# Virginia Farm to Table Conference 2026

Resilient Farms and Healthy Foods for the Commonwealth and Common Good

## December 8 - 9, 2026

9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Blue Ridge Community College
Plecker Workforce Center
One College Lane
Weyers Cave, Virginia 24486



**Michael Rozyne and Kelsey Gosch**

Red Tomato and EcoCertified™

**Bob Jones Jr.**

Chief Executive Officer and Farmer,
The Chef's Garden

**Julia Freedgood**

Author and Senior Fellow,
American Farmland Trust

**Chef Radelle Reese**

AgriCulinary & Hospitality Educator,
Department of Hospitality Management,
Virginia State University

*and more!*

***Plus***

### An Evening of Networking and Music

Tuesday, December 8
4:30 - 7:00 p.m.
The Granary at Valley Pike Farm Market

VALLEY PIKE FARM MARKET

Learn more and register at

**www.virginiafarmtotable.org**

*Brought to you in partnership with*

Virginia Cooperative Extension — Virginia Tech • Virginia State University
VSU College of Agriculture — small farm educational outreach program
Virginia Soil Health Coalition
School of Plant and Environmental Sciences — Virginia Tech
We Are The Soil for the Future
Southern SARE — Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education
Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation — Virginia Tech
Agua Fund, Inc.
VAFAIRS
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Piedmont Environmental Council
American Farmland Trust
USDA United States Department of Agriculture — Natural Resources Conservation Service
Virginia Spirits
Virginia Heritage Grain Project
First Bank & Trust Company
100 — 1926 – 2026 — Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
Common Grain Alliance
Rockingham Insurance
LD&B Insurance and Financial Services
GreenCover
Stone Soup Books at the South River
Koth Communications
VABF — Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Stokes Seeds
AgrAbility Virginia
Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative
Houff Corporation
Green Dot City Food Co-op
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley — Conserving our Land, Water, and Way of Life

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit ext.vt.edu/accessibility. If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services, or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Eric Benefeldt at 540-232-6006/TDD* during business hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event. *TDD number is (800) 828-1120.

# Conference Schedule at a Glance

## Day 1 - Tuesday, December 8, 2026

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30-9:00 AM | **Registration and Refreshments** |
| 9:00-9:10 AM | **Opening Remarks and Welcome** - ***Auditorium***<br>Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Katie K. Frazier |
| 9:10-10:00 AM | **"The Cost/Price Squeeze: Farms and Markets of the Middle"** - ***Auditorium***<br>Michael Rozyne and Kelsey Gosch of Red Tomato and EcoCertified™<br>Michael and Kelsey will share how mid-size farmers and independent retailers can achieve more than survival through pillars of differentiation and by cultivating a distinct farming and food narrative that speaks to "regular" folks. |
| 10:00-10:50 AM | **"The Chef's Garden: A Story of Resilience, Flavor, and Health"** - ***Auditorium***<br>Bob Jones Jr., Chief Executive Officer and Farmer, The Chef's Garden<br>Bob will share the history of The Chef's Garden, a family-owned and operated vegetable farm on 400 acres in Huron, Ohio and how they responded to financial adversity and innovated with on-farm research of soil health, flavor, and overall resilient systems. |
| 10:50-11:00 AM | **Stretch and Electronic Break** |
| 11:00-11:50 AM | **Plenary Panel: Resilience and the Convergence of Food Systems Crises** - ***Auditorium***<br>• Rick Williams of LD & B Insurance<br>• Michael Rozyne of Red Tomato and EcoCertified<br>• Ashlie Howell of First Bank and Trust<br>• Tony Banks of Virginia Foundation of Agricultural Innovation and Rural Sustainability (VA FAIRS)<br>• Moderator: Dale Gardner, Sustainability Coordinator, Virginia State Dairymen's Association |
| 11:50 AM-1:00 PM | **Lunch** and **Soil Health Resolution Presentation by Delegate Amy Laufer** - *Rooms A and B*<br>--Catered by Lucien's Catering |
| 1:00-1:50 PM | **Producer Panel: Resilience and The Convergence of Food System Crises** - *Auditorium*<br>• Duron Chavis of Happily Natural Day and Central Virginia Agrarian Community Land Trust (CVACLT)<br>• Amanda Cather of Plow and Stars Farm and American Farmland Trust<br>• Bob Jones Jr. of The Chef's Garden<br>• Doug Fifer of Fifer Family Farms<br>• Moderator: Katie Trozzo, PhD, Assistant Director, VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation |
| 1:50-2:00 PM | **Stretch and Electronic Break** |

