



**CENTER FOR FOOD SYSTEMS AND
COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION**
VIRGINIA TECH.



2022 Annual Report

December 19, 2022

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Overview and Aims

The Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation is an Extension/Outreach center housed 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:

- Address food system complexities and vulnerabilities with emphasis on social equity and community sustainability through programs outreach, and partnerships.
- Conduct community-based food systems research from an interdisciplinary, asset-based, and critical lens.
- Enhance existing and create new curriculum in the broader field of food systems focused on meeting community-university learning goals.

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, 4) and 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

Nicole Nunoo, Center Graduate Fellow, Department of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education

Advisory Group

We are advised by a group of experts from across the state. We communicate frequently and meet once annually. Our advisory group includes:

- **Jeanette Abi-Nader**, Executive Director, Cultivate Charlottesville; Member, Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative
- **C.L. Bohannon**, former Associate Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, Virginia Tech, who currently serves as Associate Professor in the Landscape Architecture Department and the Associate Dean of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at the University 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
- **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

Served in part during 2022:

- **Sara Santa Cruz**, Former Virginia Food Access Investment Fund Coordinator, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (outgoing)
- **Bradley Copenhaver**, Former Commissioner, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Commonwealth of Virginia

Core Programs

Our Center is home to six state and/or regional programs supporting food systems-based community development at the nexus of food, agriculture, and society. These Extension-based programs cover the following issues and are briefly described below:

- New farmer sustainability
- Health, wellness, and accessibility
- Connecting food, farm, and health
- Equitable value chain work
- Sustainable food systems

The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition

The Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition (VBFRC) is a state-wide coalition of agricultural organizations and farm businesses. The long-term goal of the Coalition is to improve opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers so they can establish and sustain viable agricultural operations and communities in Virginia. To reach that goal, the Coalition supports the development and enhancement of whole farm planning curriculum and training, online resources, and social networking. Funding was sponsored by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Award #2020-49400-32326.

AgrAbility Virginia

AgrAbility Virginia promotes safety, wellness, and accessibility on the farm through education, rehabilitative services, and assistive technology. AgrAbility Virginia services are funded through USDA NIFA and free to Virginia farmers and farm workers. This program is a collaborative effort between the National AgrAbility Program, Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Easterseals UCP. AgrAbility Virginia is funded by AgrAbility Project, USDA/NIFA Special Project 2019- 2022 (41590-22326).

Equitable Food Value Chain Coordination in Virginia

This ongoing programming initiative seeks to catalyze equitable food value chain coordination and food system development across Virginia to increase local and regional market access of small and mid-sized farms and food businesses, such as produce auctions, food hubs, food and farm cooperatives, farm stands/markets, aggregators, and distributors. A number of barriers exist for farmers and food businesses, including limited value chain coordination, logistical hurdles, lack of transparent market signals, and inadequate scale, match and fit between producers and buyers. In addition to improving value chain coordination of Virginia's local and regional foods, this initiative seeks to advance equitable producer-buyer relationships, enhance procurement of

local foods by schools, universities, and institutions, while also supporting and promoting ecological, social, and economic values from farm-to-table needed for all individuals and communities to thrive.

Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (CLRFS) Program Team of Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia's food system directly impacts the survival and viability of farms and farmland; the economic development of rural and urban communities; the care, restoration, and resilience of ecological resources such as local waterways; and critical health issues. Community, local and regional food systems (CLRFS) broadly defines a complex and interconnected set of systems and pathways that comprise sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management to bring about social, economic, and ecological change that benefits all residents. This approach involves the establishment of collaborations and partnerships to create more resilient, vibrant, and equitable food systems and economies. This planned program team assesses and develops Virginia Cooperative Extension programs that support Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems across the Commonwealth to conceptualize and achieve seven interrelated long-term values-based outcomes.

Virginia Farm-to-Table: Connecting Food, Farms, and Health

The Virginia Farm-to-Table is a state-wide food and farm system initiative, which Virginia Cooperative Extension initiated in collaboration with Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, in partnership with the Virginia Food System Council, the University of Virginia, and other state agencies and organizations in 2010. The Virginia Farm-to-Table Plan: Healthy Farms and Healthy Food for the Commonwealth and Common Good was published in 2011 as a strategic plan for strengthening Virginia's food system and economic future. This ongoing programming initiative seeks to strengthen food, farm, and health connections in communities and along the food value chain in Virginia. The program goals are to improve ecological, social, and economic health connections and impacts from farm-to-table needed for all individuals and communities to thrive.

