edu/programs/FarmtoTable.html>

**Food System Capacity Building and Facilitation.** CLRFS worked with the Center and other planned program teams to address statewide efforts on food access, farmer and food business support during disruptions in food systems, resource development in partnership with the Virginia Food System Council and Farmers Market Associations, and considering long-term solutions to existing gaps, disproportionate disparities and outcomes to low-wealth communities, and on how we get food into the system.

## 2020 Grant Proposals and In-Kind Resources

We have submitted a total of 4 grant proposals in 2020 totaling \$330,423.

**Niewolny, K. & Bendfeldt, E. (Co-PI) (9/30/20-9/29/22). *Strong Farm & Food Future: Planning for a Collaborative Regional Economy in the Roanoke Valley*. USDA AM Regional Food Systems Partnership Project (VT Subcontract \$58,896). Funded.**

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The purpose of this planning project led by Local Environmental Agricultural Project (LEAP) is to explore and build the partnership capacity of a regional food system across the Roanoke Valley in southwest Virginia. The goal is to address the necessity of sustainable farm development and local food distribution needs as one comprehensive approach for a more resilient, socially just, and economically viable system in this underserved region.

**Niewolny, K., & Mason, G. (12/20-11/2021). *Building Racial Equity for Food Justice through Critical Pedagogy and Collective Agency: A Community-University Dialogue Featuring Shantell Bingham, Michael Carter Jr., & Duron Chavis*. VT CALS Diversity Incentive Fund (\$1,000). Funded.**

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The proposal is to support a two-part forum focused on the praxis of critical pedagogy, collective agency, and solidarity politics to build racial equity for food justice. This will include a virtual public forum and a virtual student session. The invited speakers include Shantell Bingham, Michael Carter Jr., and Duron Chavis. Dr. Kim Niewolny and Ms. Garland Mason will serve as moderators. The virtual forum will be based in dialogue between speakers and attendees.

**Bendfeldt, E., Niewolny, K., & Trozzo, K. (4/01/2021- 3/31/2024). *Soil for Water: Regenerative Grazing and Soil Health Systems*. (VT Subcontract \$97,527). Southern SARE Systems Research. Submitted and Under Review**

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The purpose of this systems research project led by National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) is to identify and promote practical ways of using regenerative grazing practices to improve soil health and catch and hold more rainwater in soil. The specific objectives include: (1) Identifying practical and regionally-appropriate ways of improving soil health and catching more rainwater in soil; (2) Launching a new multi-state network of landowners who are conducting on-farm trials; and (3) Improving communication and information-sharing among producers and agricultural professionals who are interested in regenerative grazing. The VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation will focus on Objectives 1 and 3.

**Niewolny, K., Trozzo, K., Bendfeldt, E., Haskins, C., Mason, G., Jackson, Z., Travis, E., Sforza, P., Moayerian, N., Stephenson, M., Meit, M., Slawson, D., & Wahlquist, A. (10/1/20-9/30/21). *Agriculture and Local Food Activity in the Appalachian Region*. Appalachian Regional Commission. (\$173,000). Not Funded.**

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This proposed project team aimed to utilize quantitative and qualitative methods to build an online database and interactive mapping tool to understand the current status and trends of local food system capacity and opportunities across the 13-state Appalachian region. With the VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation as the lead, this partnership included: ETSU's Center for Rural Health Research, Virginia Tech's Center for Geospatial Information Technology, VT Office of Economic Development, and Institute for Policy and Governance at VT.

## Outcomes and Impacts

**Since our launch event in September 2019, we have meaningfully engaged with 1,185 people.** This has included 50 attendees at our launch event, 50 attendees at Dr. Monica White's talk in February 2020, and 75 at the Sipp Culture talk given by Brandi and Carlton Turner in April. Our learning circles have been well attended as well. We have hosted 68 participants in our learning circles with 22 participating in the March learning Circle, 16 in April, and 30 in May. For our summer learning circle series, Racial Justice in the food system, attendance was encouraged at all four events. Our total participation number for all the events was 141. Before our summer learning circle series, we offered a pilot discussion series similarly framed by Food Solutions New England's Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge, this series had about five participants across three sessions. The presentations given by Mohawk Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey had 71 in the presentation on corn, 57 participants for the presentation on beans, and 60 participants for the presentation on squash. Likewise, the conversation with Chef Nephi Craig had 60 participants. Last, our Soil, Conservation, and Place Conversation Series was attended by 510 participants. Outside of our speakers and events, we host 28 Center fellows.

