



**COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND LIFE SCIENCES**
VIRGINIA TECH™

CENTER FOR FOOD SYSTEMS
AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION



2021 Annual Report

December 20, 2021

Table of Contents

Overview and Aims	1
Core Team.....	1
Advisory Group	2
Events.....	2
Programming.....	4
Projects and Initiatives	6
Invited Center Presentations and Press	7
Publications.....	8
VCE Community, Local, & Regional Food Systems Program Team.....	9
2021 Grant and Contract Proposals and Funding	9
2020-2021 VT Expenditures	11
Website and Social Media Analytics	11
Outcomes and Impacts.....	12
COVID-19 Impact Statement.....	13
Goals and Plans for 2022	13
Resource Needs.....	14

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, agriculture, and society through a values-based and systems-approach to explore and catalyze the conditions for a more just and sustainable food system so that all may thrive. Our aims include:

- Build capacity and partnerships through programming and outreach for improved learning and collaboration among a diversity of actors and organizations to address the complexity of food system issues with emphasis on social equity and community sustainability.
- Conduct community-based, engaged, and action research to address historical and emergent food system issues from a critical and generative lens.
- Support university teaching and learning opportunities by leveraging existing and creating new curriculum in food systems and critical food studies.

Our goals and activities emphasize a number of food system needs and issues, specifically: 1) the ecological sustainability of our food systems; 2) the quality of life of food and farm system workers; 3) issues of food access, health, and wellbeing, 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, Food Systems Network and Outreach Specialist, Department of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education

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

Justice Madden, Center Graduate Fellow for Outreach, Department of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education

Kasey Owen, Center Graduate Fellow and Graduate Teaching Assistant for the Civic Agriculture and Food Systems Pathways Minor, Department of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education

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
- **C.L. Bohannon**, Assistant Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, Virginia Tech
- **Bradley Copenhaver**, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Commonwealth of Virginia
- **William A. Crutchfield**, Director Small Farm Outreach Program, Virginia State University
- **Daniel Goerlich**, Associate Director for Economy, Community, and Food, Virginia Cooperative Extension and Virginia Tech
- **Ellington Graves**, Assistant Provost for Diversity and Inclusion; Director, Africana Studies Program, Virginia Tech
- **Kathy Hosig**, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Population Health Sciences Department, Virginia Tech
- **Janine Parker Woods**, Associate Administrator, Cooperative Extension and Virginia State University
- **Sara Santa Cruz**, Virginia Food Access Investment Fund Coordinator, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- **Nicole Shuman**, Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent, Goochland County Virginia Cooperative Extension
- **Max Stephenson**, Professor and Director of the Institute for Policy and Governance, School of Public and International Affairs, Virginia Tech

Events

We have hosted or sponsored five public events that have been attended by over 300 participants who represent university faculty and students, Extension field faculty, and community leaders.

Building Racial Equity in the Food System: From Individual Anti-Racism to Dismantling Institutional Systems

On March 31, 2021, the Center hosted, Shantell Bingham, Michael Carter Jr., and Duron Chavis of R.E.A.L. (The Racial Equity in Agriculture Lab) to lead an in-depth, 2-part workshop on building racial equity in the food system from a critical pedagogy perspective. This virtual training with two 2-hour sessions was open to students, faculty, staff, and community members seeking a deeper understanding of structural and institutional racism in our food system. This workshop series was also designed to provide a pathway to action to help dismantle the attitudes, practices, and structures that hold racism in place. Sixty-four people attended the first workshop and 51 attended the second workshop.

Exploring the Ethical Politics of Storytelling in Communities of Struggle for Social Change

In this virtual learning circle held on April 7, 2021, Shannon Turner of StoryMuse, Kim Niewolny of the VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, Max Stephenson and Neda Moayerian of the VT Institute of the Policy and Governance and the Community Change Collaborative, and Bob Leonard with the School of Performing Arts hosted an evening of engaged dialogue on ethical praxis of storytelling for social change as part of Ethics Week at Virginia Tech. This event sought to engage with individuals interested in the generative quality of narratives and storytelling, as a form of cultural work for social change in communities of struggle. This would include sharing and exploring examples of community cultural development in communities that have experienced social, cultural, and/or environmental distress, transition, or conflict rooted in historical inequities and injustices. 77 participants attended this event.

