

VABF Pre-Conference Agenda

Friday, January 9, 2026

9:00AM – 12:00PM	
Contour Lines in Agroforestry Design Presenter: Thomas Leonard	<p>Hands-on training to help landowners transition to regenerative agroforestry</p> <p>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.</p> <p>In this field-based session, participants will learn how to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 <p>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.</p>
Season Extension for Vegetables Presenter: Pam Dawling	<p>Out of season crops can sell for higher prices. Feed people year-round by choosing crops wisely, providing appropriate protection and by careful scheduling. We discuss the energy and economic balance points in extending the seasons. Options for hot weather include tricks to get seed germinated, keep crops cool and watered, and keep pests off. Techniques for cold weather include growing earlier crops in spring, later crops in the fall, and cold-hardy crops in the winter. We look at three ranges of cold-hardiness and how crop protection, including hoopouses, can help. The workshop includes vegetables to grow and store for out-of-season use, and methods of storage.</p> <p>Careful scheduling for extended seasons makes efficient use of resources, as does consideration of which crops are the best for you to grow.</p>
Medicinal Herb Cultivation – Horticulture of Herbs Presenter: Jane Hawley Stevens	<p>Join Jane and learn to cultivate these potent plants of beauty, texture, and scent. Herb sales continue to rise with more awareness of their unlimited healing potential. With this increased demand for herbs, more growers are needed. 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. In addition, Jane will offer information from her book, "The Celestial Garden, Growing Herbs, Vegetables and Flowers According to the Moon and the Zodiac."</p> <p>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. Local women grow the herbs used in their herbal products, Four Elements Organic Herbals, making high-quality and effective herbal products.</p>

	You can enrich your life and create wellbeing starting with just a curiosity about what is held in Nature.
High Tunnel Tomatoes: Pivotal Lessons from Seed to Sale Presenter: Garrett Waters	<p>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, I 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.</p> <p>We'll 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.</p>

1:00PM – 4:00PM	
Getting Started With Hiring Farm Staff: A Playbook to Help Them Help You Presenter: Sally Walker	<p>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. We'll 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. You'll 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.</p>
Flower Farming for Beginners: Things to Consider Before Starting Your Own Operation! Presenter: Liza Dobson	<p>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 we wish we'd had!</p>
1:30PM – 4:30PM	
Lick Run Farm Tour Hosts: Garden Variety Harvests	<p>Join farmer Cam Terry and Chloe Johnson of Garden Variety Harvests 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 run a sliding-scale "veggie club" for neighbors of the farm. Farm tour will include hands-on irrigation workshop focused on intensive vegetable production.</p> <p><i>**Limited attendance, based on advance registration. Participants must provide their own transportation and are encouraged to carpool.</i></p>

1:00PM – 5:00PM

Ethical Seed Farming: A Hands-On Intensive

Presenters: Ira Wallace Seed School

Seed saving is a crucial component of the agricultural cycle often left out of beginner farmer training. This half-day seed intensive hosted by a group of presenters from 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.

Activities will include:

- Live demonstrations of seed processing techniques, including threshing, winnowing, screening, fermentation, drying, storage, and germination
- Presentations on the plant life cycle, flower and seed production, and the history of human intervention in co-creating food crops
- Discussion 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
- Self-reflective storytelling on seeds and food

***Note: This is a four-hour course.*