



COUNTY of VENTURA
Area Agency on Aging

Ventura County Area Agency on Aging Senior Nutrition Farm

Quarterly Newsletter

Summer 2022



In a Nutshell

When does a Garden become a Farm? Is it the amount of acreage? The size of the harvests? The movement from hobby planting to professionalized agriculture? Sometimes it's hard to pinpoint. But, the sustained success of the Senior Nutrition Garden over the past few years – despite a global pandemic – has many volunteers and Managers thinking of the Garden as more of a Farm. So, in deference to those who spend the most time on the grounds, we'll now report on the news and happenings of the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging's Senior Nutrition Farm (SNF).

Harvests at a Glance

25,341

pounds of fresh, organic produce harvested
from July 2021 through May 2022.



VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm at a Glance

Located next to Food Share of Ventura County, 4156 Southbank Rd, Oxnard, the Senior Nutrition Farm is a year-round, organic farm dedicated exclusively to feeding the seniors of Ventura County. Everything we grow stays right here in Ventura County.

While we have close to 1.5 acres currently planted, the site has room for additional cultivation, maxing out at about 2 acres. If 1.5 acres doesn't sound like much space, the farm was able to deliver over 35,000 pounds of nutritious fruits and vegetables for the county's older adults last fiscal year. And while 35,000 pounds of organic produce is amazing, the truly amazing part is that the work is done almost entirely by volunteers.

Our Senior Nutrition Farm team is dedicated to the best practices in organic gardening/farming: crop rotation, shallow tillage, pest control, composting, weeding, and irrigation. The goals of SNF team are to grow the freshest, healthiest fruits and vegetables in every season to augment the diets of Ventura County's older adults.



COUNTY of VENTURA
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Interested in learning more about
programs offered through the
Ventura County Area Agency on Aging?

Visit www.vcaaa.org or call 805-477-7300.

We Have Chickens!

The chickens are coming, the chickens are coming, the chickens are here! The first two inhabitants of our new chicken coop, Bill and Diane, were welcomed to the Farm in March, with Bob, Evan, Giuseppe, and Gray joining the crew in the weeks that followed. Don't let their names fool you – all of these beauties will grow to become laying hens. They have been named in honor of past Senior Nutrition Farm Managers. The chickens were selected specifically to be close in age, and all are expected to grow quickly under the watchful guidance of current Farm Manager, Mauri. Stay tuned for future reports on their progress!



Infrastructure Improvements

As noted earlier, the chicken coop and run, built by volunteer Karl Yost, is complete and home to some happy pullets. The coop is secured from predators and well insulated, providing an ideal environment for the growing chickens. Egg production is still in the future as the chickens continue to grow into hens and thrive in their new home.

The new greenhouse has made a huge impact on the Farm as seeds started in January, February and March have produced seedlings already planted. Seedlings from the greenhouse that have transitioned to the ground include: cucumbers, onions, tomatoes, turnip, beets, and strawberries. Tables in the greenhouse are currently full of additional seedlings waiting their turn to be moved into the newly widened planting beds. The next big improvement to the greenhouse is electricity. The Senior Nutrition Farm is implementing a solar and battery system which will provide the electricity required to more efficiently regulate the growing temperatures in the greenhouse throughout the year.

The solar and battery system is another new addition to the Farm. Consisting of five 100-watt panels, the solar battery system is expected to go live during April. The two batteries will store 430AmpH, more than enough to power the Farm's tools, charge the Farm Manager's laptop, keep the baby chicks warm at night and still run the greenhouse fans and heat mats. The system purchased is flexible, allowing for easy expansion as additional needs crop up.

The Mushroom Shed has found its permanent home, adjacent to the greenhouse. The shed interior is insulated and shrouded to ensure a stable internal temperature and a sterile, moist environment to support the growth of the mushrooms. The mushrooms will be grown in large plastic buckets that have been pre-drilled with 1/2 inch holes along the sides. The mushroom shed will hold 29 buckets. The buckets will be filled with multiple layers of straw and mycelium to the top of the buckets. Once the mycelium colonizes the bucket, oyster mushrooms (the variety chosen for SNF's initial crop) will grow out of the holes. Harvests are expected to occur weekly with the buckets being quickly replanted for the next crop. Production will begin once the misting/irrigation system is installed.

As temperatures continue to warm, having a comfortable spot to take a break from the sun is becoming increasingly important. A pergola system has been designed and the frame is in place to create a shade dome in the center of the farm. Complementing the pergola will be two picnic tables already built by volunteers using recycled lumber previously used at the Farm. Keeping volunteers hydrated, cool and happy are key concerns for the Farm Managers.