# Day 1 - Tuesday, December 8, 2026

| | |
|---|---|
| 2:00-3:15 PM<br><br>Concurrent Breakout Panels | **VOICES FROM THE FIELD: ORCHARDS, VINEYARDS, AND VEGETABLES (*ROOM B*)**<br><br>• Stefan Hess of Friendly Neighbor Gardens<br>• Henry Chiles of Crown Orchards<br>• Tom Croghan, M.D., The Vineyards of Dodon and Center of Ecological Farming<br>• Mary Stickley-Godinez and Raul Godinez of Cross Keys Farm and Countryside Nurseries<br>• Moderator: Mizuho Nita, PhD, of Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension<br><br>**BEYOND FOOD IS MEDICINE: BUILDING HEALTH AND RESILIENCE FROM SOIL TO COMMUNITY (*AUDITORIUM*)**<br><br>• Maureen McNamara Best, MPH, LEAP, leader for Virginia Food Access Coalition's Food is Medicine committee<br>• Caitlyn Owens, PhD, James Madison University Department of Graduate Psychology<br>• Bee Thorpe, MA, Local Food Systems Coordinator, Virginia Department of Education<br>• Catherine Hill of Augusta Health Farm<br>• Moderator: Kathryn Strong, RD, Virginia Cooperative Extension Community Health<br><br>**FARMS AND MARKETS OF THE MIDDLE: STORYTELLING TO SHIFT THE FARMING AND FOOD NARRATIVE (Part 1) (*ROOM A*)**<br><br>• Michael Rozyne and Kelsey Gosch of Red Tomato, EcoCertified, and the National Farm and Food Narrative Project<br>• Moderator: Steve Cooke, General Manager, Friendly City Food Cooperative |
| 3:15-4:30 PM<br><br>Concurrent Breakout Panels | **VOICES FROM THE FIELD: LOCAL AND REGIONAL GRAINS (*ROOM B*)**<br><br>• Nico Melas of Mill Song Bakery<br>• Aaron Grigsby of Deep Roots Milling at Woodson's Mill<br>• Gary Knicely of Hilltop Farms<br>• Jonathan Bethony of Seylou Bakery and Mill<br>• Moderator: Agatha Brinkley of the Common Grain Alliance<br><br>**WHO'S MISSING? EXPANDING FOOD IS HEALTH CONVERSATIONS FOR MORE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES (*AUDITORIUM*)**<br><br>• Tom Croghan, M.D., The Vineyards of Dodon and Center of Ecological Farming<br>• Wanda Johnson, State Program Assistant, VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program<br>• Devon Byrne of 4P Foods' Farm-to-Food is Medicine (FIM) work<br>• Kellie Del Signore of Feed More<br>• Moderator: Paige Riddle, MSW,Virginia Cooperative Extension Community Health<br><br>**FARMS AND MARKETS OF THE MIDDLE: STORYTELLING TO SHIFT THE FARMING AND FOOD NARRATIVE (Part 2) (*ROOM A*)**<br><br>• Michael Rozyne and Kelsey Gosch of Red Tomato, EcoCertified, and the National Farm and Food Narrative Project<br>• Moderator: Steve Cooke, General Manager, Friendly City Food Cooperative |
| 4:30-7:00 PM | Networking time at **The Granary at Valley Pike Farm Market** |