Earth Week Ecological Restoration Tour with the American Indian and Indigenous Community Center

On April 20, 2021 the Center co-sponsored an ecological restoration tour with the American Indian and Indigenous Community Center that explored the Stroubles Creek watershed that colonizing forces attempted to alter. Participants were introduced to the plant relatives along this path that have nurtured humans in this place since time immemorial. They also removed invasive species. Fifteen people attended this field tour.

Indigenous Community Garden Fall Harvest Gathering: Transforming our Plant Relatives into Memories, Relatedness, and Nourishment

On November 5, 2021 the Center co-sponsored an Indigenous Fall Harvest Gathering hosted by the American Indian and Indigenous Community Center. The gathering included a cooking demo in the afternoon where Chef Dave nixtamalized corn, pit roasted pumpkin, and made a pour over sauce. The demo was followed by a community meal in the evening. The cooking demo had 75-100 participants throughout the afternoon. The community meal had 55 attendees.

Putting Culture Back into Agriculture

On Friday, December 3rd David Anderson, Horticulture Operations Supervisor for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, provided a hybrid talk on what is Cherokee agriculture and the steps the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians have taken to preserve and grow an agriculture future. 16 people attended this event.

Programming

We offer educational programming such as learning circles, speaker series, and extensive resource archiving and sharing.

Center Fellow Speaker Series

Throughout 2021, we hosted monthly Center Fellow Talks where Center Fellows shared themes related to their work with the Center community. We had over 1,100 attendees of the series. The Fellow Speaker series is a space for conversation, peer-to-peer learning, and deep reflection around pressing issues related to the Center's work. The monthly talks provide an opportunity to engage with Fellows and 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 with the aim of encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue, relationship building, and collaboration toward the Center's aims.

- **Dr. Nick Copeland** presented “Cooperative Extension and the Coming Transition” (260 participants)
- **Dr. Mae Hey** presented “This is Home: A Facilitated Discussion on Land-Centered Learning” (77 participants)
- **Dr. Ozzie Abaye** presented “Following our Foodways: Perspectives on Sustainable Food Systems Education from Field to Kitchen” (110 participants)
- **Jenny Schwanke and Laina Schneider** presented “Cultivating Community through Food and Gardening” (96 participants)
- **Dr. Lester Schonberger** presented “Food Safety as a Part of Food Security” (118 participants)
- **Dr. John Galbraith** presented “Growing Food for Donation: Multiple Uses for Extension, Research, Education, and Community Service” (74 participants)
- **Dr. Marcus Comer and Dr. Leonard Githinji** presented “Agriculture in the Urban Landscape: Rooted in Sustainability and Resiliency” (108 participants)
- **Dr. Sarah Misyak** presented on “Virginia Food Security Status During the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Assessment by the Virginia Family Nutrition Program” (96 participants)
- **Dr. Vivica Kraak** presented on “The United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021: Understanding the Controversy about the Structure, Governance Process and Outcomes that Led to Protests and Boycotts” (60 participants)
- **Dr. Bikrum Singh Gill** presented on “The Agrarian South and the Industrial Revolution 4.0: Food Sovereignty against the Financial Agritech Accumulation Regime” (65 participants)
- **Dr. Jessica Agnew & Dr. Ralph Hall** presented on “Exploring the Use of Blockchain Technology to Improve Food Security through African Indigenous Vegetables in Western Kenya” (45 participants)

Graduate Student Learning Circles

Between March and December 2021, we hosted bi-weekly graduate student learning circles where graduate students from Virginia Tech and elsewhere took turns leading sessions. Sessions took various forms. Some practiced their defense or conference presentations, others shared a paper idea or instrument, and some selected a theme, reading or podcast to base a facilitated discussion. Our list of graduate student leaders and their learning circle topics are outlined below:

