

# **VABF Conference Agenda**

Saturday, January 10, 2026

<b>SESSION A      8:30AM – 10:00AM</b>	
<b>A Progressive View of the Traditional Practice of Gardening by the Moon</b>	<p>Unveil this ancient system of agricultural practice. In our mechanized world, we overlook much traditional wisdom. I have had success using this system for over 35 years, incorporating Moon phases and the elemental influences of Fire, Earth, Air, and Water. This has brought rhythm, design, and timely methods into my organic herb farming practice. Dry and moist influences are shifting throughout the month, as seen in the tides.</p> <p>You can incorporate this system to enhance your organic plan by engaging in invisible energy free from Nature. Tap into these ancient methods, which save time, energy, and assist in successful planting and harvesting times.</p> <p>You will learn why:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Moon phases affect the water table.</li><li>2. The Elements Fire, Earth, Air and Water shift every three days, providing wet and dry influences.</li><li>3. There is a unique relationship between people, plants, and planets showing the synthesis uniting all life.</li></ol>
<b>Addressing Food System Resilience in Virginia Together: A Listening Session</b>	<p>A resilient food system is critical to the health, economic vitality, and long-term sustainability of communities across Virginia. Environmental and social disruptions make resilience increasingly important, but the complexity and scale of these issues require coordinated efforts across our state. This session is part of a seed project led by Virginia Tech, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Virginia State University to engage farmers, growers, and actors across the food system in a conversation about what resilience means, what it looks like in practice, and how we may advance resiliency efforts together. We will begin with a brief overview of key elements of food system resilience, followed by a discussion of strengths and opportunities for building resilience within and across Virginia's food system. The goal of this session is to build toward a statewide community of individuals and organizations to think about and advance food system resilience efforts together.</p>
<b>Landscaping with Edible Native Plants</b>	<p>In this workshop, I focus on planting native edible plants in the landscape to support biodiversity and create food security using plants that are adapted to the local climate and habitats of the Southeastern United States. Many of these plants may be unfamiliar to many people. Through my landscape design theory EONS (Edible Ornamental and Native Plants and Sustainable Methods) I will show you how to plant them in a landscape that looks appealing, seasonally interesting, and manages to fly under the radar from HOAs and neighborhood skeptics who may have issues with your landscaping. I will cover plants from trees such as the Butternut to groundcovers such as Partidgeberry.</p>

<b>The Care and Keeping of Poultry: Chickens, Ducks Geese and Turkeys</b>	Learn everything you need to know to raise happy Chickens, Ducks, Geese and Turkeys, and make money in the process. This workshop will cover care and keeping, safety and breeding, and basic pest and disease management. Also, learn how to incorporate them into your farm or garden in a way that allows them freedom and fun and also reduces work for you.
<b>Farm Law for Farmers</b>	Gray Montrose, herself an urban farmer, will provide an overview of basic legal concepts for small and urban farmers. Topics will include a primer on local ordinances, the Virginia Right to Farm Act (RTFA) and important RTFA case law, cottage food and farm stand laws, and resources for folks with legal needs.
<b>On-Farm Plant Breeding and Variety Trials Research</b>	This session is an introduction to the hows and whys of plant breeding and variety trials research for farmers. Edmund's work with cucumbers, squash, melons, tomatoes, peppers and more will serve as examples, with the goal of helping participants identify and workshop potential projects that are both needed and doable on their farms. More farmers doing this work in our region has the potential to significantly improve the seed options and outcomes available to us all and is an important part of creating and sustaining healthy seed systems.
<b>Agroforestry for Your Small Farm</b>	Agroforestry is not a set of new practices; it has been around for centuries in various forms and cultures. In today's society we are seeing these practices reemerge in the forms of alley cropping, forest farming, silvopasture, riparian buffers and windbreaks. These approaches are gaining in popularity across small- and large-scale producers. The purpose of this class is to introduce agroforestry concepts that can be incorporated into the everyday homestead or small-scale farm for crop and wildlife diversity, multi-revenues of income, soil and water protection, and a host of other benefits. Participants will gain a high-level understanding of how to take these concepts and apply them to their land through presentation of design considerations, conversations and situational case study for hands-on application.
<b>Setting up a Successful Equipment Share</b>	This talk will discuss different models of equipment shares, with different levels of organization and investment. We will also discuss the most common pitfalls that prevent success and how to avoid them. I will present sample budgets and agreements, and cover what to think about and accomplish up front to allow your model to grow in terms of increasing members and purchasing additional equipment.
<b>SESSION B 10:30AM – 12:00PM</b>	
<b>Genetic Diversity Preservation of Culturally Significant Seeds</b>	When you begin your journey by starting to save the seeds from plants you've grown and plant them again in subsequent years you become part of a cultural ritual 10,000 years old. That ritual gave us the bounty through which each and every one of our world's unique culinary traditions were born and developed all the food we eat from their wild ancestors. When we look to the past, none of us, from any heritage, or walk of life has to go back very many generations to find a farmer in the family, and a connection to these seeds. By saving seeds you are living your farming ancestor's legacy of strength and resilience, and protecting that sense of place which grows out of our shared traditions.