**In addition to the established partnership with the VCE Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (CLRFS) Program team, we have built a community of core partnerships** Our community is now made up of a diversity of Center fellows and organizations on campus and off. For example:

**Center Fellows.** We currently host a community of 28 Center fellows. Fellows include Virginia Tech faculty, graduate students, Virginia Cooperative Extension agents, and community members. A fellow is an outstanding individual who is part of a university, organization, or community that follows the aims of the Center and is a leader and resource to community members and stakeholders in their area. These individuals have a passion for exploring critical and often complex issues related to the food system, and are committed to supporting and working towards a more equitable, just, and healthy food system.

**VT Community Change Collaborative (CCC).** The CCC is a graduate student group based in the Institute of Policy and Governance at Virginia Tech. The group examines the methods, frameworks, and forces shaping community development, approaches to community engagement, and how to build sustainable, cross-sectoral partnerships. We have partnered with the CCC on a number of events in 2021 including hosting Dr. Monica White and Brandi and Carlton Turner of Sipp Culture.

**Cambium Collective.** The Cambium Collective is a consulting group made up of educators and organizers. The Collective facilitates groups and organizations to transform conflict, understand power and oppression, and shape liberating visions and decisions. The Cambium Collective advised us on our Racial Justice in the Food Systems Learning Circle Series and helped us to facilitate the sessions with sensitivity and care.

**Virginia Food Systems Council.** The mission of the Virginia Food System Council is to advance a nutrient-rich, safe, and environmentally sustainable food system for Virginians at all income levels, with an emphasis on access to local food, successful linkages between food producers and consumers, and a healthy, viable future for Virginia's farmers and farmland. Though a MOU with Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Center provides backbone support for the mission and objectives of the VFSC. Eric Bendfeldt and Kim Niewolny serve as 2 of the 24 Board Directors.

## Website and Social Media Analytics

We engage an audience of 4,013 followers on our [Virginia Farm-to-Table Facebook page](#) and 46 followers on our [Center twitter handle](#) created just a few months ago. Our listserv consists of 235 members from Virginia and beyond. People also engage frequently with the content on our website with over 12,710 pageviews this year.

## 2019-2020 Expenditures

- Center Launch Event with Dr. Alice Julier. Reservation for Hahn Garden Pavilion (\$200), Hazel Bea catering and bar beverages (\$1,977), ABC Banquet Licensee (\$40), 2-night lodging for Dr. Julier (\$230), and honorarium for Dr. Julier (\$800). Total cost = \$ 3,247
- Dr. Monica White 2-day speaking event. Reservation for the Alexander Black House for public event (\$800), Our Daily Break refreshments for 50 (\$400), flight (\$457), 2-night lodging (\$220). Honorarium fee for Dr. White of \$1500 was fully provided by the Community Change Collaborative of the VT Institute of Policy and Governance. Total cost= \$1,877
- Racial Justice in the Food systems Learning Circle Series planning, design, facilitation, and evaluation services provided by Cambium Collective. Total cost= \$9,200 for 3 trainers @ 4 months
- American Indian & Indigenous Community Center at VT speaker honorarium costs for Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey and Chef Craig Nephi. Total cost=\$1,500
- Soul Fire Farm Uprooting Racial Justice in the Food Systems Training hosted by Cultivating Charlottesville. Core Center team members participated in the 4-hour training: Kim Niewolny, Eric Bendfeldt, Katie Trozzo, Mason, Haskins, and French Price. Total cost =\$150 @ 6 = \$900

## COVID-19 Impact Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the ways in which we are able to carry out our work. In the early spring of 2020, we were forced to pivot and move all of our programming to virtual platforms. This included rescheduling the presentation from Brandi and Carlton Turner of Sipp Culture and moving it to Zoom, as well as hosting our learning circles via Zoom. The virtual setting impacts the ways and depth to which we can interact with our audiences. That said, we believe that our collective effort to pivot to virtual programming has been adept and we have maintained a high level of communication, engagement and participation from both event attendees and among our own core team despite the online setting.