- **Matthew Reiss**, Graduate Student, MS in Architecture - Industrial Design presented on “Using mycelium to upcycle waste streams in the circular economy paradigm.”
- **Lia Kelinsky-Jones**, PhD Candidate in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education presented on “Self-Reliance and Land-Grant Universities:
- **Nicole Nunoo**, PhD Candidate in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education presented on “Examining the Role of Collective Agency in Multi-Sector Advocacy for Racial Justice in the Food System: A Case of the National Black Food and Justice Alliance”
- **Lacy Watson** presented “Packing and Cracking: The Science and Politics of Space and Place,”
- Open Discussion on Emily Nonko’s September 22 article “Abolitionist Organization Takes On Maryland’s Prison Food System” from Next City
- **Czarina Salido** presented on “Conscientization in STEM and we had a generative discussion on how to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing into STEM.”
- Introductions and Organizing for the Semester
- Farm Tour and potluck at Gnomestead Hollow Farm
- **Matthew Reiss**, graduate student in Architecture and Industrial Design presented on “Using mushrooms and residual plant biomass to help cultivate a circular economy.”
- **Nicole Nunoo**, PhD student in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Transformation, presented on “Collective Agency in Multi-Sector Advocacy for Racial Justice in the Food System.”
- **June Jones**, PhD student in ASPECT, presented on “Do peasants exist in the US? Let's talk categories and identities.”
- **Dr. Renata Carneiro** from the Department of Food Science and Technology, presented on “Understanding the factors to motivate edamame consumption for promoting sustainable domestic production in the U.S.”
- **Susan Chen**, PhD Candidate and Graduate Research Assistant in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, presented on “Food Waste Through a Food Systems Lens.”
- **Julia Battocchi**, PhD student in Architectural Design Research (Landscape track), presented on “Re-use of urban land as an opportunity to maximize urban agriculture and forestry.”
- **Lia Kelinsky-Jones**, PhD in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, facilitated a discussion on “Advancing climate-resilient food security in the Town of Blacksburg: An Interactive Session.”

Five Pieces Worth Reading

In 2020, in response to the pandemic, we began featuring five annotated articles that we sent to our listserv weekly starting in April and continued through the year. In 2021, we continued this effort and expanded the focus of our weekly readings to span a diverse set of themes related to food systems transformation work including food, agriculture, and community, COVID-19 and the food system, and equity and justice. We have sent weekly annotated readings to our listserv, with now over 900 members, and have received feedback from many individuals that they use this resource both personally and professionally. The articles shared weekly are also archived by theme in our [news archive on our webpage](#). There are now over 360 annotated articles in the news archive.

Projects and Initiatives

In 2021, we continued to design and conduct projects and resource initiatives from 2020, and have also entered into new projects focusing on regional food systems networking, soil health, and storytelling. More details are listed below for each project and initiative.

4 The Soil Awareness Initiative

Virginia Tech and the School for Plant and Environmental Sciences (SPES) recently received a three-year \$1 million National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to build soil health across Virginia. The Center is working with SPES colleagues and the Virginia Soil Health Coalition and its partners to raise awareness about soil as a critical resource and encourage farmers and landowners to follow the four soil health principles. As part of this initiative, the *4 The Soil: A Conversation* podcast was premiered and seven episodes developed as a collaboration with Eric Bendfeldt, Mary Sketch Bryant of the Virginia Soil Health Coalition, Jeff Ishee of *On the Farm Radio*, and Ennis Carter of Social Impact Studios. Podcast guests to date have included Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring, Ari Weinzweig of Zingerman's Community of Businesses, Dr. John Galbraith, Ira Wallace of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, and Chris Lawrence of USDA-NRCS. For more information and to access the podcasts, [visit the website](#).

Soil, Conservation, and Place Project

This project aimed to deepen community understanding of the importance of agriculture and soils to a sense of place, community, and culture. Through this project, twelve videos were created to highlight participating farmers' stories of conservation and place-making, which are [available for viewing on our website](#). A journal article titled, *Rethinking farmer knowledge from soil to plate through narrative inquiry: An agroecological food systems perspective*, was recently published in the Journal Agriculture Food Systems and Community Development to highlight the findings of this research. A book manuscript is being prepared that will include audio and video recordings. This initiative was funded through Virginia Tech's Community Viability, the Agua Fund, and through Virginia Cooperative Extension. 2018-2021, \$70,000.