<b>Cover Crop Grazing Project</b>	Many areas in Virginia grow row crops, which may or may not be followed by cover crops after harvest. During harvest season, producers are often too busy with cash crop collection to prioritize early cover crop planting. This gap creates a prime opportunity for livestock producers to lead in early cover crop establishment and boosting access to high-quality, affordable forage. This session will provide livestock producers with practical tips and tricks on how to economically and successfully sublease cropland for the purpose of expanding their total grazeable acres. In addition, we will review some challenges that livestock producers can face when grazing cover crops and provide some helpful resources to help overcome these potential obstacles. Content discussed will stem from research and the Cover Crop Grazing Project managed by American Farmland Trust along with research conducted by others across the US.
<b>The Labor Issue, Community Building, and Making Farming Fun Again</b>	Small farmers have a hard time making ends meet if they spend a lot on labor. Opening the farm up for gatherings, camping, hiking, swimming and learning opportunities can build a farm community willing to help with labor in exchange for something besides money. We'll discuss internships, bartering, collaborations, gleanings, hobs and other forms of non-monetary compensation practiced by parsimonious farmers in the past and present.
<b>A Homestead Ecological Journey</b>	This colorful Power Point Presentation describes the transformation of a ten-acre unimproved pasture, into a biologically abundant and ecologically diverse homestead in Rockbridge County, Virginia. My mission has been to demonstrate that agriculture and native wildlife can coexist in harmony. I'll cover topics such as restoring soil microbiology; choosing resilient trees and perennial plants; maintaining wild areas; linking native habitats with agriculture; encouraging local insect predators and prey, etc. Time will be set aside for your thoughts and questions. I look forward to sharing this 25-year ecological journey with other homesteaders and small farmers.
<b>Collaborative Marketing &amp; Distribution: Edible Goose Creek's Community Supported Adventures</b>	<p>Interested in more direct-to-customer sales? Maybe burned out on the work of attending farmers markets? Feel timid about "going it alone" with a CSA/subscription program? It might be time to consider collaborating with your fellow farmers to extend your reach and develop loyal customers.</p> <p>Edible Goose Creek producers discuss the nine-year evolution of their collaborative marketing and distribution methods. Learn from our adventures in developing a network that makes it easier for small scale growers/producers/artisans to reach their market with less stress and work. We will cover how we handle administrative details; communications; customer relations and retention; website; our customized CSA selection process; money management; and leave plenty of time for your questions, too.</p>
<b>Exploring Soil Biota</b>	In this session we will dive into the field of soil ecology, the study of the relationships between living organisms and their physical environment (abiotic and biotic) within the soil. Soil biota will be described by their taxonomy, size classifications, feeding behaviors and more. The different methods used for measuring different groups of biota will be discussed, with live demonstrations of methods including modified Berlese funnels

