



WELCOME!

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition

Quarterly Meeting

June 1st, 2023



 **Virginia Cooperative Extension**
Virginia Tech • Virginia State University



VABBF
Virginia Association for Biological Farming



Sustainable Chesapeake



OLD DOMINION
LAND CONSERVANCY



Center for Natural Capital
RURAL AMERICAN RESILIENCE



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF PLANT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
VIRGINIA TECH



APPALACHIAN
sustainable
DEVELOPMENT

atural pHuel



Maryland
& Virginia

Milk Producers
Cooperative Association



Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

Thank you to our funders!

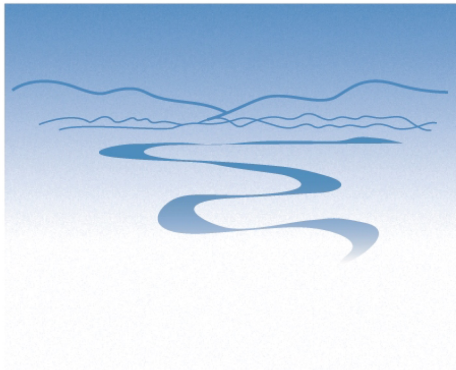


NFWF



Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund

AGUA FUND, INC.



Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation



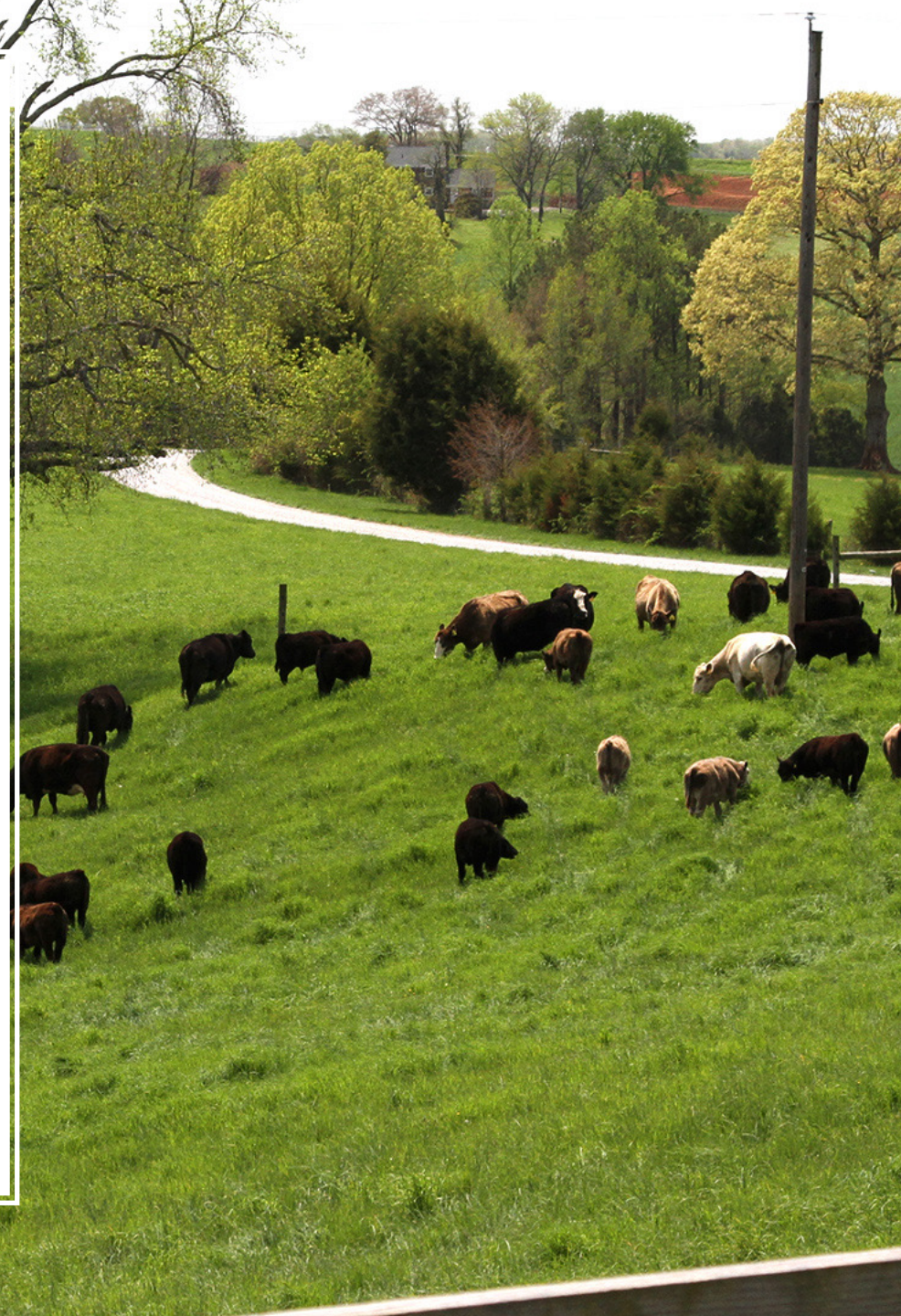
Sustainable Agriculture
Research & Education



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL, LEADERSHIP,
AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Agenda

