

VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

December 2023 Newsletter



Highlights

Over the course of 2023, Farm Managers have been working toward adding mushrooms to the list of crops. Prepping the Mushroom Hut required the complete sanitization of the interior. Once work on the Hut was completed, Managers initiated a mushroom pilot in late summer. The pilot program focused on five growing buckets prepped with mycelia for blue oyster mushrooms. The pilot resulted in a yield of two pounds of mushrooms per week. Given the success of the pilot, the Mushroom Hut will soon be home to 29 growing buckets.



Farm Manager Karl Yost has been spearheading an effort to create a native flowering plant hedgerow between the dragon fruit wall and the County's flood prevention basin. The corridor between the hedgerow and dragon fruit wall has been completed (cleared, leveled

and mulched) and in mid-November the seeds were sown. Flowering native plants will attract pollinators (more honey!) and provide a natural barrier to

the debris basin. Native plants were chosen for color, hardiness, and varying heights to ensure that a solid wall of colorful vegetation develops over time.



In a Nutshell

Ventura County's 11th Annual Farm Day brought a record number of visitors to the Senior Nutrition Farm on Saturday, November 4. The number of registered visitors to the Farm more than doubled over the previous year, with 498 interested folks touring the Farm with guided talks by Farm Managers Karl and Christopher. Farm Manager Mark kept the day's volunteers on task, clearing rows and prepping for winter plantings. And the Farm never looked better! The entrance avenue of trees was newly planted, the newly completed row markers were installed and the sails over the outdoor classroom provided welcome shade. It was a fun and informative day for all participants.



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

Highlights continued

One of the greatest benefits of volunteering at the Farm is learning the ropes of organic farming. Many volunteers are already successful gardeners, but not all are experienced with organic farming processes. And not all volunteers have room at home for a garden. In an effort to provide volunteers with more hands-on experience, the team has created a series of raised-bed plots for the personal use of volunteers. The plots are labeled, and volunteers are encouraged to work on their plots and experiment with organic crops and techniques.



As noted above, the avenue of trees at the entrance to the Farm is a new feature. The new trees and bushes are all part of a large purchase of 65 trees enabled by the VCAAA Foundation. The avenue of trees consists of apple varieties, while the far border of the farm leading to the beehive is now lined with Haas avocados and has a Punica Wonderful pomegranate tree at each end. Four varieties of blueberries were included in the purchase along with peach, plum, pear, persimmon, and pluot varieties.



Harvests & Planting

Most of the crops for the rainy winter season are in! Peas, potatoes, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, and onions have all been planted. But there's still considerable activity in the greenhouse as additional seedlings are prepped for mid-Winter planting.

Harvests continue to impress as tomatoes, squashes, dragon fruit and okra are finally starting to peter out. These crops were abundant all through the late Summer and early Fall. In addition, lettuces, radishes, kale, chard and sweet potatoes have been abundant lately, particularly the sweet potatoes.



Our Volunteers in Action



The Farm was humming in November as several groups of volunteers pitched in to help prepare for winter planting. Groups from E+Y, Villanova Prep School, and Oak Park High School aided the Farm Managers, as did volunteers from the Naval Base Ventura County Point Mugu Youth Center.

Volunteer Tracy Sandt-Hill and the Ventura County Credit Union were instrumental in creating our new irrigation and row identification signs. The new signs are not only good looking, but they also help volunteers and visitors navigate the Farm and understand where specific crops are located.

The efforts of Volunteers are greatly appreciated! And yet still more Volunteers are needed — especially on Wednesdays and Fridays. If you have a few hours that you can spare, the Senior Nutrition Farm is always looking for assistance!

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

When making your plans for end-of-year giving, please consider helping the Senior Nutrition Farm. All donations to the Farm are greatly appreciated. Tax-deductible financial contributions can be made to the VCAAA Foundation.

Help support the Farm's operations and future growth by making a donation at 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