	(microarthropods), Baermann funnels (nematodes), and floatation techniques (weevils, beetles, etc.). Methods for how to easily measure the feeding activity of soil biota will also be covered. The ecosystem services and biological processes that are driven by these different organisms will be discussed. The session will then cover how soil biota can be managed to enhance soil health and promote the ecosystem services they provide.
<b>Mechanize to Maximize: Scaling Your Flower Farm and Preserving Your Body</b>	Efficient, scalable systems are essential for the long-term success of cut flower operations. This session will explore practical applications of mechanization tailored to the unique workflows of flower farming—from bed prep and transplanting to harvest and post-harvest handling. Learn how to evaluate and integrate tools and equipment that reduce physical strain, improve labor efficiency, and support farm scalability. Ideal for growers seeking data-informed strategies to optimize production while minimizing wear on the body.
<b>Optimizing a Regenerative Microgreens Operation: Low-Input, High-Profit Growing Systems</b>	<p>Looking to grow a thriving microgreens business that's profitable and sustainable? In this behind-the-scenes session, Dave and Nicky Schauder of Permaculture Gardens share how they've built a closed-loop, soil-based microgreens operation that supplies local chefs and markets, without relying on costly inputs like Promix or aquaponics. Learn how they grow nutrient-dense greens using regenerative practices, calculate profit per tray, and adapt their packaging models for different markets. You'll get a detailed look at three microgreens product streams they're currently testing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Systems for smooth drop offs at restaurants and compostable or reusable non-plastic packaging</li> <li>- Spreadsheet that attendees can copy, for tracking profits and sowing schedule and amounts</li> <li>- DIY microgreens kits for retail at groceries</li> </ul> <p>This session is ideal for small farmers, homesteaders, or market gardeners looking to diversify income with low-overhead, fast-turnaround crops. With real-world numbers, workflows, and lessons learned, you'll leave with practical tools to grow microgreens profitably while keeping your operation earth-friendly and financially resilient.</p>
<b>SESSION C 2:00PM – 3:30PM</b>	
<b>The Never-Ending Journey to Becoming a Better Manager</b>	Like all businesses, running a successful farm is about people. The panelists in this session will reflect on their combined 62 years of experience managing employees on their diversified vegetable and flower farms. Hear how their strategies for setting expectations, delegating responsibility, evaluating performance, and giving praise have evolved over time. The journey to become a better manager requires self-work: learning to manage emotions, being accountable, building confidence, and accepting people for who they are, including yourself. This discussion is sure to be packed with candid stories of management stumbles, personal growth, and field-tested strategies for effective communication with farm employees.
<b>Farmers Markets and Farmers Working Together for Farmer Viability</b>	This panel session will explore the relationship between farmers and farmers markets. Farmers Markets can serve as a launching pad for farm businesses, access to new farm business

	customers, a steady sales opportunity for farm products, and/or an integral part of a diversified farm production model. In the session, three pairs of farmers market managers and farmer vendors will explore how farmers and farmers markets can work together to support their separate and overlapping goals.
<b>Growing Perennial Fruit in the Mid-Atlantic</b>	An overview of strategies and techniques for growing perennial fruits and berries using organic practices, with a focus on the crops that have been most successful at Wild Rose Orchard in Mount Sidney, Virginia
<b>Organic and Regenerative Certification: Considerations in a Changing Certification Landscape</b>	(Description TBC)
<b>Does That Stuff Really Work? Field Evaluations of OMRI-Approved Insecticides</b>	A wide range of home remedies and commercial products are touted as effective solutions for insect pest problems on vegetable crops. In this talk I will present a review of several of these products including field efficacy data from experiments conducted in Virginia. The last 30 minutes I will open it up for discussion and sharing of information.
<b>Never Stop Harvesting: Multi-Season Crop Plans for Diverse &amp; Profitable Yields</b>	<p>What if you could turn a small garden into a powerhouse of year-round production? Inspired by Miraculous Abundance and John Jeavons' Grow Biointensive method, this session dives into how to rotate crops across spring, summer, and fall to achieve maximum yield in minimal space. Dave Schauder of Permaculture Gardens shares practical strategies used on their 3-acre Bethany Farm, where they grow intensively to feed their family and local community. Learn how to time crop transitions to reduce garden "downtime," select varieties that thrive in Virginia's climate, and improve soil fertility even while harvesting high-output crops. Whether you're working with a quarter-acre or raised beds, you'll walk away with a real-world rotation formula to increase productivity, biodiversity, and soil health.</p> <p>Attendees will learn: How to time crop rotations across three seasons; Which crop varieties perform best in Virginia; How to boost soil fertility while rotating high-yield crops.</p>
<b>Seen and HERD: How to Show the Story That Sells</b>	<p>Your farm or food business already has a story. That's Great! But if no one sees it, it might as well not exist. In this follow-up to "If You Don't Tell Your Story, Someone Else Will," we'll dive into visual storytelling: how to use photos and videos to build trust, show your values, and turn passive followers into loyal customers.</p> <p>This session will focus on clarity over perfection. We'll cover the five essential photos every farmer or foodmaker needs, how to organize content without burning out, when to DIY, and when it's worth investing in professional visuals. Whether you're a nonprofit looking to amplify your mission or a producer trying to grow your audience, this workshop will help you show your work in a way that moves people.</p>
<b>Silvopasture Outside the Box</b>	You've probably heard about Silvopasture by now, so let's look at some innovative examples from folks who are modeling natural systems to create really interesting and productive landscapes. There will be a brief introduction to silvopasture and discussion of