- **Welcome!**
 - Dr. Mike Gutter, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension
- **Panel conversation: “Addressing the soil health technical assistance gap: Challenges and opportunities for cropping systems”**
- **TA Panel follow-up: Breakout room Q&A/conversation with panelists**
- **4 The Soil: Next Steps and Listening Sessions with Social Impact Studios**
- **Coalition update: Implementing the Strategic Plan & developing Innovation Teams**
- **Announcements and adjourn**



Addressing the soil health technical assistance gap: Challenges and opportunities for cropping systems”

- Anne Coates, Executive Director, Thomas Jefferson SWCD
- Dwight Forrester, District Conservationist, Tappahannock, Virginia NRCS
- Dr. Sarah Hirsch, Agricultural Extension Agent, Maryland Cooperative Extension
- Tim Woodward, Chief Operation Officer, Virginia Seed Company
- Facilitated by Adrienne Kotula, Virginia Director, Chesapeake Bay Commission



Breakout Rooms

Choose your own adventure!

- **Room 1: Anne Coates**
- **Room 2: Dwight Forrester**
- **Room 3: Sarah Hirsch**
- **Room 4: Tim Woodward**



4 The Soil



Sarah Koth • May 17 • 9 min read

"LEARNING FROM THE LAND" WITH STEPHANIE MILLER OF MYSTIC PINE FARM

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Stephanie Miller's love for family, community, and food planted the seeds that grew into MysticPine Farm. As a farmer and chef with over 20 years of experience, Stephanie grows ingredients with taste, health, and access in mind.



[Take the Pledge!](#) [About](#) [4 Core Principles](#) [Podcast](#) [Soil Health Champions](#) [Blog](#)

Take the Pledge



People around the country have taken the pledge!

Soil health impacts us all. Whether we care for the soil on our farmland, urban gardens, front lawns and backyards, or when purchasing produce and meat at the store, we all influence soil health. Explore how you interact with soil in your daily life, and how you can care for the soil.

Whether you're a farmer, a conservation professional, a nature lover, or a food lover, you can support soil health. Pledge your support below!



4 The Soil: A Conversation



Soil. What is it, really? It's more than the dirt under our feet and the ground we stand on. Soil is living and life-giving. Listen as we unlock the mysteries of soil by speaking with people at the forefront of the soil health movement. "4 The Soil: A...

[Read More](#)

Podcast

Search podcast...



Episode 23 - 11: Catalyzing Creative Solutions with Taona...

5/23/2023 | 22 min [Listen Episode](#)

Whether you live in the United States or Malawi in southeastern Africa, you can be 4 The Soil because soil health has national and international inspirations and applications. Soil health is foundational to...



Episode 23 - 10: The Ins and Outs of Cover Cropping with Mi...

5/9/2023 | 22 min

Cover crops have many different functions and benefits from adding biomass to alleviating compaction to providing habitat for beneficial pollinators. People may be hesitant to plant a mixture of cover cro...



Episode 23 - 9: Soil Health by Trial and Error with Mike Parris...

4/25/2023 | 21 min

Farmers, gardeners, and homeowners can face different challenges in managing and building soil health. Mike Parrish, senior extension agent with Virginia Cooperative Extension in Dinwiddie Count...

Join the movement. Take the pledge.

YES, I am 4 The Soil!

I will follow and advocate for the 4 Core Principles of Soil Health Management whenever my lifestyle can support it.

(Check the box at the end to get on the mailing list for biweekly tips, resources, and updates.)

First Name

Last Name

Email *

Where do you manage soil health? (e.g. backyard, farm, garden, your plates, etc.)



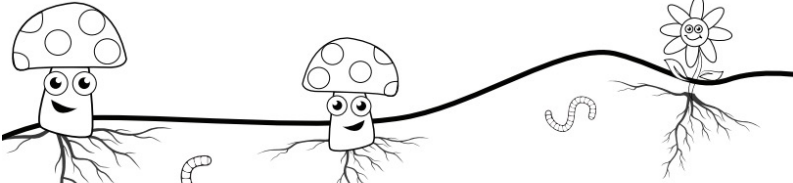
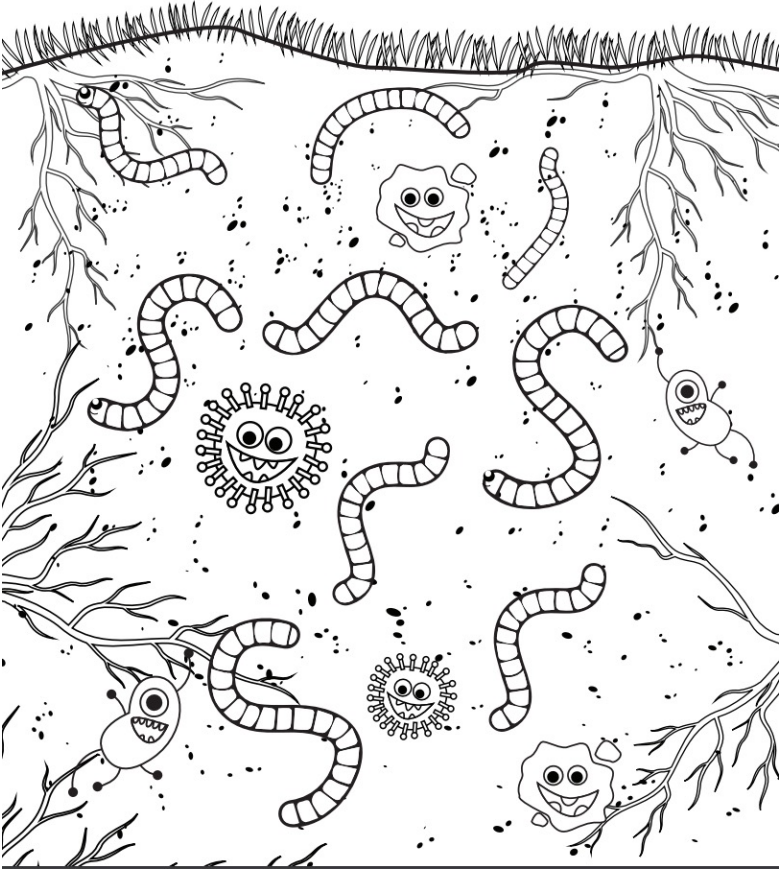
Download the Ambassador Toolkit to access all the 4 The Soil graphics and materials to share.

AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

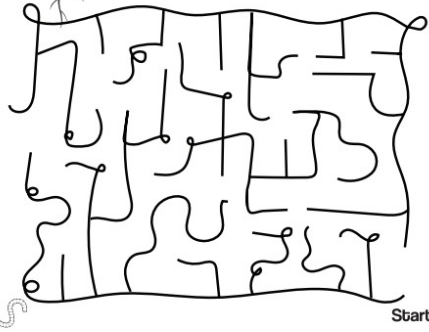
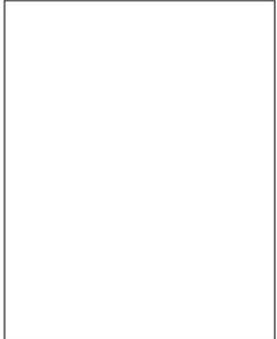
Check out our new coloring book!

Soil principle 2. Minimize Soil Disturbance

A second way we can take care of the soil is to not disturb it through digging too much and uncovering it. By not disturbing the soil physically or chemically, we provide a healthy place for plants to grow and tiny beneficial insects to thrive.



Draw your soil health champion!



| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| D | T | W | W | E | I | G | I | T | I | G | O | E | |
| C | R | T | R | V | T | L | I | V | I | N | G | S | A |
| T | R | I | O | W | I | I | Y | M | R | Y | A | S | R |
| R | L | N | R | C | S | F | T | I | Y | C | O | I | F |
| O | I | R | E | I | R | M | O | C | O | E | M | W | O |
| W | P | A | V | W | E | R | R | R | B | O | R | A | O |
| O | O | R | O | W | V | V | R | O | T | R | L | P | M |
| O | M | R | C | E | I | R | E | B | M | O | I | I | D |
| Y | L | T | M | O | D | O | M | E | T | E | F | O | C |
| O | C | R | O | P | F | O | R | A | G | E | F | O | R |
| I | G | S | E | W | I | T | G | F | R | F | R | O | O |
| O | W | A | T | E | R | S | R | O | S | I | O | S | A |
| M | T | T | L | M | L | L | I | O | S | B | L | R | Y |
| D | C | O | S | B | O | E | T | V | O | R | M | V | F |

- forage
- diversity
- food
- crop
- cover
- living
- soil
- microbe
- worm
- roots
- water



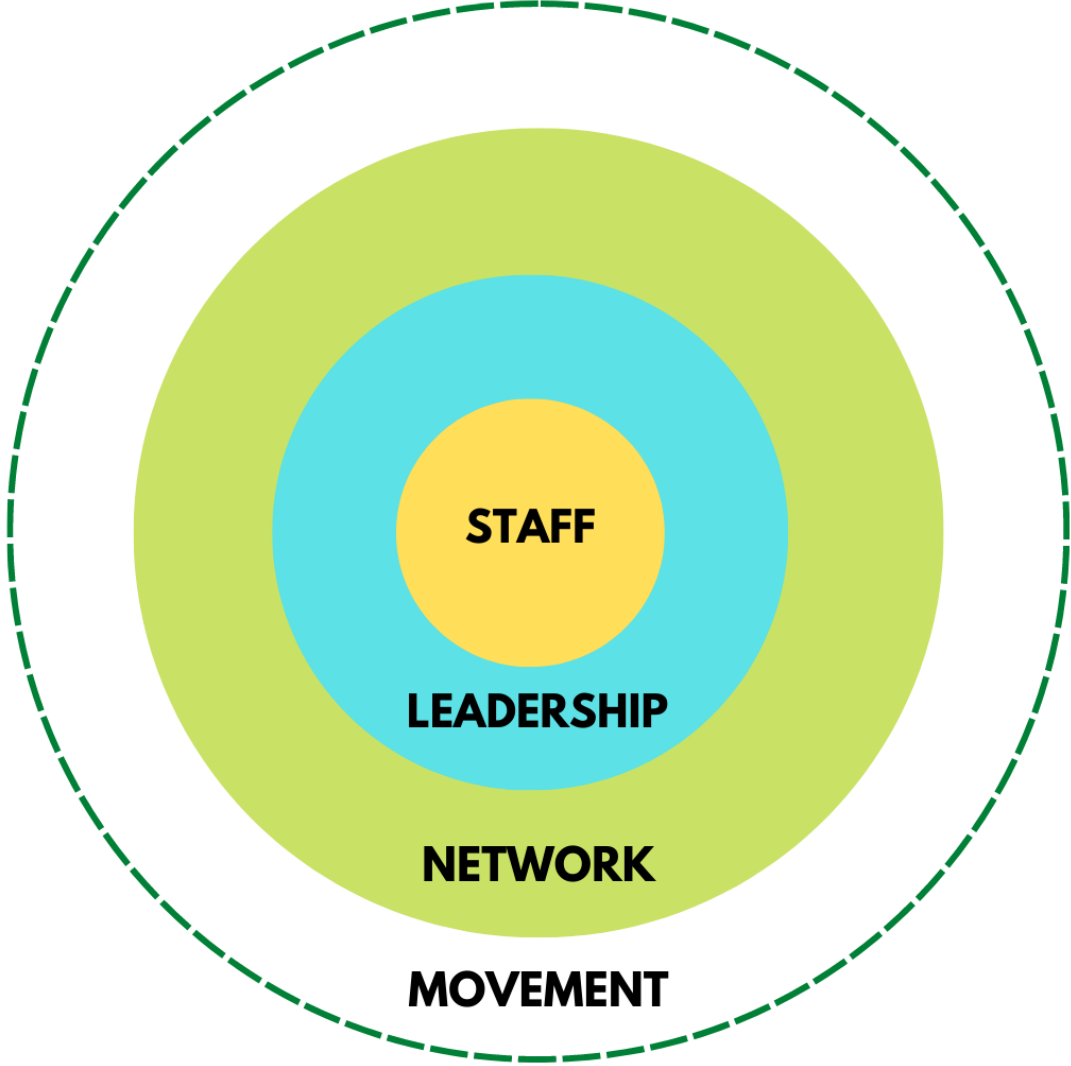
how many worms can you find on this page?