Virginia Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education (SARE) Resources

Virginia is part of USDA's Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) region. The Virginia SARE program seeks to support farmers and ranchers through sustainable agriculture research and education strategies and educational programming that encourages ecological management, promotes natural resource conservation, regenerates landscapes, strengthens financial viability, develops regional food systems, builds community, and fortifies the state's overall resilience. A specific strategy is to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for agricultural professionals and mentor farmer-leaders to enhance their

knowledge and expertise in sustainable agricultural principles and practices, emerging research, and innovations. In addition, Virginia SARE shares and builds awareness of the six grant programs that Southern SARE administers that farmers, agricultural professionals, educators, researchers, graduate students, and community-based organizations are eligible for to encourage on-farm research, education, demonstration, and ongoing professional development.

Projects

As a Center, we are involved in eight projects that support food systems and community transformation on the ground including those that develop regional food systems, share farmer agroecological knowledge, support regenerative land management practices, and share stories of the people working from farmgate to dinnerplate. Find out more information below about each of these grant funded projects:

Roanoke Foodshed Network

This partnership project, newly named the Roanoke Foodshed Network (RFN), aims to explore and build capacity for a regional food system in the Roanoke Region of Southwest Virginia. The project's goal is to collectively learn about and address the needs of sustainable farm development, local food distribution, equitable food access, and to develop a comprehensive approach to create a more resilient, socially just, and economically viable food system in this underserved region. The Center is supporting the project by 1) facilitating community storytelling about food farming, and community in the region, 2) organizing virtual learning exchanges with partners inside and outside the region, and 3) supporting the network development and function. The project is funded 2021-2023 by USDA-AMS Regional Food System Partnership grant and led by Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP), a Roanoke-based 501 (c)3 non-profit organization.

Soil for Water

This sustainable agriculture systems research project led by National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) aims to identify and promote practical ways of using regenerative grazing practices to improve soil health and catch and hold more rainwater in soil. The objectives of the project 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 Center is supporting the third objective by: 1) creating and publishing videos about regenerative grazing featuring farmers in Virginia, and 2) designing and co-hosting community storytelling events to support a community dialogue across public and private entities. These

activities will help catalyze community capacity and cultural understanding of the experiences and realities of food and farming system stakeholders in Virginia, specifically as it relates to regenerative grazing, soil health, water quality and quantity, and broader agroecological values. Project partners include NCAT, Southern SARE, and the Virginia Association for Biological Farming. The project term is 2021-2024.

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 in 2020 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. The *4 The Soil: A Conversation* podcast was premiered as part of the initiative. To date, 35 episodes have been published and distributed 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. Most recent, 4 The Soil podcast guests included Jon Stika of Understanding Ag, Mike Phillips of Valley View Farms, Brian Downing of Crooked Row Farm, Cover Crop Coach Steve Groff, and Lee Rinehardt of the National Center for Appropriate Technology. For more information and to access the podcasts, please [visit the Center's website](https://www.4thesoil.org/) or <https://www.4thesoil.org/>

The Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center Forest Herb Network

The Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center's Forest Herb Network was established in 2021 to help prospective and new growers in the Roanoke and New River valleys and beyond to cultivate, process, and sell woodland medicinal herbs. Our Center has helped launch and provide organizational support for educational and outreach programming.

Appalachian Sustainable Development's Agroforestry Train the Trainer Programming

ASD, in partnership with Interlace Commons, Savanna Institute, Cornell University, and Virginia Tech, has been awarded funding from the Edwards Mother Earth Foundation (EMEF) to improve agroforestry technical assistance for forest farming, alley cropping, and silvopasture to meet the growing support needs of farmers. To increase agroforestry adoption, project partners will combine collective expertise to implement a Train the Trainer (TtT) model that provides agroforestry education and builds a network of agricultural technical service providers (TSPs). This model will include an online course for virtual learning throughout the U.S. and regional in-person training at demonstration sites in the Midwest, Northeast, and Southeast. Focus practices will include forest farming, alley cropping, and silvopasture initially, with room for expansion to other agroforestry practices over time. Training will be made available to public, private, and non-profit TSPs, K-12 educators, and farmers interested in implementing agroforestry practices.

Intentional justice, equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility efforts will be made to actively engage people from diverse communities, including BIPOC, LGBTQA+, economically distressed, and other underserved populations. Our Center is helping support by organizing logistics for hosting three agroforestry training sessions in 2023.

Appalachian Sustainable Development's Point of Harvest Program

The Point of Harvest (PoH) initiative, led by the Appalachian Beginning Forest Farmer Coalition and Appalachian Sustainable Development, offers free training to wild harvesters and buyers of woodland roots, barks, and more. The program is designed to help participants access premium priced markets and includes training in plant identification, propagation and stewardship, sustainable harvest, post-harvest handling, and storage and processing. Our Center provides organizational support for hosting PoH trainings that will be offered in 2023.

Stories of Community Food Work in Appalachia

This project shares narratives or “stories” that express the diverse experiences of people working for food systems change, and include the voices of organizers and practitioners from across western North Carolina, Southwest Virginia, and West Virginia. From a cultural community development perspective, this initiative sets the theoretical-methodological groundwork for understanding how food system practitioners and leaders are creating systems-level social change in communities of struggle and resistance in central Appalachia. At the community level, this grant funded research has informed community food security assessments and regional action plans. We have also published conceptually-driven journal articles, a book chapter, and paper presentations while mentoring thesis and dissertation research using our narrative inquiry methodology.