Plantings & Harvesting

One of the more exciting trends on the Farm is the expansion of crops to include more fruits. Mature citrus trees have been on the property for a few years now, but the introduction of dragon fruit, papaya, bananas, grapes, strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, nopales and stone fruits such as plums, peaches, apricots and nectarines are more recent additions. All of these fruits have been planted and are well on their way to bearing fruit. Harvests may be small at first, but as the trees, canes and vines mature, more fruit will be available to Ventura Seniors throughout the seasons.

Seedlings in the greenhouse readying for transplant to the field rows include multiple varieties of tomatoes, carrots, beans, squashes, melons, carrots and peppers. Planting multiple varieties of these favorites allow the Farm Managers to determine which varieties are best suited to the Farm's growing environment.

Harvests continue to warrant a twice a week picking schedule. In late March volunteers focused their efforts on oranges, grapefruits, strawberries, sugar cane, chard, broccoli, bok choy, beets, leeks, green onions, peas and lettuces! Peas and lettuces have been especially prolific with 200 pounds of peas and almost 300 pounds of lettuce harvested by the last week of March!

Volunteer News

From July through early June the farm had 846 volunteers spending a total of 6,365 hours helping around the farm.

Being a volunteer at the Farm involves much more than crop planting, weeding, maintenance and harvesting. The creativity of volunteers is also expressed in projects that add to the ambiance of Farm. Stroll through the Farm and you'll notice that the rows are now labeled with painted plant stakes and that "pollinator plants" that attract bees, birds, butterflies have been placed at the head and foot of the crop rows. Volunteers at the Farm bring with them a myriad of valuable skills that enhance all aspects of the environment and bring success to our mission.

Groups that have volunteered in the Farm recently include:

- Ventura County Credit Union
- Cal State Channel Islands (Health Sciences)
- Cate School, Carpinteria
- La Reina School, Thousand Oaks
- Wild and Free Home Schooling Program
- Ventura County Probation Department

Whether as individuals or as part of a group, the Senior Nutrition Farm depends upon the motivated efforts of our volunteers. Their hard work and positive energy are backbone of the Farm and they make a significant impact on the quality of life for Seniors in Ventura County.

Summer Squash

Summer squash is versatile and nourishing. It can be cooked in a variety of ways or eaten raw. Summer squash is full of B vitamins that help our cells grow and stay healthy while also providing a good source of vitamin C which keeps our immune system strong.

The featured *Quick Summer Squash Sauté* recipe is a simple and delicious side dish that goes perfectly with any meal and is a great way to use summer squash that you may have on hand. This one skillet recipe is made with summer squash, cherry tomatoes, garlic, and Parmesan cheese. It can be eaten hot or cold. You can even add-in grilled chicken or scrambled eggs to make a satisfying and budget-friendly meal.



Quick Summer Squash Sauté

Servings: 2

1 summer squash *chopped*

½ cup cherry or grape tomatoes

2 cloves of garlic *minced*

1 tablespoon olive oil

¼ tsp salt

1 tablespoon shredded parmesan cheese *optional*

Instructions

1. Heat olive oil in large skillet on medium-high heat. Add summer squash and cook for 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Add in the garlic and tomatoes and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, gently stirring, until the summer squash is lightly browned, and tomatoes look like they are ready to burst.
3. Season with salt. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese, if using.

This recipe was developed by the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging's Registered Dietitians.

VENTURA COUNTY AREA AGENCY ON AGING'S *Senior Nutrition Garden*



THANKS OUR SPONSORS:



(805) 477-7300
www.vcaaa.org

Proudly feeding Ventura County's older adults and people with disabilities one harvest at a time.

Shout Out to Our Recent Donors

- Agromin Corporation recently donated 40 cubic feet of compost
- Coast Water, one of the Senior Nutrition Farm's original partners, has donated 10,400 feet of high-quality drip tape, and continues to provide consulting advice on SNF irrigation system improvements
- Tree Top Inc. provided SNF with 10 storage barrels which are being used for bio-secure storage of organic fertilizer
- An anonymous donor has gifted a substantial amount of seeds for heirloom tomatoes and peppers. Increasing the diversity of crops with heirloom varieties is greatly appreciated
- Annette Reed donated used sails that are rigged over the washing and drying stations. The shade provided by the sails keeps the produce fresh until it can be picked up for cool storage

We Salute the Donors to the Senior Nutrition Farm! Your Generosity is Greatly Appreciated!



Donating to the Farm

Donations to the VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm can be made to the VCAAA Foundation by visiting www.vcaaaaf.org. For more information, e-mail VCAAAFoundation@gmail.com.