4 The Soil + Value Chain Coordination

- Application submitted to Agricultural Marketing Service
 - Advance local and regional food system health and infrastructure in Virginia and the Mid-Atlantic region from the soil up.
 - Building off the 4 The Soil Initiative and Buy Fresh Buy Local, aim to increase demand for local and regional foods, while increasing diversity of producers participating in conservation programs.
- First meeting of workgroup/Innovation Team held in May



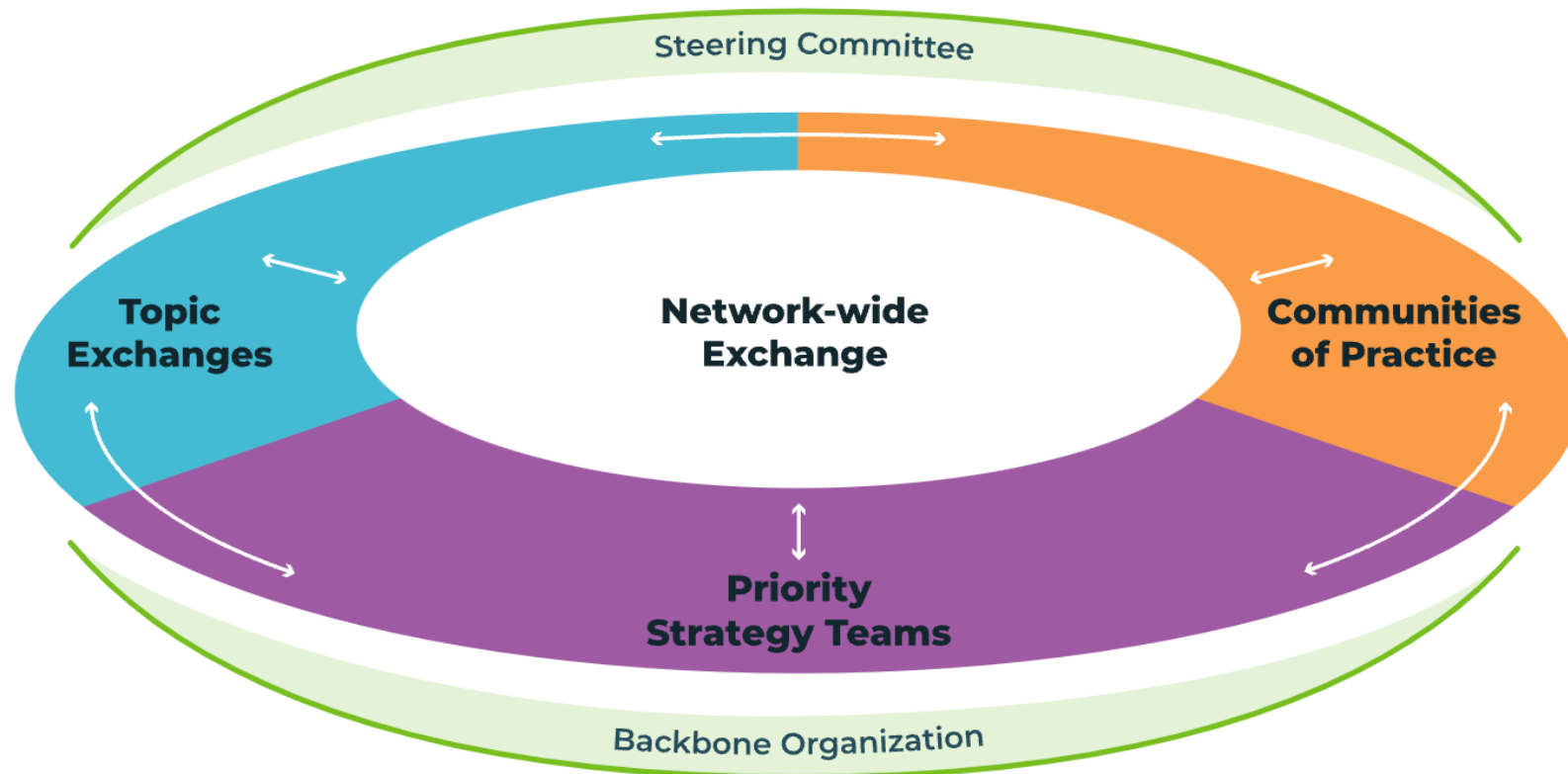
The VSHC Ecosystem



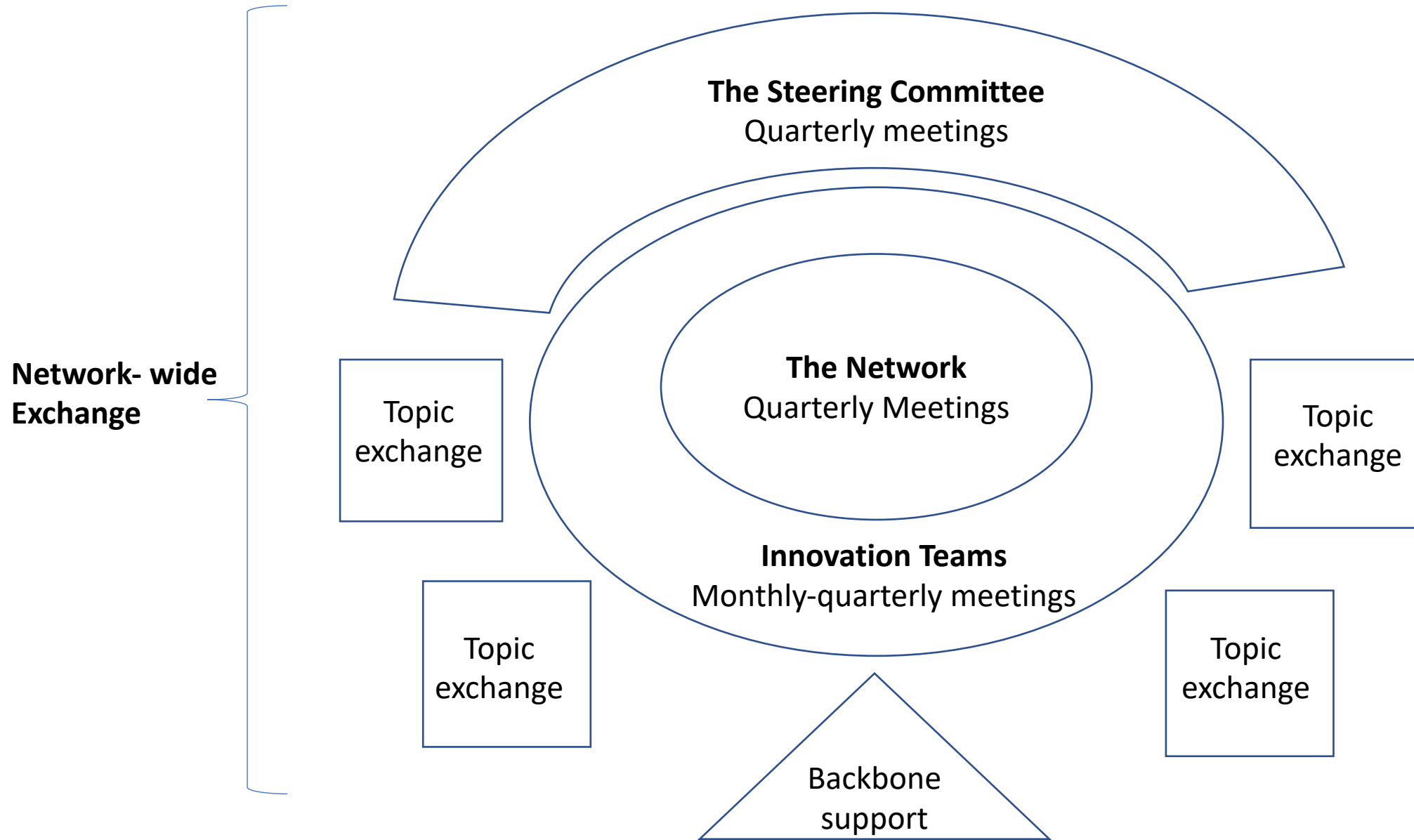
Example: Vermont Farm to Plate Network

Network Structure

The interactive Network diagram provides a visual representation of the network structure and brief explanations of the different group types of the F2P Network in its current form. Hover over the group names to learn more about the purpose and function of each group type.