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. The project highlighted 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. 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](#). The project was generously funded and supported by a community viability grant from Virginia Tech’s Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education and the Agua Fund.

A Virginia Food Value Chain Research and Extension Initiative to Catalyze Innovation and Collaboration for Food System and Community Resilience.

With grant funding (\$43,455) from the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Strategic Plan Advancement 2021 Integrated Internal Competitive Grants Program, VCE CLRFS and the Center collaborated to 1) develop and formalize an internal integrated multi-disciplinary food system planning approach across CALS and VCE Planned Program Teams and 2) build capacity for trans-disciplinary coordination, cooperation, and collaboration across VCE Planned Program teams and the land-grant universities to strengthen comprehensive food value chain coordination and responsiveness from field-to-fork for greater food system and community resilience. The grant project team conducted a "Come to the Table: Connecting Food, Farm and Health" virtual summit (n = 64 participants) and five district-level gatherings (n = 98 participants) at various locations across the state to learn but also build camaraderie and capacity. Eight recommendations and insights offered to strengthen food system research and extension initiatives: 1) Consistently communicate Extension's role in advancing public, ecological, and economic health; 2) Get all disciplines involved with food system and public health issues to address gaps and root causes; 3) Increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in agriculture spaces and trainings; 4) Emphasize the role research and extension can play in educating and informing policies that affect the eight values-based impacts of Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems, specifically around the potential outcomes and consequences of taking or not taking an action; 5) Encourage broader food system-related programmatic collaboration at the unit office level; 6) Consider contributions of all of agriculture in taking a tiered approach from backyard gardening, market gardening, direct to consumer, intermediated farm to school, university, and institution opportunities, and broader wholesale and commodity-oriented markets; 7) Hire or designate a Local Food System Extension and Research Specialist position; and 8) Continued education and understanding of Extension and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' role in community-focused food system development that is equity and justice-oriented.

Center Programming

We offer signature, targeted programming such as learning circles, speaker series, training series, and special events to address a diversity of stakeholder needs. Over 750 participants attended these 27 events and represent university faculty and students, Extension field faculty, and community leaders.

The Poetry Cafe: Planting the Seed

On February 2, 2022, the Center hosted the Poetry Café, led by Josephus Thompson III, and the live band and artist group he collaborates with, to lead a creative writing workshop and evening open mic event. The 2.5-hour workshop was open to students, faculty, staff, and community members who wanted to explore food systems through writing exercises. The 2-hour evening

program was open to the Center community and larger Virginia Tech community as a way to explore the theme of “planting the seed” through poetry, music, and dance. 25 participated in the workshop and 125 joined the open mic program, with over 10 audience participants sharing at the mic.

Building Beyond Nice Racism

In early 2022, we hosted the Racial Equity in Agriculture Lab (R.E.A.L.) in providing a 5-month series for student, faculty, organizational, agency, and community leaders seeking a deeper understanding of structural and institutional racism in our food system. This program builds on our ongoing efforts to provide high-impact learning opportunities on diversity, inclusion, and equity in agriculture—especially with an educational focus on racial equity in the food system. We had over 80 participants who participated in the 5-month series, which covered the following topics:

- *The Black (Farmer) Tax*, held in January (75 attendees)
- *Race and Racism in American Agriculture*, held in February (72 attendees)
- *Structural Inequity: Urban Renewal, Redlining, and Oppression in the Built Environment*, held in March (71 attendees)
- *Institutional Solutions*, held in April (56 attendees)
- *Institutional Solutions and Marching Orders (What I can and will do)*, held in May (46 attendees)

Center Fellows and the Fellows Speaker Series

We currently host 52 Center fellows who comprise a mix of 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.

Throughout 2022, we hosted nine Center Fellow Talks where Center Fellows shared themes related to their work with the Center community. We had over 500 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.

- Adam Taylor & Dr. John Munsell, *Agroforestry and Regenerative Agriculture at the Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center* (92 participants)
- Eric Bendfeldt & Mary Sketch Bryant, *4 the Soil: Message, Metaphor, Movement* (61 participants)
- Dr. Jacob Lahne, *Food and the Senses: Relating Sensory Science to the Food System* (40 participants)
- Dr. Lia Kelinsky-Jones, *The Social Science of Agroecology: Policy and Praxis Implications*. (48 participants)
- Dr. John Bovay, *Food Safety, Reputation, and Regulation: An Economic Perspective* (32 participants)
- Dr. Brianna Posadas, *Using Agriculture to Introduce Programming and Data Science to Students* (56 participants)
- Dr. Danille Christensen, *Contextualizing Food, Art, and Labor: The Aims and Crimes of Artisanal* (53 participants)
- Dr. Saul Halfon, Dr. Vivica Kraak, Dr. Jacob Lahne, & Dr. Lester Schonberger (moderator), *Defining 'Meat': An interdisciplinary conversation on the technical, socio-political, and policy tensions of cellular, animal, and plant-based proteins* (75 participants)
- Nicole Nunoo, Reed Byg, & Justice Madden, *(Re)imagining Collective Food Futures: A Panel Presentation with Graduate Student Fellows* (72 participants)

