WELCOME!

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition

Quarterly Meeting
June 1st, 2023

Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech • Virginia State University
Thank you to our funders!

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

Stephanie Miller’s family, community, and local diet are three seeds that grew into Mystic Pine Farm. A love and connection to the land, 8 years of experience, Stephanie grows a diverse mix of vegetables, grains, meat, and eggs.

A Conversation

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..."
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. Try not disturbing the soil physically or chemically, we provide a healthy place for plants to grow and tiny beneficial insects to thrive.
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

The Network
Quarterly Meetings

The Steering Committee
Quarterly meetings

Innovation Teams
Monthly-quarterly meetings

Network-wide Exchange

Topic exchange

Topic exchange

Topic exchange

Topic exchange

Backbone support
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

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Innovation Team: Market + Value Chain</strong></th>
<th><strong>Innovation Team: Cost Share and Incentives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Innovation Team: Education/Outreach</strong></th>
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<td>Financial/economic levers</td>
<td>IRA, state VACS funding, CSC, etc.</td>
<td>On-farm research (both university research and case studies/other storytelling) (see PFI example for case studies)</td>
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<td>Soil health in the marketplace—where does soil health fit into the food value chain</td>
<td>how to best leverage all of the funds out there (e.g. make examples of funding packages)</td>
<td>- Peer-to-peer network</td>
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<td>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.</td>
<td>Flexible funding- equity and farmer access</td>
<td>- Reaching the ‘quartile 3 and 4’ farmers</td>
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<td>How to lift up local and regional producers engaged in soil health practices.</td>
<td>Linking TA- gaps to accelerate delivery</td>
<td>- <em>There is A LOT here- probably need to break it down more/streamline</em></td>
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<td>Mapping $$$- gap analyses</td>
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<td>Streamline offers to farmers—help them understand what is out there</td>
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<td>Willingness to advance funding packages</td>
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<td>SH practice code/law (advocacy)</td>
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**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
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

**Agriculture Program Cost Share Analysis**

- Tree Plantings
- Stream Exclusion
- Animal Waste Facilities
- Cover Crop
- Cropland Conversion
- Nutrient Management Plans
- Precision Nutrient Management
- Stream Protection-Maintenance
- Extension of Watering Systems

Cost Share Paid to Landowners in 2022:

- $0
- $200,000
- $400,000
- $600,000
- $800,000

**TJSWCD Agricultural Land Use Map**

**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/Bare Land (32,189.9 acres, or 2.58% of the District)
- Forest/Wetland/Shrubland (947,877.8 acres, or 21.28% of the 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.
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