

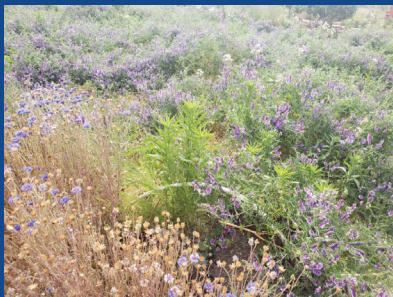
# VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

July 2023 Newsletter



## In a Nutshell

Organic farming is a choice — one that brings farmers additional costs and risks. Conforming to best practices in organic farming requires dedication, persistence, and creativity. Choosing not to use commercial fertilizers and pesticides means implementing alternative practices, both ancient and modern. One such practice is using cover crops such as Vetch to get more nitrogen into the soil. During the Spring, one section of the Farm was planted with a cover crop that resembled the wildest wildflower plot.



This crazy-quilt of flowers delighted pollinators all Spring and by the nature of the plants, pumped much-appreciated nitrogen into our soil, obviating the need for fertilizers. Now that Summer has arrived, the Vetch has been cleared and new summer crops have taken hold.

## Highlights

The Farm continues to pursue “no-till” farming strategies for planting preparation. Instead of turning over the plant rows when a crop has been fully harvested, the team use a broadfork to loosen and aerate the soil prior to planting. At the end of each harvest, volunteers strip all vegetation from the rows and remove any invasive or lingering plants. The rows are then spread with compost and the broadfork is used to aerate the ground and work the compost deep into the soil. This manual process is time-consuming, but it ensures that nutrients remain deep in the soil.

Composting is a way of life at the Farm. Farm Manager Mark has been overseeing this critical aspect of soil management for many years. Aside from composting all the organic vegetable matter from the Farm, Mark has also worked with Food Share to compost any of their foodstuffs that are no longer appropriate for distribution. Now, the State of California is requiring each County to purchase compost from the organizations that manage consumer compost collection and recycling programs. This means that the Senior Nutrition Farm will receive an abundance of high-quality compost from Peach Hill Soils thanks to this state-wide program. Keeping the Farm’s soil healthy has just gotten easier.

Not only do Farm Managers work with Mother Nature to ensure abundant harvests, sometimes they must fool Mother Nature as well. Case in point: crows. Visitors to the Farm have surely noticed a large flock of crows frequently hovering over crops, looking for ripening fruits and vegetables to snack on.



**PLEASE CONSIDER HELPING US WITH OUR VOLUNTEER AND DONATION NEEDS (P3)!**

Crows, by their nature, are incredibly smart. Protecting crops from crows requires a variety of tools including netting and random, loud noises such as air horns. One new tool the Farm Managers are using is a “dead crow”. Essentially the dead crow serves as a “reverse” decoy. Made to look exactly like a crow, it repels the flock when placed in a field. The trick to using the dead crow successfully is to sneak it into the field. The crows won’t fear it if they see it placed in the field. Sneaky, but highly effective!



Lastly, Mauri Trimmer resigned from their role at the Senior Nutrition Farm in June. Christopher Fiorello is now managing the Farm with assistance from Mark LaBorde and Karl Yost. All three have been actively working and volunteering at the Farm for many years, each with their own expertise and areas of specific focus.

## Harvests & Planting

Consistent, bright sunshine is making a difference at the Farm. Throughout June and into July, harvest production is up! In mid-July the yield ranged from 800-1,000 pounds weekly. Squashes (zucchini, yellow squash, cocozelle) have been abundant, as have green beans. One week in June, the Farm harvested 519 pounds of squash and zucchini and 503 servings of green beans! The team has also been pulling radishes, bok choy, beets, and the first tomatillos. In addition, the onions and garlic planted over the winter have been pulled and are now finishing the drying process in the green house.



The stone fruits have also been in season. Although relatively small, the donut peaches have been prolific and sweet. Plums have also been ripening and look delicious as they cover the trees in the orchard. The dragon fruit had a tough season due to our rainy Winter and relatively cool Spring. Heavy trimming was required to banish the resulting stem rot. The crop is starting to come back now with beautiful blooms thanks to all the sun. And, the first crop of blueberries and blackberries are now complete.

The Farm is just about completely planted at this point and the team has started to work on the planting schematics for the Fall planting season. As a result, the green house is almost empty — save for some seedlings of different varieties that are used as backfill for times when plants in the field need to be replaced due to pests or disease.



Thanks to the diligent efforts of our volunteers, more tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squashes, melons, corn, and okra have been added to the earlier spring plantings.





# Our Volunteers in Action

June and July have brought out large volunteer groups from our corporate partners Amgen, Ralphs and the Bureau of Jewish Education. Adults from the Cole Vocational Services Program are regulars at the Farm as are members of the Wild + Free Home School program. These volunteers make a huge contribution to the success of the Farm!



While groups of volunteers are always welcome at the Farm, we also value the phenomenal contributions of individuals such as Dellon Strommen, Jane Brickner, Peg Walker, and Austin Dent. 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](mailto:leslie.suarez@ventura.org), or visit [vcaaa.org/volunteer](http://vcaaa.org/volunteer)

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

# Thanks to Our Donors

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

Help support the Farm's operations and future growth by making a donation at [vcaaafoundation.org](http://vcaaafoundation.org)!

Thank you to the following companies and organizations!



**COUNTY of VENTURA**  
Human Services Agency  
Area Agency on Aging



Stories and pictures provided by Farm volunteer Kathleen Khirallah