Graduate Student Learning Circles

Between September and November 2022, Center Graduate Fellows Nicole Nunoo, Justice Madden, and Kasey Owen hosted 11 weekly graduate student learning circles where graduate students from Virginia Tech took turns leading sessions. This was a graduate-led affinity space. These circles served as a space for graduate students to foster dialogue, build community, and enhance interdisciplinary professional development skills centered around food systems work. These weekly opportunities also served as an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and reflection around pressing issues related to the Center's work and graduate student research. Most learning circle discussions primarily focused on one reading from the Center's News Archive (derived from our listserv's 'Five Articles Worth Reading' series). However, sessions took various forms. Some students practiced their defense or conference presentations, others shared a paper idea or instrument, and some selected a theme, reading, or podcast to base a discussion on during facilitated resource sharing or workshopping sessions.

- **September 7, Meet and Greet**
Collaborative intention setting and community practices
- **September 14, Reading Discussion**
Op-Ed: One Year in, Where Vilsack's USDA Stands on 10 Key Measures by Ricardo Salvador

- **September 21, Student Presentation**
June Ann Jones, PhD Student in the Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought (ASPECT) program presented on her dissertation research on the USDA and state construction of farmer identity in the US
- **September 28, Reading Discussion**
USAID Could Improve Food Security Assistance, Says Watchdog Report by Teresa Welsh
- **October 5, Student Presentation**
Nicole Nunoo, PhD Student in the Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education (ALCE) program presented her dissertation research which explores the role of collective agency in the advocacy for racial justice in the food system
- **October 11, Reading Discussion**
Indigenous food sovereignty requires better and more accurate data collection by Omid Mirzaei and David Natcher
- **October 19, Mid Semester Check-In**
Facilitated check-in, team activity (pumpkin painting), and contributions to the curated resource-sharing documents
- **October 26, Reading Discussion**
A Former Brocero Farm Worker Breaks His Silence, Recalling Abuse and Exploitation by Selene Rivera
- **November 2, Reading Discussion**
Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems: Comparing, Contrasting, and Contested Versions by Tim Benton and Helen Harwatt
- **November 9, Workshopping Session**
This week focused on students' own work/research and workshopping ideas together as a group. Peer workshops facilitate dialogue and feedback as a dynamic way to incorporate feedback on ideas, thoughts, and updates
- **November 16, Student Presentation**
Justice Madden, Master's Student in Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education program presented on "Seed Griot: Practices of Black Radical Imagination through Seed Keeping Traditions"

Partner Programming

In addition to our Center programming, we also partner with a number of on and off campus organizations providing backbone support and hosting for collaborative programs.

VT Catawba Sustainability Center Herb Network

In collaboration with the VTCSC, the Center helped host a seven agroforestry programs, both in-person and virtual, in 2022. Programs engaged additional partners and were very well attended (1,304 attendees total). More information about each program is below.

Original People's Forest Visit

On September 10, 2022, the Center in collaboration with the VT Catawba Sustainability Center (CSC) and VT Inclusion and Diversity, hosted Mx. Tyson Sampson, a tribally enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, to lead a half-day forest visit at the VT CSC. In the 3.5-hour event, Tyson shared about Original People's woodland edible and medicinal species. Ms. Victoria Ferguson of VT Inclusion and Diversity, and tribally enrolled member of the Monacan Nation, also shared ways the Monacan and Tutelo people used the land in the region. (70 participants)

An Introduction to Growing Ramps Workshop

On Saturday April 9, 2022 from 9 am to 2:30 pm, the Center, in collaboration with the VTCSC and the Appalachian Beginning Forest Farmer Coalition (ABFFC), offered this one day in-person workshop, held at the VTCSC. The workshop covered the natural history of ramps, siting and establishing a ramp farm, a case study of ramp growing at the Yew Mountain Center, and hands-on planting of ramps in the forest on site. (40 participants)

Winter Webinar Series

From February to April 2022, the Center in collaboration with the VTCSC, the ABFFC, Penn State, and NC State, hosted five 1.5-hour evening webinars, titled "[Forest Farming in Focus](#)," featuring experts in the field and experienced forest farmers. The series covered the following topics: 1) Tree Saps and Syrups (280 attendees); 2) Forest Farming Ramps (313 attendees); 3) Forest Farming Fungi (231 attendees), 4) Forest Farming Ginseng (227 attendees); 5) Goldenseal & Other NTFPs (143 attendees)