## Goals and Plans for 2021

We have planned offerings for 2021 that directly inform our Center's goals and objectives. They include offering a speaker series, events, trainings, and grant-funded research project deliverables. The following are a few examples of core activities planned:

### 2021 Fellows Speaker Series

In 2021, we will host monthly events to highlight the work, research, interests, and ideas of our Center fellows. Each month, beginning in January, we will invite one fellow to give a public presentation or host a community dialogue. These talks will engage both our Center fellow community, as well as the larger campus and Extension community, organizational partners, and the general public. These talks will occur virtually until in-person meetings are deemed safe and appropriate.

### 2021 Graduate Student Learning Circles

We will host a series of learning circles for graduate students in 2021. These learning circles will take place biweekly and will be led by graduate students on themes of their choosing. Graduate students will be encouraged to present their current research or facilitate conversations on themes of interest to them.

### 2021 Food Justice and Community Sustainability Program

We are partnering with Michael Carter Jr., of Carter Farms and Virginia State University Small Farms Program; Duron Chavis, urban farmer, educator, and change maker in Richmond, Virginia, and; Shantell Bingham, Program Director of Charlottesville Food Justice Network of Cultivate Charlottesville to design



and implement a program that educates food system practitioners, leaders, and students about systemic racism and inequities in our food system and addresses ways that these leaders could organize their communities through anti-racist praxis.

### **Food Systems Facilitation Training with VCE CLRFS Program Team**

The CLRFS Planned Program Team plans to provide two online in-service workshops based on the content in the Facilitating Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems toolkit publication as an effort to support food value chain development and connections. The first focus training will cover the ten elements of the CLRFS facilitation Toolkit (~ 90 minutes). The second online workshop will feature the use of story circles as a method to initiate community conversations around issues and challenges related to the food systems (75-minutes). Additionally, two other educational proposals were submitted by our program team to VCE administration for the 2021 calendar year; a workshop titled, "The impact of Covid-19 on local and regional food systems" for the VCE annual conference, and an in-service agent training proposal titled 'Training on Vegetable Crop Production for Urban Agriculture'.

### **Roanoke Valley Food System Partnership Project with LEAP**

In 2021, we will work toward the goals of our newly established USDA Regional Food System Partnership Project. With Local Environmental Agricultural Project (LEAP) as the lead, project partners include entities rooted in the Roanoke Valley (Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission, City of Roanoke, Blue Ridge Land Conservancy, United Way Healthy Roanoke Valley, Carilion Clinic, Virginia Cooperative Extension) and entities with a multi-region focus (Virginia Tech and the affiliated Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition, Virginia Association for Biological Farming, Eastern Food Hub Collaborative). Our four Center deliverables include: 1) build community capacity through story circle methodology, 2) provide Virginia Cooperative Extension food system facilitation and value chain coordination trainings, 3) document place-based leverage points for public-private partnership development among Roanoke Valley regional food and farm system stakeholders, and 4) coordinate learning exchanges with current USDA-Agricultural Marketing Services' 2018 Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) partners in the Shenandoah Valley and Northern Piedmont regions of Virginia.

### **Partnership with the American Indian & Indigenous Community Center and Native at VT**

We will continue our partnership with Dr. Mae Hey from the Department of Sociology, Center Fellow, with the American Indian & Indigenous Community Center and Native at VT. The Center is partnering on a new Community Viability grant project with Dr. Hey and Dr. Donna Westfall-Rudd project to co-host and facilitate an Indigenous food program to include a speaker series, cooking demonstrations, experiential learning opportunities, and an educational internship program where students learn the cultural ways of Indigenous communities to prepare for future careers.

### **Virginal Tech Food Systems Joint Society Workshop**

We have started to explore the possibility of co-hosting an Agriculture, Food, & Human Values Society (AFHVS)/American Society of Food Studies (ASFS) post-2021 conference (June 9-15) workshop in partnership with the Food Studies Program in the VT College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

## **Resource Needs**

While the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation has been productive for 2019-2020, with plans for further impacts in 2020-2021, we are seeking opportunities for growth and sustainability. One resource we feel is pivotal to build our capacity is obtaining a common campus space to 1) house our Center team for the completion of collaborative outreach and research aims, 2) host small speaking events with on and off campus stakeholders, and 3) lead training and planning sessions with student, faculty, and community partners.



**THANK YOU FOR READING  
ABOUT OUR WORK!**

**Please visit our website if you  
would like to learn more.**

**[HTTPS://FOODSYSTEMS.CENTERS.VT.EDU/](https://foodsystems.centers.vt.edu/)**