

VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

January 2024 Newsletter



In a Nutshell

2023 was a memorable year for the Senior Nutrition Farm! It was a year of “firsts” in terms of crop diversity and production. 2023 brought Ventura County’s older adults our first honey, first table grapes, first consistent egg production, first bananas, first stone fruits, first blueberries and blackberries, and the beginnings of a mushroom harvest. And while all of these “firsts” brought welcome variation to the diets of our beneficiaries, the Farm also produced more than 17,000 pounds of produce, an increase of 30% over 2022. How did all this goodness happen? It’s a direct result of more than 4,500 volunteer hours. Volunteers made 2023 a success for the Senior Nutrition Farm. A heartfelt “thank you” to all our volunteers!



Highlights

Basking in the success of 2023 is fun, but 2024 is showing tremendous potential too. There are plenty of upgrades, improvements, and new “firsts” on tap for 2024 ...

- The Ventura County Area Agency on Aging Foundation has approved a grant of \$15,000 to the Farm. \$5,000 has been earmarked for a shipping container to be delivered in January, while \$10,000 will be used to upgrade the Farm’s solar capabilities and battery storage. The funding will effectively triple the solar capture and storage infrastructure. These improvements mean more consistent power for the Farm (and particularly to the green house) regardless of the weather conditions on any given day.

- Composting is a multi-step process that typically takes two to three months. The first phase is gathering leftover crop material from the fields, wood chips/mulch, and weeds. These materials are mounded together, soaked, and left to begin decomposing thanks to microbes in the materials. When a temperature gauge reads 150°, the mound is turned over, raked, mounded, and soaked again. Microbes once again do their thing, and the temperature gauge is re-inserted. Once the mound has been



WE COULD USE YOUR HELP! PLEASE CONSIDER BECOMING A FARM VOLUNTEER. SEE PAGE 3

Highlights continued

turned and soaked three times and reached 150° each time, the mound is ready to be sifted into compost soil. It's a time-consuming process, but the quality of the soil produced is excellent — dark, moist, and rich in nutrients. Each mound typically yields 24 bins of compost soil.

- Over the past few months, the furthest corner of the Farm has been raked, rocks and stones have been removed, and compost has been spread with the goal of adding 1 1/2 additional acres to the Farm. Until the reclamation project got underway, the land was barren and was often used for storage of materials donated to the Farm. Farm Managers have been working to reclaim the land for



crop cultivation and to provide a permanent outpost for chicken day care. As the flock grows, corralling the chickens and keeping them away from newly seeded rows is a challenge. Giving them a place to run, peck, and dig away from vulnerable crops is vital. Using the additional land requires approval from County agencies, and Farm Managers are hopeful of a positive outcome.

- The Senior Nutrition Farm has a new staff member, Alec Giffin. Alec joined the team in December and has already made a difference in helping with the Farm's busy workload. Welcome to the world of organic farming, Alec!

Harvests & Planting

Now that it's officially winter on the Farm, the crops harvested each week have a cold weather profile. Dark leafy greens such as kale, chard, and hardier lettuces are currently being picked. The citrus trees have abundant fruit with lemons, limes, oranges, and grapefruits leading the pack. Rounding out the weekly harvests are mushrooms, peas, and eggs.



The chicken flock currently has 11 producing hens. Recently, Farm Managers have been concerned with the amount of protein in the flock's diet and have initiated a program to systematically introduce more worms (Red Wrigglers) into their diet. Farm Manager Karl and volunteer Austin Dent are building a new feeding station for the chickens that resembles a series of mini-compost bins set into the ground. Seeded with worms and food scraps, the feeding station will serve as a buffet of delights to improve and diversify the chickens' diet. Access to the protein-rich bins will be regulated to ensure sustainability and managed consumption.

Our Volunteers in Action



As noted earlier, the Farm benefited from more than 4,500 volunteer hours in 2023. That averages out to approximately five volunteers every day! Looking ahead into 2024, Farm Managers are hopeful that volunteers will continue to visit the Farm and provide consistent assistance in the mission to provide fresh, local, and organic produce to older adults throughout Ventura County. Individuals and groups are welcome to come and participate in the work. 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

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