Roanoke Foodshed Network Learning Exchanges

The Center is a partner of the Roanoke Foodshed Network, serving as co-leads in RFN working groups and participating as part of the leadership team that meets monthly. Through this they have led five farming and food production working group meetings and hosted 3 in-person farm events, with 130 attendees of the events. On behalf of the Roanoke Foodshed Network, the Center also hosted a spring and fall virtual learning exchange series, with 4 sessions each, that served 280 participants. The spring series featured food systems practitioners outside the region to share what is happening in networks further along in their establishment. The fall series

featured food systems practitioners in the Roanoke Region, to showcase the work already happening on the ground. Sessions included brief presentations from speakers, then moderated discussion and audience questions. The full list of learning exchanges is below:

Farm Events

- September Farm Tour and Social at Bramble Hollow Farm (50 participants)
- October Ergonomics Workshop (35 participants)
- November Farm Tour and Social at Thornfield Farm (45 participants)

Spring Series

- *Food Policy Structures and Governance: A Regional Food System Planning Perspective.* Karen Bassarab of Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future and Dr. Becca Jablonski of Colorado State University. January 2022 (39 participants)
- *Asset-based Food Economies in Appalachian Ohio: A Focus on Rural Resiliency* Tom Redfern of Rural Action. Leslie Schaller of the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet). February 2022 (27 participants)
- *Food Policy Council Possibilities: Stories of Success and Lessons Learned from the Bottom Up.* Gini Knight of Community Food Strategies and Jesse Rosenblum of Western NC Community Food Justice Planning Committee. March 2022 (64 participants)
- *Local Food and Farming Systems in Western North Carolina: Building Connections from Farms to Markets to Schools.* Molly Nicolie, Executive Director of Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP). April 2022 (39 participants)

Fall Series

- *Healthy Food Futures for All: Values-based Perspectives and Connections in the Roanoke Valley.* Amezetta Anderson of the George Washington Carver Gardens and Rachel Burks of Carilion Clinic Planning and Community Development October 5, 2022 (31 participants)
- *Growing a Culture of Resiliency and Cooperation: Urban Food Justice Possibilities.* Cameron Terry of Garden Variety Harvest and Davey Rogner Stewards of the Harvest Collective. November 9, 2022 (46 participants)
- *Cultivating Care from the Ground Up: From Mobile Markets to Community Art.* Bernadette (BJ) Lark of CommUnity Arts Reach, Kelly Key of the Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP), and Connie Smith of the Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP). December 7, 2022 (34 participants)

- *Regenerative Food Production: Healthy Soil, Ecosystems, and Communities*
Anna and Brent Wills of Bramble Hollow Farm and Adam Taylor of the Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center. January 18, 2023 (not hosted yet)

The Indigenous Friendship Garden Events

The Center supports the Indigenous Friendship Garden through creating promotional materials, managing registration, and sending outreach communications. Over the course of the year, we have partnered on 11 programs with the Indigenous Friendship Garden, serving 538 participants. See the full list below:

- *Indigenous Cooking Demo with Mohawk Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey*. February 4, 2022 (38 in-person participants and 98 virtual participants)
- *A Cooking Demo with Mohawk Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey*. March 18, 2022 (25 in-person participants and 18 virtual participants)
- *Preserved, Foraged, and Fished: Celebrating What Nature Gifts Us While Our Gardens Rest*. Featured Guests: Amy Rose Foll, Nino Ripepi, Rick Rudd, and Victoria Ferguson. April 22, 2022 (48 participants)
- *Celebrating Summer and Our Growing Community*. Featured Guests: Mohawk Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey, Abenaki Agriculturalist and Food Security Advocate Amy Rose Foll, Garden Pitmaster Nino Ripepi, and Mae Hey. June 27, 2022 (29 participants)
- *Wake Forest University and Virginia Tech Potluck and Talking Circle*. Featured Guests: Wake Forest University Office of Sustainability and Intercultural Center and Mae Hey. July 29, 2022 (24 participants)
- *Celebrating Summer Diversity in Our Indigenous Friendship Garden*. Featured Guests: Mohawk Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey, Indigenous Friendship Garden Pit Master Nino Ripepi, and Indigenous Friendship Garden Coordinator Mae Hey. August 10, 2022 (18 participants)
- *Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month: Food from the Indigenous Friendship Garden*. Featured Guests: Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey, Chef Krysia Lycette Villon, Nino Ripepi, Mae Hey. September 30, 2022 (89 participants)
- *Indigenous People's Day Cooking Demo and Celebration*. Featured Guest: Mae Hey. October 10, 2022 (77 participants)
- *A Harvest Celebration for American Indian Heritage Month: Grits, Greens & Roasted Pumpkins*. Featured Guests: Chef Dave Smoke-McCluskey. November 4, 2022 (75 participants)
- *Pandapas Pond Nature Walk*. Featured Guests: Jeff Kirwan and Mae Hey. December 2, 2022 (25 participants)
- *Indigenous Friendship Garden Winter Welcome and Acorn Celebration*. Featured Guests: Em Shawish and Mae Hey. December 9, 2022 (17 participants)

Sustained Partnerships

The Center has also fostered partnerships with additional organizations on and off campus to achieve mutually supportive outcomes. Examples include:

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 Poetry Cafe event.