Roanoke Valley Food System Partnership Project with LEAP

In 2021, we began working on a USDA Regional Food System Partnership Project with Local Environmental Agricultural Project (LEAP) and regional partners. These partners include entities in the Roanoke Valley (e.g., 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-regional focus (Virginia Tech and the affiliated Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition, Virginia Association for Biological Farming, Local Food Hub). 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.

Catalyzing Agricultural and Educational Resources to Move the Local Food Value Chain Needle in the Shenandoah Valley and Northern Piedmont Regions of Virginia.

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. A result of the grant project was the establishment of a statewide Food Value Chain Coordinator position through partnership with Extension, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and Virginia Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. Additionally, four food value chain videos were created. To learn more, visit: www.foodsystems.centers.vt.edu/projects/LFPP. This project was funded through a USDA-AMS-LFPP grant, 2018-2021, \$496,839.

Virginia Tech Food Systems Curriculum Database

In 2020, 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 that helped us launch our [Food Systems Course Compendium](#) resource on our website. In 2021, we have continued to manage this resource by sending out calls for courses that our community would like to add and promoting the resource during Virginia Tech's Drop/Add period when students are signing up for classes each semester.

COVID-19 and the Food Systems Compendium and Resources

In 2020, when the Pandemic hit, the Center took leadership in developing a compendium, "[COVID-19 and Food Systems](#)" that served as a collection of updated news, public and scholarly literature, position papers, and VCE and partners resources (locally, regionally, & nationally) that addressed or related to the impacts COVID-19 has brought to the food system. We also highlighted emergent stories. We have maintained this resource page in 2021 and have continued to share COVID-19 Food Systems articles in our weekly readings, which are also catalogued in [the news archive](#).

Invited Center Presentations and Press

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:

Presentations

- Virginia Tech Leadership & Social Change Residential College (LSCRC) "Intersections" Food House Series. "A Critical Praxis: Community Food Work Narratives as Generative Possibilities for Food Justice. Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Presentation.

- Virginia Tech Policy Destination Area (DA) “Policy, Technology and Society” Seminar Series, “Exploring Food Policy from Local to Global to Support Healthy, Equitable, Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems. February 18, 2021. Dr. Niewolny, Invited Presentation.
- Virginia Tech Food Studies Program, “What is Food Studies?” February, 26, 2021. Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Presentation.
- Virginia Tech Deans' Forum: Covid in Context, spring 2021. Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Presentation.
- Virginia Tech Rhizome Living-Learning Community, College of Architecture and Urban Studies, “Food Politics.” October 2021. Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Lecture.
- 2021 SERA – 47 Virtual Annual Meeting “Engaging New Frontiers.” December 13-15. Dr. Kim Niewolny, Invited Conference Presentation.

Press

- [Virginia Tech Workshop Addresses Racial Inequities in Food System Head-on](#) (March 30, 2021, WSLs 10 News).
- [Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation Works to Address Food Systems Inequities](#) (May 4, 2021. Virginia Tech News).
- [\\$1 million grant aims to identify and implement ecologically sound grazing practices](#) (May 25, 2021, Virginia Tech News).

Publications

We submitted four peer-reviewed journal articles and launched a Podcast series in 2021.

Journal Articles

Niewolny, K. (2021a). Boundary politics and the social imaginary for sustainable food systems. *Journal of Agriculture, Food, & Human Values* 38: 621–624. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-021-10214-0>.

Niewolny, K (2021b). AFHVS 2021 Presidential Address: critical praxis and the social imaginary for food systems transformation. *Journal of Agriculture, Food, & Human Values* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-021-10278-y>

Bendfeldt, E., McGonagle, M., & Niewolny, K. (2021). Rethinking farmer knowledge from soil to plate through narrative inquiry: An agroecological food systems perspective. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 11(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.111.012>

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*.

