

VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

February 2023 Newsletter



Highlights

While planting and harvesting are the marquee activities on the Farm that require skillful planning and execution, there are other essential efforts that are non-stop, everyday concerns. The two jobs on the Farm that never take a break are weeding and irrigation repair/maintenance.

Once the rains of December and January came to an end, weeds blossomed across the Farm with a vengeance. Laying mulch between rows is a key to keeping weeds smothered and out of crop beds. All over the Farm, volunteers are weeding crop rows and spreading mulch to starve weeds of light and prevent their encroachment into the crops.

Irrigation repair and maintenance are critical to Farm stewardship. Providing crops with the right amount of water without waste is a delicate balancing act. A broken pipe, or a burst in a hose, can throw off the best efforts to grow crops efficiently. Given the drought conditions facing California, water management is a key concern for Farm Managers.



In a Nutshell

Farm infrastructure has come a long way in the past two years. Farm Managers Mark, Mauri, and Christopher are better equipped to plan and execute Farm tasks as a result.

The greenhouse has made a tremendous improvement in the Farm Managers' ability to develop seedlings and crops specifically for the needs of Ventura's older adults. What makes the greenhouse even more effective is the addition of new solar panels that provide light, heat, and ventilation. Perched atop the shipping container/command post, the solar panels provide the juice that keeps the Farm humming.



Harvests & Planting

At this stage of winter, plant maintenance continues to be a major effort. Weeding and thinning the winter crops remains a priority, and the cloth covers shown to the right are used to keep pests out and heat in.

Meanwhile, in the greenhouse, seedlings have sprouted and are being tended prior to planting in next few weeks. The picture on the left shows the Spring planting map developed for the Summer crops. The map uses coordinates to denote the exact location for each crop on the Farm. Laying out the planting map in this fashion allows the Farm Managers to group crops together according to their water needs and optimizes planting strategies based on where crops have thrived in past years.



Winter harvests are long on dark green, leafy vegetables, citrus, and root vegetables. Lettuce, chard, collards, kale, radishes, turnips, grapefruit, and oranges have dominated recent harvests. The chickens have been doing their part in egg production, and the volume of eggs is expected to increase as the hens mature and the weather warms.

Our Volunteers in Action



Three groups of volunteers visited the Farm recently: nursing students from Santa Barbara City College, high school students from the Cate School in Carpinteria, and adults from the Cole Vocational Services program in Oxnard.

While groups of volunteers provide much-needed assistance in working through larger projects, individual volunteers are often the backbone of the Farm. Volunteers Kathy Helms and Janis McCann are shown painstakingly weeding and thinning rows of beets.

Join us at the Farm by becoming a volunteer!

Contact Leslie Suarez
at (805) 477-7354 or
leslie.suarez@ventura.org,
or visit
vcaa.org/volunteer

Farm Hours:
Monday-Friday
9am-Noon

Thanks to Our Donors

Help support the Farm's operations and future growth by making a donation at vcaafoundation.org!

As noted earlier, seedlings in the greenhouse are the key to bountiful summer harvests. The stacks of seedling starter racks shown in the greenhouse were generously donated by a local grower. These pre-filled racks contain the nutritious growing medium that allow seedlings to thrive.



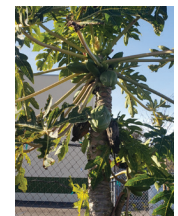
Over the years the Farm has received some very generous donations of equipment — everything from hand tools to compost bins to shade covers for the washing stations. Checking in with the Farm Managers uncovered some additional equipment needs that would be helpful as we head into the spring and summer:

- A 20 – 32 horsepower tractor
- Gator utility vehicle (or similar)
- Wheelbarrows



Finally, the Farm would also love to expand our crops to include avocados. Eight Haas avocado tree saplings in 24 inch boxes would allow the team to further diversify our crop base.

All donations to the Farm are greatly appreciated. If you can help with any of the items noted above, please contact christopher.fiorello@ventura.org or brian.murphy@ventura.org. Financial contributions toward these items can be made to the [VCAAA Foundation](http://vcaafoundation.org).



Thank you to the following companies and organizations!



COUNTY of VENTURA
Area Agency on Aging



Stories and pictures provided by Farm volunteer Kathleen Khirallah