

# Pre-Conference

## Friday, January 9, 2026

SESSION AM: 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM

**Season Extension for Vegetables**

Pam Dawling

*Shenandoah B*

SESSION AM: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

**Contour Lines in Agroforestry Design**

Thomas Leonard

*Shenandoah A*

**Medicinal Herb Cultivation: Horticulture of Herbs**

Jane Hawley Stevens

*Pocahontas*

**High Tunnel Tomatoes: Pivotal Lessons from Seed to Sale**

Garrett Waters

*Appalachian*

**LUNCH BUFFET: 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM**

*Regency Dining Room*

SESSION PM: 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

**Getting Started With Hiring Farm Staff**

Sally Walker

*Shenandoah A*

**Flower Farming for Beginners**

Liza Dobson & Gwynn Hamilton

*Pocahontas*

SESSION PM: 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM

**Garden Variety Harvest Farm Tour**

Cam Terry & Chloe Johnson

*Lick Run Farm – Offsite*

SESSION PM: 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM

**Ethical Seed Farming: A Hands-On Intensive**

Ira Wallace Seed School

*Shenandoah B*

**EVENING ACTIVITIES**

6:00 PM – 6:30 PM

**VABF Business Meeting**

Seyra Whitney

*Shenandoah B*

6:30 PM – 7:30 PM

**Farmer Listening Session**

Seyra Whitney

*Staff Hospitality Room*

7:30 PM – 9:00 PM

**Farming is Funny Comedy Show.**

Brent Wills & BLC

*Washington Lecture Hall*

## Pre-Conference Session Descriptions

### SEASON EXTENSION FOR VEGETABLES

Out-of-season crops can generate premium returns, making strategic planning essential for growers seeking efficiency and sustainability. This workshop examines how careful scheduling, crop selection, and protective measures enable year-round production while balancing energy and economic considerations. Participants will explore techniques for extending the season in both warm and cold climates. In hot weather, strategies include promoting seed germination, maintaining crop health through cooling and irrigation, and managing pests effectively. In cooler seasons, methods focus on advancing spring crops, prolonging fall harvests, and cultivating cold-hardy varieties throughout winter. The session highlights three levels of cold-hardiness and demonstrates how protective structures such as hoopouses support resilience. Additionally, participants will learn which vegetables are best suited for storage and practical preservation methods to ensure availability beyond the traditional growing season.

### CONTOUR LINES IN AGROFORESTRY DESIGN

Contour Lines Corp offers free trees and technical assistance to farmers committed to soil conservation and regenerative land management. This hands-on workshop is designed to train landowners in how to efficiently and effectively transition land to agroforestry systems. In this field-based session, participants will learn how to: mark contour lines on the landscape; excavate berms and swales that maximize weed control and conserve soil; efficiently plant bareroot seedlings; integrate nitrogen-fixing support species; mulch trees and establish cover crops. This workshop is ideal for landowners, farmers, and community members interested in applying for the Contour Lines Tree Planting Grant. You'll leave with the skills to begin implementation—and a clear understanding of what our programs require and how they work.

### MEDICINAL HERB CULTIVATION: HORTICULTURE OF HERBS

Herb sales continue to rise with more awareness of their unlimited healing potential. With this increased demand for herbs, more growers are needed. Four Elements produces over 80 species of medicinal herbs

totaling over 2000 pounds of dried herbs on under five acres on their 130-acre farm. Join Jane and learn to cultivate potent plants of beauty, texture, and scent, or simply learn the horticulture of herbs for fun and increased well-being in your garden. Certified organic since 1989, Jane will cover organic methods and offer information from her book, *The Celestial Garden, Growing Herbs, Vegetables and Flowers According to the Moon and the Zodiac*.

**HIGH TUNNEL TOMATOES: PIVOTAL LESSONS FROM SEED TO SALE**

This presentation will provide a practical, start-to-finish guide to producing high-yield high tunnel tomatoes. Drawing on five years of experience as a tomato tunnel lead between Glade Road Growing and Washington State University Organic Farm, the presenter will cover every stage of the process, from selecting the best cultivars to grafting basics to bed preparation and fertility management using foliar and fertigation techniques. Attendees will also explore strategies for pest and disease management, highly efficient trellising systems, and developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) to streamline task management. The talk will conclude with a look at average yields, storage and sales techniques, and annual sales data, offering a complete economic and production picture of a profitable high tunnel tomato operation.

**GETTING STARTED WITH HIRING FARM STAFF: A PLAYBOOK TO HELP THEM HELP YOU**

Building a tuned-in staff allows you the mental and physical energy to move towards your dream farm picture. Hiring is also a committed, long-game endeavor with lots of moving parts. The presenter will deep-dive into a nuts-and-bolts approach to hiring, onboarding, coaching new hires for quality outcomes, delivering feedback, setting expectations (especially of yourself), retaining farm workers year after year, and staff time management. Attendees will walk away with an understanding of what all you can learn from your staff, along with an action plan for a more economically sustainable (and staffed) farm.

**FLOWER FARMING FOR BEGINNERS: THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE STARTING YOUR OWN OPERATION!**

Thinking about starting a small flower farm? Let us help you prepare and plan for what's ahead! With over 30 years of farming experience together, Liza and Gwynn will share their wins, losses, suggestions, and considerations to help set you up for success. From the minutia of seeds to the enormity of sales, let's work through the parts of starting and maintaining a profitable flower enterprise. Topics will span infrastructure, crop selection, labor, timelines, schedules, materials, market outlets, and more. This is the workshop every flower farmer wishes they'd had before they got started!

**GARDEN VARIETY HARVEST FARM TOUR**

Join farmers Cam Terry and Chloe Johnson with the Garden Variety Harvests team for a tour of Lick Run Farm, two miles from Hotel Roanoke in NW Roanoke City. Owned by a community land trust, Lick Run Farm is a 3.5 acre property cultivating a diverse array of vegetables and flowers for direct sales in local farmers markets and restaurants. They run farm education programs for nearby youth and a sliding-scale "veggie club" for neighbors of the farm. The farm tour will include a hands-on irrigation workshop by Berry Hill Drip focused on how to leverage alternative products and approaches with intensive vegetable production.

**ETHICAL SEED FARMING: A HANDS-ON INTENSIVE**

Seed saving is a crucial component of the agricultural cycle often left out of beginner farmer training. This half-day seed intensive hosted by the Ira Wallace Seed School will focus on hands-on seed saving and processing techniques, as well as discussions around critical topics in the seed world. Presenters will offer live demonstrations of seed processing techniques, including threshing, winnowing, screening, fermentation, drying, storage, and germination; discussions on the plant life cycle, flower and seed production, and the history of human intervention in co-creating food crops; discussions around critical topics in the seed world, including community and cooperative-based seed work, the history of consolidation of seed businesses, and seeds as tools of empowerment; and self-reflective storytelling on seeds and food.

*Instructors: Chris Kieve, Veronica Limeberry, Tomia MacQueen, and AmyRose Foll.*

**Presenter Bios**