Podcast

4 The Soil: A Conversation podcast is a collaboration of Virginia Cooperative Extension, On the Farm Radio, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Virginia Soil Health Coalition with funding from the Agua Fund, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Virginia Tech’s Department of Agriculture, Leadership, and Community Education’s Community Viability grant program. The podcast is available through Apple iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and Spreaker, and the Center’s project page at <https://foodsystems.centers.vt.edu/projects1/4TheSoil.html>

VCE Community, Local, & Regional Food Systems Program Team

COVID-19 Resources and Content. VCE (Community, Local, & Regional Food Systems) 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.

A Virginia Food Value Chain Research and Extension Initiative to Catalyze Innovation and Collaboration for Food System and Community Resilience. VCE CLRFS and the Center collaborated to submit a grant application to the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences’ Strategic Plan Advancement 2021 Integrated Internal Competitive Grants Program. The application was funded (\$43,455) with the goal to catalyze new food value chain possibilities through a collaborative values-based and systems-approach that informs and integrates research development, extension education, policy and funding recommendations.

Come to the Table: A Community, Local and Regional Food Systems’ Virtual Potluck series: In an effort to build Extension’s food system development programming capacity facilitation. CLRFS worked with the Center to organize nine webinars to encourage conversation and sharing of experiences, stories, and lessons learned in Extension programming around community, food, farming, and more, while also setting the virtual table for peer-to-peer learning and mentoring. Average attendance for each webinar is 31 people.

The Economic Outlook for Small to Mid-Sized Farms and Food Businesses in a Post-COVID Era – A webinar in-service training with Dr. David Kohl. Dr. Kohl specifically discussed the future of local and regional agriculture, factors impacting farm-to-table connections, and perspectives and trends in values-based value chains. Fifty-four (54) people participated in the training and webinar. Twenty-six (26) Extension colleagues listened to the webinar recording, and additional 491 were reached through social media.

2021 Grant and Contract Proposals and Funding

The Center has six current grant proposals that are funded totaling \$310,878, and is awaiting a decision on another \$105,000 subcontract opportunity that was submitted to the Common Grain Alliance and USDA.

Niewolny, K. & Bendfeldt, E. (Co-PI) (9/30/20-9/2022). *Strong Farm & Food Future: Planning for a Collaborative Regional Economy in the Roanoke Valley.* USDA-AMS Regional Food Systems Partnership Project (VT Subcontract \$58,896). **Funded.**

The purpose of this USDA-AMS Regional Food Systems Partnership 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 a 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.

The proposal supported a two-part virtual public forum focused on the praxis of critical pedagogy and solidarity politics to build racial equity for food justice. The trainers included Shantell Bingham, Michael Carter Jr., and Duron Chavis. The virtual forum took place in March 2021.

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 Awarded

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.

Bendfeldt, E.S., Samtani, J. Niewolny, K., & Haskins III, C. (4/30/2021 - 5/1/2022) *A Virginia Food Value Chain Research and Extension Initiative to Catalyze Innovation and Collaboration for Food System and Community Resilience* (\$43,455). Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Strategic Plan Advancement 2021 Integrated Internal Competitive Grants Program. Funded.

The goal is to catalyze new food value chain possibilities through a collaborative values-based and systems-approach that informs and integrates research development, extension education, policy and funding recommendations. The proposal has the following objectives: 1) Develop and formalize an internal and integrated multi-disciplinary food system plan and approach across CALS and VCE Planned Program Teams, 2) Build capacity for trans-disciplinary coordination, cooperation, and collaboration across VCE Planned Program teams to strengthen comprehensive food value chain coordination and responsiveness from field-to-fork.

Bendfeldt, E.S., Sketch, M. Niewolny, K., Crutchfield, W., Parrish, M., & Trozzo, K. (9/1/2021 - 8/31/2023). *4 The Soil Awareness Initiative: Building Community and Health from the Soil Up*. (\$50,000). Virginia Tech Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education Community Viability Grant Program. Funded.

The 4 The Soil Awareness Initiative is a two-phase educational plan and campaign to raise broader awareness of soil as an agricultural and natural resource critical to current and future social, economic, and environmental health.