Coalition Structure/Function: A Distributed Network



Innovation Teams



- **Goals/purpose:**
 - Communication → innovation. Develop innovation specific to a certain topic/realm related to soil health with ultimate goal of supporting increased awareness and implementation of soil health principles.
- **Expectations from Team leader:**
 - Identify need for meetings + agenda
 - Identifies core partners needed at the table
 - Facilitates meetings
- **Expectations from backbone team:**
 - Support meeting scheduling
 - Take and disseminate notes at team meetings
 - Support team lead with partner outreach/engagement
 - Support with fundraising where relevant
 - Communicate information to broader Coalition network
- **Expectations from Team partners**
 - Engage as able in regular meetings and other identified activities
 - Open communication
 - Fluidity as needed with your organization and the goals of the team



Steering Committee:

- 10-14 soil health leaders that drive the direction and strategy of the broader Coalition
- Provide infrastructure support and direct guidance to the Backbone Team
- Identify and help bring in new partners to the network

Innovation Team: Market + Value Chain

- Financial/economic levers
- Soil health in the marketplace- where does soil health fit into the food value chain
- Eric working with partners and Coalition (Mary) to submit a USDA Local Food Promotion Program grant this spring to expand 4 The Soil to see what is possible in the marketplace—identifying soil as the basic infrastructure of food systems.
- How to lift up local and regional producers engaged in soil health practices.

Innovation Team: Cost Share and Incentives

- IRA, state VACS funding, CSC, etc. – how to best leverage all of the funds out there (e.g. make examples of funding packages)
- Flexible funding- equity and farmer access
- Linking TA- gaps to accelerate delivery
- Mapping \$\$- gap analyses
- Streamline offers to farmers— help them understand what is out there
- Willingness to advance funding packages
- SH practice code/law (advocacy)

Innovation Team: Education/Outreach

- On-farm research (both university research and case studies/other storytelling) (see PFI example for case studies)
- Peer-to-peer network
- Reaching the ‘quartile 3 and 4’ farmers
- *There is A LOT here- probably need to break it down more/streamline*

Backbone Team:

- Coalition Staff
- Virginia Tech supervisory support

Emergent Innovation Teams

- Value Chain Coordination
- Nutrient Management
- Policy?
- Urban agriculture?



VSHC Value Chain Innovation Team

The Innovation Team will seek to strengthen the connection of soil health in the local and regional food value chain and expand the 4 The Soil Initiative's capacity to further leverage market drivers that are tied to agroecological practices through Increased coordination and collaboration of partners (agencies, nonprofits, funders, private entities) across the state and region.



Opportunities

- **June 5th, Warrenton, VA: “Vetch in the Rye” Cover Crop Field Day**
- **June 6-7th and 12-14th, Weyers Cave, VA: DCR Nutrient Management Training**
- **June 13th, Blackstone, VA: Weed Management Field Day**
- **July 18th, Bedford, VA: Soil Health Show & Tell Visit at Bramble Hollow Farm**
- **August 1st, Virginia Beach, VA: Ag Expo**

* Stay tuned for more information on upcoming training webinars and other opportunities.

www.virginiasoilhealth.org/calendar



Reminders

- Share your logo in support of the Coalition's mission, vision, and principles.
- Visit the website and sign up for the newsletter: virginiasoilhealth.org.
- Take the pledge and download the podcast: 4thesoil.org.
- Reach out to us about project ideas and grant proposals.
- Have a topic you want to hear more about or want us to bring a speaker in- let us know!
- Stay tuned for updates on soil health training!



Steering Committee

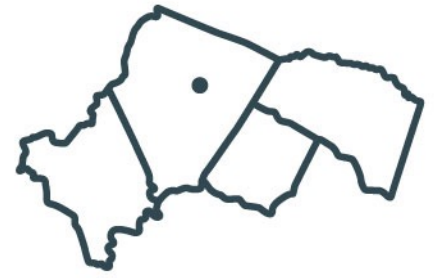
- ❖ Eric Bendfeldt, VA Cooperative Extension
- ❖ Kristen Hughes-Evans, Sustainable Chesapeake
- ❖ Mike Kane, Piedmont Environmental Council
- ❖ Dr. Rory Maguire, Virginia Tech SPES
- ❖ James Martin, VA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
- ❖ Jamie Mierau, American Farmland Trust
- ❖ Robert Shoemaker, VA DCR
- ❖ Becky Szarzynski, Virginia Forage and Grassland Council
- ❖ Dr. Wade Thomason, Virginia Tech SPES
- ❖ Dr. Kendall Tyree, VA Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- ❖ Brent Wills, Virginia Association of Biological Farmers

Advisors

- ❖ Chris Lawrence, VA NRCS



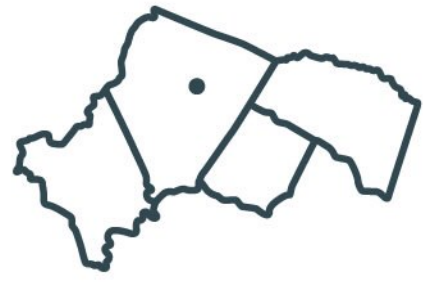
THOMAS JEFFERSON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



TJSWCD TA Offered to Cropland Farmers:

- Staff of 12 + 3 New Positions = (2 of those are for AG)
- 8 on Ag Team - 3 Certified Nutrient Management Planners
 - Recommendations on crop rotation, soil testing
 - Coordinating soil test results, GPS field locations, and FSA maps
 - VA No-Till Alliance (VANTAGE) field day
 - Connecting participants with area experts
 - Cost Share options, etc.