	available funding for installation followed by case study examples from folks in the field who are pushing the envelope with their forward-thinking practices.
<b>SESSION D 4:00PM – 5:30PM</b>	
<b>Grower-Buyer Panel</b>	(Description TBC)
<b>Converting Organic Waste into Biochar and Compost</b>	Biological farming requires quality compost as a soil amendment. Our communities throw away large amounts wood, food and other organic materials that could be made into quality compost. The benefits are reduced waste in landfills, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved soil and sequestering carbon in the soil. Learn about how this circular economy can be created in your community.
<b>Crop Planning for Sustainable Vegetable Production</b>	A step-by-step approach to closing the planning circle, so that you can produce crops when you want them and in the right quantities, so you can sell them where and when you need to and support yourself with a rewarding livelihood while replenishing the soil. Never repeat the same mistake two years running! This workshop will provide planning tools for diversified vegetable production while considering income, markets, crops, scheduling and mapping. You'll also learn various fine-tuning tricks to fit more in and improve your plans each year.
<b>Beekeeping Basics &amp; Beeyond</b>	Honeybees can be a great addition to your farm and life but are challenging to raise successfully. These special insects can increase annual crop yield, inspire your farm team, and provide you with energizing honey. In this session we will cover the fundamentals of beekeeping including hive placement, varroa and pest management, as well as honey production and winter survival. We will learn about the best management practices and common mistakes to avoid for new beekeepers.
<b>Grow Vegetables Without Plastic: Practical Tractor Techniques for 1–10 Acres</b>	Want to ditch plastic mulch but still keep weeds under control? This session is for beginner and mid-scale organic farmers growing 1–10 acres of vegetables. We'll share practical, farm-tested tractor cultivation methods that eliminate the need for plastic while keeping your system productive and manageable. Learn how to prepare beds, control weeds, and plan labor and timing for a clean, efficient growing system—from planting to harvest. We'll walk through the specific tools we use on our own organic farm, along with strategies that work for both intensive and extensive production styles. You'll leave with clear, actionable steps to create a weed-free system that's simple, cost-effective, and easy on your body.
<b>Preserving Flavor &amp; Artistry: A Case Study in Venetian Radicchio and Knowledge Transfer</b>	Franco Fubini in conversation with Will Dorman to explore one of Natoora's most ambitious preservation projects: bringing traditional Venetian radicchio to the farms and tables of the Northeast US. Franco will share how two decades of building a flavor-first supply chain led to this living example of preservation through education — from connecting Vermont grower Amanda with master growers in Veneto, to adapting time-honored forcing techniques for new climates. Attendees will taste radicchio while learning its varietal diversity, cultural history, and the patience it demands to grow well. The session will weigh local vs. imported through full life-cycle analysis, showing how knowledge transfer

	and chef-driven demand can create markets that allow small-scale, high-flavor crops to thrive. Beyond radicchio, this is a blueprint for aligning sourcing with flavor to protect biodiversity, sustain traditions, and transform farming economics.
<b>Strategic Diversification: How to Create an Array of Products from a Short Crop List</b>	In this interactive session, Kat the Farmer will take participants beyond the usual advice to 'diversify' and explore strategic diversification within a niche. The key? Creating an array of products from a short crop list! Kat will demonstrate how she's turned her most valuable crop—salad greens—into profitable value-added products, while reducing waste and increasing average order size. Kat will use examples from her own operation and inspire you to rethink your harvests to add profit and loyalty to your market offerings.
<b>Getting the Guts to Raise Your Prices</b>	You grow one of the most nutritious products in Virginia. Are you being paid a fair price for it, one that enables you to farm for years to come? Here we'll tackle the hard mental work of getting your prices up to support a thriving income for you. We'll go into why your prices likely need to be much higher than you think to support you and your operation and key strategies (besides just profit & loss calculations) to raise your prices with confidence. We'll address relationship building with a clientele that trusts you and techniques on how your prices and products can serve customers from all walks of life.

Additional sessions and activities will be added to the agenda as they are confirmed.