Bendfeldt, E.S., Sketch, M. Niewolny, K., Crutchfield, W., & Trozzo, K. (9/1/2021 - 8/31/2023). 4 The Soil Awareness Initiative: Building Health from the Soil Up. (\$60,000). The Agua Fund. Funded.

The Agua Fund grant aligns with the Virginia Soil Health Coalition's strategies for building long-term soil health and ecological resilience across the state and Chesapeake Bay watershed. The 4 The Soil Awareness Initiative continues to aim to leverage market opportunities and encourage greater adoption and implementation of soil health-building practices, while raising broader awareness of soil and the four core soil health principles promoted by federal and state partners and the Coalition. This grant fund was used as a 1:1 cash match for the VT ALCE Community Viability grant.

Bendfeldt, E.S., Niewolny, K., & Price, E.F. (10/31/2021 - 10/30/2024) Expanding Equitable Grain Value Chains in the Mid-Atlantic through the Common Grain Alliance. (Requested \$105,000). Subcontract from the Common Grain Alliance as part of a USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Regional Food System Partnership planning grant application. Submitted but awaiting a decision.

The Common Grain Alliance is a collaborative effort of farmers, millers, bakers, and artisans working to expand equitable grain value chains in Virginia and the Mid-Atlantic region. The Center, if funded, would provide recommendations, ideas, and feedback on expanding CGA's network facilitation, infrastructure support, and educational work.

2020-2021 VT Expenditures

The following expenditures are associated with Virginia Tech funds (state, college, and/or university) beyond those acquired through externally awarded grants and contracts:

- *Building Racial Equity in the Food System: From Individual Anti-Racism to Dismantling Institutional Systems*: \$1000 CALS Diversity Council award; \$250 VT Institute for Policy and Governance; \$3250 Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation = \$4500 honorarium for R.E.A.L.
- *Exploring the Ethical Politics of Storytelling in Communities of Struggle for Social Change*: \$3000 CALS Innovative Education Initiative funding through ALCE (Niewolny) for StoryMuse honorarium for classroom visits and "Exploring the Ethical Politics" public event.
- *Earth Week Ecological Restoration Tour with the American Indian and Indigenous Community Center*: \$200 American Indian and Indigenous Community Center; \$100 Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation = \$300 honorarium for speaker.

Website and Social Media Analytics

We engage an audience of 4,013 followers on our [Virginia Farm-to-Table Facebook page](#) and 257 followers on our [Center twitter handle](#). We just created a new [Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation Facebook](#) page in October of 2021, with a total of 43 followers. Our listserv consists of 932 members from Virginia and beyond. People also engage frequently with the content on our website with over 13,369 pageviews from January 1 to December 15, 2021.

Outcomes and Impacts

In 2021, we have meaningfully engaged with over 1,400 people. This has included over 300 who attended our individual events, over 1,100 who attended our monthly fellow speaker series, and several who attended our graduate student learning circles. Outside of our speakers and events and programming, we engage with our Center Fellow community and have established partnership with a number of organizations and units both internal and external to Virginia Tech, for example:

- **Center Fellows.** We currently host 43 Center fellows. Fellows include Virginia Tech faculty, graduate students, Virginia Cooperative Extension agents, and community leaders. A fellow is an outstanding individual who is part of a university, organization, or community that uplifts the aims of the Center and is a leader and resource to stakeholders in their area. These individuals have a passion for exploring critical and complex issues related to the food system, and are committed to supporting and working towards a more equitable, just, and healthy food system.
- **VCE Community, Local, and Regional Food systems (CLRFS) Program Team.** We continue to partner with the CLRFS Program Team to offer interdisciplinary programming and outreach related to community, local, and regional food systems issues and topics. In 2021, this partnership resulted in four specific outcomes: 1) COVID-19 resources and content; 2) VT-CALS funded “Virginia Food Value Chain Research and Extension” initiative, 3) “Come to the Table: A Community, Local and Regional Food Systems” virtual potluck series, and 4) In-service with Dr. David Kohl titled, “Economic Outlook for Small to Mid-Sized Farms and Food Businesses in a Post-COVID Era.”
- **The American Indian and Indigenous Community Center (AIICC).** Their mission is to create the conditions for underrepresented student success and to develop the cultural competence of every Virginia Tech student. We partnered with the AIICC, led by Dr. Mae Hey, Center Fellow, this year on several events, including an ecological restoration field tour, an Indigenous community garden fall harvest gathering, and a talk on Cherokee agriculture.
- **The Racial Equity in Agriculture Lab (R.E.A.L.)** We partnered with R.E.A.L. on a two-part public forum titled “Building Racial Equity in the Food System: From Individual Anti-Racism to Dismantling Institutional Systems.” This workshop with R.E.A.L. received positive responses through a post-event survey evaluation. Recommendations included offering additional opportunities for this in-depth learning experience.
- **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 partnered with the CCC on the event “Exploring the Ethical Politics of Storytelling in Communities of Struggle for Social Change.”
- **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. Through a MOU with Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Center provides backbone support for the mission and objectives of the VFSC. Kim Niewolny serves as Secretary and 1 of the 24 Board Directors. Garland Mason provides administrative assistance. Eric Bendfeldt resigned as a board member in 2021 to concentrate on his doctoral studies.