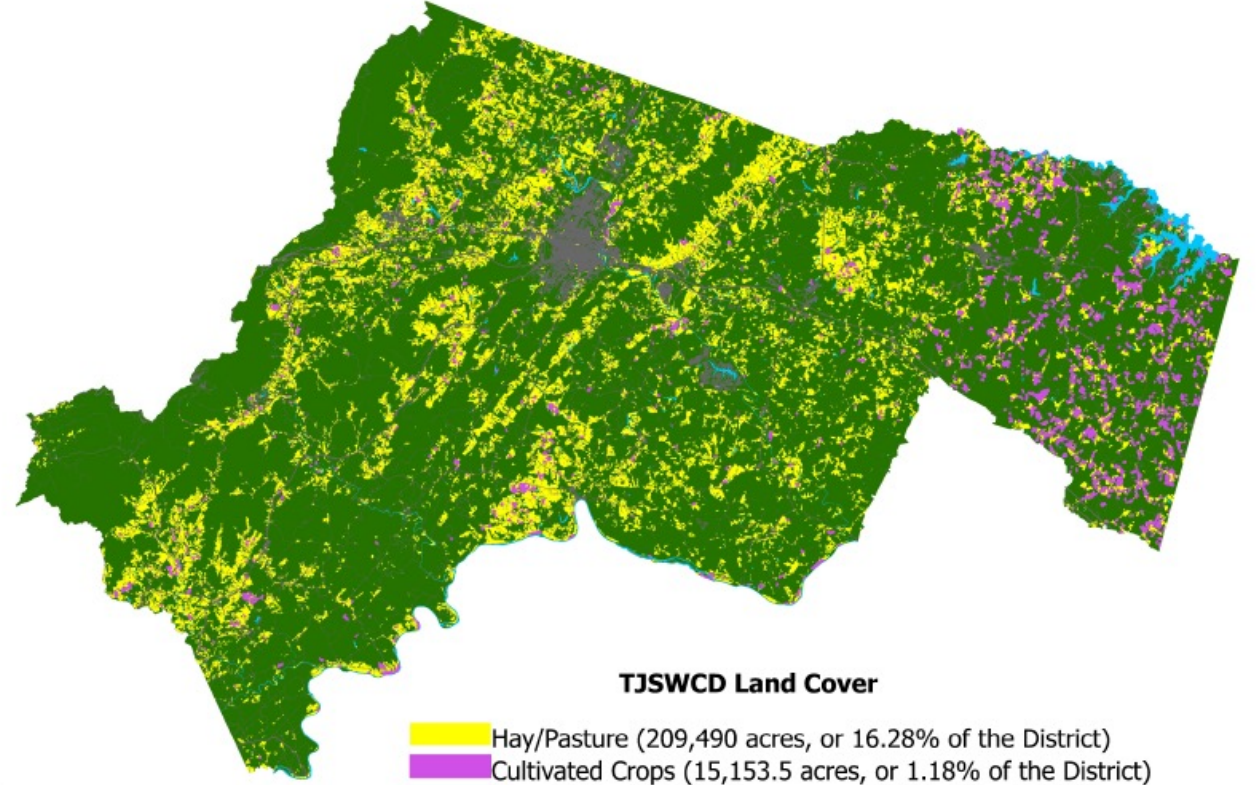
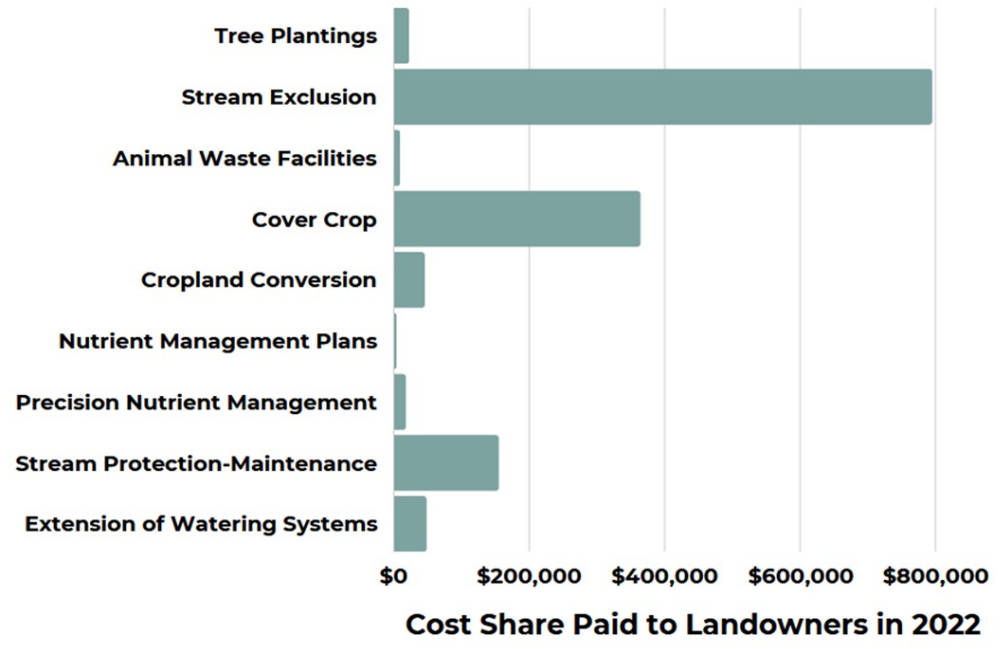
THOMAS JEFFERSON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



