

VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

June 2023 Newsletter



Highlights

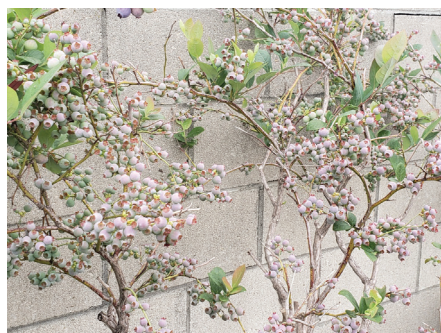
Farm expansion was a key theme for the month of May. Not only has the Farm added a half-acre of orchard land, but it is also preparing for a significant expansion in crop diversity.

The additional orchard space is primarily comprised of citrus trees (naval oranges, cara cara oranges, lemons, and key limes) with a few Haas and Bacon avocado trees. The existing trees were well-established; however, they required upgrades to their irrigation systems. While laying new irrigation lines, Farm Managers also planted squashes around the trees to serve as a weed barrier/ground cover. As Summer arrives and warms the earth, the squashes (butternut, acorn, delicata and spaghetti) will keep weeds at bay and ensure a steady harvest of deliciousness.



Crop diversity has long been a passion for the Farm Managers. This year alone, the Farm will harvest hundreds of pounds of bananas from trees planted just last year. Other new crops that are beginning to bud and fruit are peaches, plums, blueberries, blackberries and grapes. And the bees at the far end of the Farm made it through the winter just fine, so we look to have honey for harvest in the August-September timeframe.

No discussion of Farm expansion would be complete without a report on the four new baby chicks. These lovelies are currently kept in a pen adjacent to the coop, keeping them safe and warm. In a few more weeks they'll be large enough to join the rest of the flock and help bump up egg production.



In a Nutshell

With Spring well underway, the Farm is buzzing with activity. Farm Managers are busy getting crops into the ground and keeping weeds at bay. This year's rainy season has created a "super bloom" of weeds, so efforts to control weeds and invasive species are on high alert. But getting seedlings into the soil is still the primary focus. This year, for the first time, all seedlings to be planted were started in the Farm's greenhouse. Homegrown seedlings aren't inherently better than other seedlings, but these plant-starts represent very specific varieties that were chosen particularly for the Senior Nutrition Farm.

PLEASE CONSIDER HELPING US WITH OUR VOLUNTEER (p2) AND DONATION (p3) NEEDS!

Harvests & Planting

Harvests increased in May as the weather started to warm. On average, the Farm produced just over 400 pounds of produce each week. The produce stars for May included carrots, beets, lettuces, onions, peas, radishes, lemons and herbs. The biggest producer in May was sweet peas. This year brought the Farm a bumper crop with more than 1,000 servings of sweet peas over the April-May timeframe.

Getting seedlings into the ground is a key priority and there



was plenty of activity in May.



Tomatillos, zucchini, bush beans, green onions, peppers, okra, all kinds of cherry tomatoes, red norland potatoes, and everyone's favorite squashes — butternut, spaghetti, delicata, acorn — were all moved from the green house to the fields. And the greenhouse is still full of additional starts of cucumbers, peppers (hot and sweet), tomatoes, and more squashes on the way.

Our Volunteers in Action

Fortunately, volunteers from corporate groups and dedicated individuals came throughout May to help with the planting activity.

Groups from Amgen, Ernst and Young, and Rostar all showed up to lend a badly needed helping hand. Groups from schools or businesses are always welcome — once assigned to tasks, they can really make great progress. There is strength in their numbers.

The Farm is blessed to have some knowledgeable individuals that provide much needed volunteer support. Whether building support structures, weeding, planting, or harvesting, these hardy Friends-of-the-Farm provide incredible assistance to Farm Managers. Their efforts are tireless and much appreciated.

But, as the weather warms, more Volunteers will be needed — especially on Mondays and Thursdays when harvesting occurs. Helping with harvests is especially gratifying. Pulling produce from the fields, knowing that it will help feed Ventura's older adults, is a great feeling. If you have some free time this summer, join us!

Join us at the Farm by becoming a volunteer!

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

Farm Hours:
Monday-Friday
8 a.m.-Noon

Thanks to Our Donors

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

Generous donations of compost from both Peach Hills Soils and Agromin have significantly augmented composting efforts centered on the Farm. Composting organic waste from our operations is a long-held practice at the Senior Nutrition Farm, but the yield has always been far less than the amount required. Compost donations are welcome additions, allowing Farm Managers to amend our soil with valuable nutrients.

All tax-deductible donations to the Farm are greatly appreciated. Current needs include a 20-32 horsepower tractor, a gator utility vehicle (or similar), wheelbarrows, pitchforks, and egg cartons. If you can help with any of these items, please contact christopher.fiorello@ventura.org or brian.murphy@ventura.org. Financial contributions toward these items can be made to the VCAA Foundation.

Events

During May, two important groups hosted meetings at the Farm and took tours. The VCAA Foundation Board Meeting was held at the classroom, as was a networking event and luncheon for the Ventura County Management Council.



Thank you to the following companies and organizations!



COUNTY of VENTURA
Area Agency on Aging



Stories and pictures provided by Farm volunteer Kathleen Khirallah