COVID-19 Impact Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact the ways in which we are able to carry out our work. However, we believe that our collective effort to focus on scholarship, grant funding, partnership building, and virtual programming has been adept and we have maintained a high level of communication, engagement, and participation.

Goals and Plans for 2022

We have planned educational and outreach offerings for 2022 that directly inform our Center's 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:

New

Poetry Café and Poetry Institute

On February 2-3, we will host the Poetry Café and Poetry Institute for a two-day visit to Virginia Tech. Mr. Josephus Thompson III is the director of the Poetry Café and will be our main guest with a small team to accompany the work: 1) Themed Creative Writing Workshop: "Planting the Seed," 2) Reception at the Black Cultural Center, 3) Poetry Café Open Mic event at Haymarket Theater, and 4) Podcast co-hosted by the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation and Community Change Collaborative. Current partners for this event include: Africulture and Carter Farms, the Community Change Collaborative (CCC) of the VT Institute for Policy and Governance, the Black Cultural Center, Center for the Humanities, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

The Racial Equity in Agriculture Lab (R.E.A.L.) presents "Building Beyond Nice Racism: Catalyzing Institutional Change in the Food System"

This virtual learning series is planned 2022 is open to student, faculty, organizational, agency, and community leaders who are seeking a deeper understanding of structural and institutional racism in our food system. The series is designed to provide a pathway to action to help dismantle the attitudes, practices, and structures that hold racism in place as a step toward creating a more equitable system that works for everyone. This five-part "fellowship" runs January-May 2022 and will include two-hour sessions on the following dates: January 25; February 22; March 22; April 26; May 24.

Soil for Water: Regenerative Grazing and Soil Health Systems

To launch in 2022, 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. Our work for this project includes: **(a)** Identifying practical and regionally-appropriate ways of improving soil health and catching more rainwater in soil; **(b)** Improving communication and information-sharing among producers and agricultural professionals who are interested in regenerative grazing.

Continuation (select examples)

Fellows Speaker Series

In 2022, we will continue hosting monthly events to highlight the scholarship of our Center fellows. These virtual talks will engage both our Center fellow community, as well as the larger campus and Extension community, organizational partners, and the general public.

Graduate Student Learning Circles

We will continue hosting a series of learning circles for graduate students in 2022. Graduate students will be encouraged to present their current research or facilitate conversations on themes of interest to them.

Roanoke Valley Food System Partnership Project with LEAP

In 2022, we will work toward the goals of the USDA Regional Food System Partnership Project in collaboration with Local Environmental Agricultural Project (LEAP) as the lead, and with partners across the region.

The 4 The Soil Awareness Initiative with Podcast

We will continue to develop a two-phase educational plan and campaign to raise broader awareness of soil as an agricultural and natural resource critical to current and future social, economic, and environmental health.

American Indian & Indigenous Community Center and Community Viability Partnership

We will continue our partnership with Dr. Mae Hey from the Department of History, 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.

Resource Needs

While the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation has been productive for 2019-2021, 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.