TJSWCD Agricultural Land Use Map

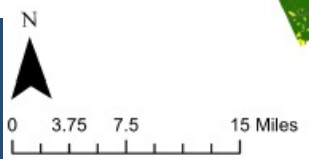
Agriculture Program Cost Share Analysis

Best Management Practices

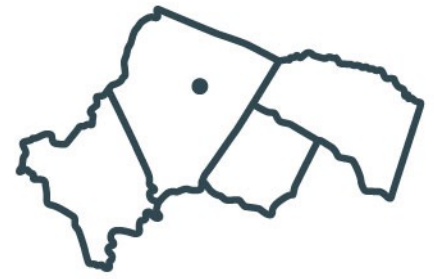


TJSWCD Land Cover

- Hay/Pasture (209,490 acres, or 16.28% of the District)
- Cultivated Crops (15,153.5 acres, or 1.18% of the District)
- Open Water (17,036.4 acres, or 1.32% of the District)
- Developed/Barren Land (32,189.9 acres, or 2.5% of the District)
- Forest/Wetland/Shrubland (947,877.8 acres, or 21.28% of the District)



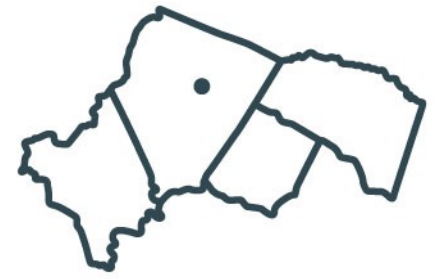
THOMAS JEFFERSON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Challenges for Recruitment Hiring

- Diverse Ag Background – Needed for TJ
- Location of District (Cost of Living, No Local Ag Colleges)
- Trained Applicants vs Entry Level
- Selling Skills and Knowledge of Ag and Ag Economics
- Soft Skills not just Technical
- Training - Length of Time (2 Years)

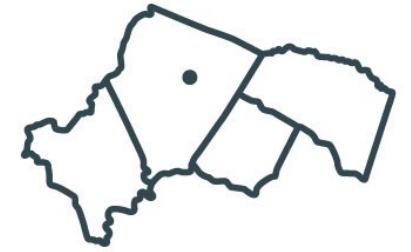
THOMAS JEFFERSON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



TJ Solutions

- **Adjust Compensation – Market Analysis**
- **Provide Other Benefits (Hybrid Work, Team Building/Culture, Increased Benefits, Training and Travel, etc.)**
- **Listen to Employees – Build a Team Approach**
- **Pay Attention to Interests and Strengths**
- **Divide Tasks – Enough Volume to Split up Assignments**
- **Board Support**
- **Trim and Hone In (Focus on our District Strengths/Local Needs – Stop Duplicating what others are already doing)**
- **Offer Other than TA – e.g., Resource Library, Grazing Sticks, Soil Probes, etc.**

THOMAS JEFFERSON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



<https://www.tjswcd.org/resources/agriculture-resources/>

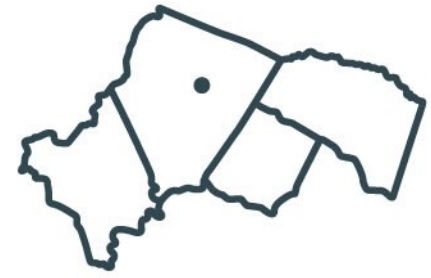
Home Learn About TJSWCD Programs & Services What's New **Resource Library** Calendar Contact

Agriculture Resources Home / Resources / Agriculture Resources

Crops Topic [Reset](#) Show **25** per page Search:

| Image | Title | Summary | Category | Topic | Source | Date Published |
|-------|---|---|--|--|--------|----------------|
| | A Management Guide for Invasive Plants in Southern Forests | This is a great guide for planning a management strategy for invasive plants in a forested landscape, including management strategies for common invasive plants in the Southeast. | Cattle, Crops , Hay, Horses, Other, Small Ruminants | Invasive Species | FS | 2015 |
| | Agronomy Handbook | This handbook is packed full of information on Virginia crops (including forage) and soils, hay recommendations (inc. seeding and storage), information on pasture and nutrient management, and more. | Cattle, Crops , Hay, Horses, Small Ruminants | Grazing Management, Hay Production, Pasture Management, Soil Testing and Fertilization | VCE | 2000 |
| | Agronomy Handbook - Nutrient Management | This publication discusses the purpose and components of nutrient management planning. | Cattle, Crops | Manure Management | VCE | 2000 |

THOMAS JEFFERSON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Statewide Work Force Solutions

Staff Incentives (e.g., Bonus). (NRCS offers it)

Offer 2 Days for Paid Time to Donate Community Event – Staff Choice (State offers it)

Contribution Agreements/Cooperator Agreements/MOA's (e.g., similar to Biologist Programs)

Staff Sharing – Regional between Districts or other Partners

District more flexible/nimble

Ag Colleges/Universities – Dig Deep – What curriculum are they getting, job fairs, where do their graduates end up (first job, career, etc.)?

Boot Camp – Expedited Training

Consider and Build on Each Other's Partners' Strengths/Missions

We can't each be the GO-TO for Everything

Time to Collaborate More than Ever