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.

Resource Initiatives

Five Pieces Worth Reading

We have shared a weekly digest of five annotated articles to our listserv (now with over 1000 members) since spring of 2020. Our weekly readings feature a diverse set of themes related to food systems and community transformation work. We highlight stories local to our region, as well as those from other areas of the country and across the globe. Themes include, regenerative agriculture, racial justice and anti-racist praxis, food and land sovereignty, and food systems policy, among many others. The articles shared weekly are archived by theme and cataloged by year in the [news archive on our webpage](#). We have received feedback from many individuals that they appreciate and use this resource both personally and professionally, for example:

- “I should perhaps say that I thanked you in the acknowledgements for my book. I know we’ve never met, but that weekly email has been really helpful in finding issues and articles. I appreciate the work you put into it each week.”
- “I really find these articles very interesting and always share them with my clients.”
- “I appreciate your curated emails so much! Thank you for highlighting our humanity in this hard and joyful work we do.”

Racial Equity in Food System Webpage

In 2022, we added a new resource page to our website based on stakeholder interests and needs following our yearly programming: [Racial Equity in the Food System](#). This page includes a statement on the ways that racism and inequity impact the food system and how the Center's programming aims to disrupt systems of oppression through the promotion of analysis and critical thought. On this page, we bring together Center efforts to showcase programming that explores these themes including our educational programming on racial equity and justice, as well as Indigenous food and land sovereignty. The page offers a list of food equity and justice organizations cataloged by geographic area of work (i.e. Virginia regional, national, and global). We also paraphrase and link to our full statement on our commitment to justice, equity, and inclusion.

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. The Center has since 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, original stories, 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 have maintained this resource page in 2022.

Invited Center Presentations, Press, and Recognition

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

- Niewolny, K. (2022, October). *Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation*. Presentation for the Virginia Tech Honors Residential Commons (HRC).
- Niewolny, K. (2022, October). *Food, Sustainability, and Diet*. Discussion held with the Fredericksburg Public Library (Virtual).

- Niewolny, K. (2022, September). *Cultivating Connections for Sustainable Food Systems: Possibilities and Lessons Learned for Land Grant Universities*. FoodFORWARD Symposium Keynote, Clemson University.
- Niewolny, K., & Nunoo, N. (2022, September). *Sustainability and Food Security: Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation*. Presentation for the Virginia Tech Leadership Residential College.
- Niewolny, K. (2022, May). *Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation*. Presentation for the Montgomery, Radford, and Floyd Branch of the NAACP. Virtual.
- Niewolny, K. (2022, April). *Community food work narratives as generative possibilities*. Lecture for the American University of Rome, MA Food Studies Program. American University of Rome, Italy (Virtual).
- Niewolny, K. (2022, March). *Harvesting Inspiration: Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation*. Keynote address for Kentucky Local Food Systems Summit, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.

Press and Recognition

- Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) Team Award, Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation (2022). \$10,000 award.
- Vosburgh, T. (2022, May). Top global rankings highlight Virginia Tech's commitment to sustainability. *VTX*. Retrieved from <https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2022/05/unirel-IMPACT-rankings-2022.html>

Virginia Tech has ranked in the top 100 overall in all categories of the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, according to this article from *VT News*. The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings assess universities' efforts in areas related to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. The Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation is recognized in this article as having contributed to the high ranking (No. 36 out of 553 institutions) in the category of 'zero hunger.' This category factors in a university's research efforts related to hunger, teaching in the area of food sustainability, addressing food waste on campus, and the University's commitment to addressing hunger on and off campus.

- Esterhuizen, M. (2022, February). Virginia Cooperative Extension fights food insecurity in the commonwealth. *VTX*. Retrieved from https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2022/01/ext-food-insecurity.html?utm_source=cmpgn_news&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=vtUnirelNewsDailyCMP_020322-fs

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of Virginians who struggle to acquire enough food consistently to feed themselves and their families. In this article, Extension is recognized for helping improve community food security, self-sufficiency, and access

to the most basic of human needs during the pandemic. The Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation was recognized for its programming to actively engage students and community partners in food access issues in the community and on the VT campus.

Publications

We published 1 peer-reviewed journal article, 1 peer-reviewed book chapter, led a Podcast series, and contributed to the Editorship of *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, special issue, "Critical Praxis and the Social Imaginary for Sustainable Food Systems."