# Day 2 - Wednesday, December 9, 2026

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30-9:00 AM | **Registration and Refreshments** |
| 9:00-9:10 AM | **Open Remarks and Welcome** - ***Auditorium***<br>Mr. Chris Mullins, Interim Associate Dean for Extension and Extension Administrator, Virginia State University |
| 9:10-10:00 AM | **"Planning Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems: A Soil-to-Soil Framework"**<br>- ***Auditorium***<br>Julia Freedgood, MS, Senior Fellow of American Farmland Trust<br>Can we build healthier farm and food systems from the ground up (and back to the ground again) through planning, policy, and programs that truly support farmers, ranchers, and communities? |
| 10:00-10:50 AM | **Functional Foods and Health from the Soil Up: A Chef's Perspective** - ***Auditorium***<br><br>Chef Radelle Reese, AgriCulinary & Hospitality Educator, Department of Hospitality Management, Virginia State University<br>Moderator: Andrea Haubner, MPH, VCE Community Health<br>Chef Radelle will share her passion for food, her journey in the culinary world, and how she's helping students and communities connect to agriculture, nutrition, health, and innovation through the art of cooking. |
| 10:50-11:00 AM | **Stretch and Electronic Break** |
| 11:00 AM-12:10 PM | **Food Systems Resilience: County-Level, Urban, and Cultural Perspectives** - ***Auditorium***<br><br>• Heather Bruskin of Montgomery County, MD Government<br>• Duron Chavis of Happily Natural Day and Sankofa Community Orchard<br>• Michael Carter Jr. of Carter Farms and Africulture<br>• Moderator: Mary Sketch Bryant, Director, Virginia Soil Health Coalition |
| 12:10-1:20 PM | **Lunch and 2026 Carl Luebben Soil Health and Water Quality Award** - *Rooms A and B*<br>Catered by Lucien's Catering |
| 1:20-2:20 PM | **Planning for Resilience From Cultivation to Cooking to Compost** --***Auditorium***<br><br>• Heather Bruskin of Montgomery County, MD Government<br>• Michelle Edwards of the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Planning Commission<br>• Chef Radelle Reese, Department of Hospitality Management, Virginia State University<br>• Eric Walter of Black Bear Composting<br>• Closing thoughts: Julia Freedgood, MS, Senior Fellow of American Farmland Trust<br>• Moderator: Lindsay Smith, Coordinator, Municipal Washington Council of Governments |
| 2:20-2:30 PM | **Stretch and Electronic Break** |

# Day 2 - Wednesday, December 9, 2026

| | |
|---|---|
| 2:30-4:00 PM<br><br>Concurrent Breakout Panels | **FUNCTIONAL FOODS AND HEALTH FROM THE SOIL UP: A CHEF'S DEMONSTRATION (*ROOM B*)**<br><br>• Chef Radelle Reese, AgriCulinary & Hospitality Educator, Department of Hospitality Management, Virginia State University<br>• Moderator: Kathryn Strong, RD, VCE Community Health<br><br>**RESILIENCE AND THE CONVERGENCE OF CRISES THROUGH STORY CIRCLES (*ROOM A*)**<br><br>To explore and deepen a shared understanding of resilience in the context of Virginia's Farm and Food Systems and to identify actions to take to meet challenges inhibiting resilience amongst individual participants within the system.<br>• Bob Leonard, BA, VT School of Performing Arts<br>• Kim Niewolny, PhD, Director, VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation<br>• Katie Trozzo, PhD, Food Systems Network and Outreach Specialist, VT Department of Agricultural, Leadership, & Community Education<br><br>**PRODUCER PANEL: SOIL-TO-SOIL FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE (*AUDITORIUM*)**<br><br>• Bob Waring of Brandon Farms and Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District<br>• Amanda Cather, Plow and Stars Farm and American Farmland Trust<br>• Shelley Sackier of the Virginia Heritage Grain Project<br>• Alan Thibault, Director of Wine, Ashton Creek Vineyard<br>• Moderator: Summer Thomas, PhD, Education and Outreach Specialist, Virginia Soil Health Coalition |
| 4: 00-4:30 PM | **Closing, Evaluation, and Final Networking - *Rooms A and B***<br>*Safe travels home!* |

# Virginia Farm to Table Conference 2026

*Resilient Farms and Healthy Foods for the Commonwealth and Common Good*

Tuesday, December 8th and Wednesday, December 9th
Blue Ridge Community College, Plecker Workforce Center, Weyers Cave, VA

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Home Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____

Business/Organization: _____

I will be attending (check all that apply)

_____ Day 1: Tuesday, December 8th ..... $45

_____ Day 2: Wednesday, December 9th..... $45

_____ Evening Networking Reception, December 8th.....$20

Total Enclosed: _____

**Make checks payable to "Treasurer, Virginia Tech"**
Mail completed Registration form and payment to: VCE Northwest District Office, 147 Dinkel Ave., Suite C, Mount Crawford, VA 22841

**Register online** at https://tinyurl.com/2026VAF2TConferenceReg

Please contact Eric Bendfeldt at ebendfel@vt.edu/540-232-6006 or
Mary Sketch Bryant at msketch2@vt.edu/919-402-7241 with any questions.