Journal Articles and Book Chapters

Posadas, B., Ogunyiola, A., & Niewolny, K. (2022). 'Socially responsible AI assurance in precision agriculture for farmers and policymakers' In *AI Assurance: Towards Trustworthy, Explainable, Safe, and Ethical AI*, Edited by Feras Batarseh and Laura Freeman. Academic Press. [AI Assurance - 1st Edition \(elsevier.com\)](#)

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

Niewolny, K., (2021-Present). Editor for the *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, special issue, "Critical Praxis and the Social Imaginary for Sustainable Food Systems." Editorial team includes M. Stephenson, K. Niewolny, L. Zanotti, and A. Erwin. See: <https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/37417/critical-praxis-and-the-social-imaginary-for-sustainable-food-systems>

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, the Virginia Soil Health Coalition, 4thesoil.org, and the Center's project page at <https://foodsystems.centers.vt.edu/projects1/4TheSoil.html>

2022 Grants, Contract Proposals, and Funding

During 2022, the Center had a total of 5 current grant project proposals totaling \$325,789. An additional 5 proposals were submitted in 2022 totaling \$4,829,754.

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 as a comprehensive approach for a more resilient, socially just, and economically viable system in this underserved region.

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 sustainable agriculture 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., & Price, E.F. (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.

Niewolny, K. Nunoo, N. (9/1/2022- 8/31/2024). *The Role of Black Farmer Organizers in Promoting Healthy and Sustainable Local Community Food Access.* (\$15,911). Southern SARE. Funded.

This project is a community-based case study with Black farmer organizers in the Commonwealth of Virginia, who are actively farming and providing local leadership to address the core goals of sustainable food system development (i.e., soil health, food access, social justice, and economic wealth) in their communities. The study aims to identify recommendations for sustainable community development through agriculture led by Black farmers as illustrations of self-determination and community resiliency. These findings are of significant benefit to community stakeholders, local food movement actors, sustainable agriculture service providers, extension professionals, and rural/urban farmers. Although the study is specific to Virginia, the research may have broader implications for similar geographical regions.

Trozzo, K., Niewolny, K., Bendfeldt, E., Taylor, A., Brown, H., Munsell, J., Commander, K., Warren, S., Wills, B., Beegle, D., Downing, A., & Fike, J. *Expanding the Agroforestry Regional Knowledge (ARK) Exchange Network in Virginia.* USDA-SOUTHERN SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) Professional Development Grant Project (VT Funding Request \$80,000). Submitted 11/15/2022.

The purpose of the project proposed in the SARE-PDP proposal is to expand Virginia's Agroforestry Regional Knowledge (ARK) Exchange Network, enhance Train the Trainer programming, and amplify awareness and coordination of existing and emerging on-farm research and demonstrations using a collective impact approach to grow agroforestry systems and a coordinated educational technical assistance network in Virginia.

Niewolny, K., Crutchfield, W., Bendfeldt, E.S., Brown, H., Githinji, L., Jackson, N. & Trozzo, K. (2022). USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund – State (January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2025) Total request: \$1,499,754.

The overarching purpose of this collaborative project is to equip new and established urban farmers, commercial growers, and market gardeners in Virginia with the tools, capacity, and skills needed to successfully access and utilize USDA (e.g., FSA and NRCS) programs and

services from an equitable food systems perspective. The training and equipping of urban farmers, commercial growers, and market gardeners, along with FSA personnel, will serve as a sound cornerstone for creating more resilient, vibrant, and equitable urban food systems and economies needed to increase supply chain resiliency, improve sustainability, and long-term viability of urban farming operations and food systems. This work aligns with FSA goals to increase equity in urban food systems by expanding FSA’s outreach efforts to urban producers through technical assistance, outreach, education, and research. *This is an invited cooperative agreement.*

Niewolny, K., Bendfeldt, E.S., & Trozzo, K. (2022). USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund – National (January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2027) Total Subaward request: \$250,000. Submitted.

The Virginia State University’s Small Farm Outreach Program will be the proposal lead on the five-year project titled, “National Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization FSA Bridging a Gap to Improve Sustainability.” *This is an invited cooperative agreement.*

Boyer, R. Niewolny, N. Bendfeldt, E., Trozzo, K. et al. (2022). Central Appalachian Regional Food Business Center. USDA AMS Regional Food Business Center Program. Total Subaward request: \$3,000,000. Submitted.

Virginia Tech is collaborating with the University of Kentucky and other regional land-grant universities (e.g., Virginia State University) and nonprofit organizations in the Central Appalachian Region to submit a 2022 USDA-Agricultural Marketing Services’ Regional Food Business Center grant application. The proposed project would be for five-years. Drs. Renee Boyer and Kim Niewolny are the proposal leads for Virginia Tech representing the VT Food Science and Technology and the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, respectively. Virginia Tech’s funding request is \$3,000,000.

2021-2022 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:

- Poetry Café and Poetry Institute 2-day event in partnership with the Virginia Tech Community Change Collaborative (\$5,000).
- “Building Beyond Nice Racism: Catalyzing Institutional Change in the Food System.” This was a 5- month long learning series led by R.E.A.L. with resource support from VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and revenue from participant fees (\$15,000).
- Indigenous Friendship Garden van rentals, honorarium, and in-kind support for 2022 cooking and community events (\$3,000)

Website and Social Media Analytics

We engage an audience of 352 on our [Center twitter handle](#) and our [Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation Facebook](#) page has 143 total followers, both of these numbers are up 100 from last year. Our listserv consists of 1,056 members, which is an increase of 124 from last year. People also engage frequently with the content on our website with over 14,000 pageviews from January 1 to December 16, 2022, which is up 1,000 page views from last year. The Center also manages the [Virginia Farm-to-Table Facebook page](#) with 4,400 followers, which is up 400 from last year.

Outcomes and Impacts

Our Center supports six core programs and eight projects. In 2023, we have meaningfully engaged with over 3,000 people. This includes the over 750 who attended our 27 Center events, the 2,295 who attended the 29 events we helped our partners host and promote, and our 52 Center Fellows. In 2023, our Center has hosted four resources initiatives, offered seven presentations, was acknowledged in three press articles, published three publications, created 27 podcast episodes, and submitted funding for five projects. We also have current funding for several awarded projects.

Goals and Plans for 2023

We have planned educational and outreach offerings for 2023 that directly inform our Center's objectives. They include continuing to offer a speaker series, events, trainings, and grant-funded research project deliverables. The following are a few examples of core activities planned:

New (highlights in addition to our core programs & initiatives)

Center Open House and Symposium

We received a CALS Team Award that we plan to use to host an open house on March 28, 2023 and a Center Symposium in August of 2023. The open house will celebrate our new space and provide those interested in our work and community a chance to meet and engage with us in person and in an informal setting. The open house will also showcase a speaker who works in the area of food systems and community transformation.

The Symposium will engage our Center community in knowledge exchange and meaning making around food systems and community transformation work. A keynote speaker, well known in the field, will be selected by the Center team and invited to address our community. Participants will be invited to share their work through poster and oral presentations and there will be space for engaged dialogue and networking.

New position: Research Assistant Professor

In early 2023 we plan to hire a new Research Assistant Professor Faculty position as part of our Center Team. As a member of the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation core team, the Research Assistant Professor would contribute to leading the Center's community-based research program by conducting interdisciplinary and community-engaged scholarship focused on food systems change and community transformation. This position will be an excellent opportunity to work as a scholar-practitioner interested in addressing pressing societal challenges and food system issues, especially relevant to Virginia, Central Appalachia, and the Mid-Atlantic region.

Continuation (select examples)

Fellows Speaker Series

In 2023, we will continue hosting monthly events to highlight the scholarship of our Center fellows. These virtual talks (with the possibility of hybrid virtual and in-person opportunities) 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 2023. Graduate students will be encouraged to present their current research or facilitate conversations on themes of interest to them. Center Graduate Fellows Nicole Nunoo, Justice Madden, and Kasey Owen will continue to organize and lead facilitations in this graduate affinity space during the spring 2023 semester. Based on participant feedback from the fall 2022 semester, the learning circles will be held monthly in the spring, and future learning circles will focus on tying in more professional and personal development workshopping time.

Roanoke Foodshed Network with LEAP

In 2023, we will continue supporting the RFN as part 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.

Soil for Water: Regenerative Grazing and Soil Health Systems

We will continue to work with the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) 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.

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, and caretaker of the Indigenous Friendship Garden. The Center is planning to continue to partner with Dr. Hey and Dr. Donna Westfall-Rudd 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 and Acknowledgements

The Center is pleased to announce that we have acquired space on the Virginia Tech campus to serve as our physical home in Litton-Reaves Hall, which includes two rooms. One is a shared office space for our Center Associates, Dr. Katie Trozzo and Garland Mason. The other room will serve as a conference room where we can host meetings, discussions, and events. Groups throughout the ALCE department are welcome to reserve this space as well. We are thankful to Dr. Tracy Rutherford, Dr. Susan Sumner, and Dean Alan Grant for facilitating this growth opportunity to advance our presence and impact. We are currently moving in and plan to have an open house on March 28, 2023 from 11:00-1:30 for all Center stakeholders and partners.

Lastly, we are grateful for the leadership and support of Dr. Edwin (Ed) Jones, former Director of Virginia Cooperative Extension, who retired in the fall of 2022. Dr. Jones has been a voice of support, guidance, and encouragement in the development, launch, and growth of the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation. We look forward to illustrating our ongoing commitment to Virginia Cooperative Extension and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech in 2023 and beyond.