

VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

February 2024 Newsletter



Highlights

Big changes to the Farm's Op Center are now underway! A second shipping container has been delivered, and volunteer Austin Dent has been hard at work subdividing the interior and prepping it for use. Most of the container will be devoted to large tool storage, ensuring the Farm's most valuable tools and equipment are stored under lock and key. Smaller sections of the container will be used for office/organizational space and as a packing station for produce.



The arrival of the second shipping container has resulted in plans to reconfigure the space between the current produce washing/drying station and the greenhouse. Essentially, the washing and drying station will be relocated to the area between the

new container and the greenhouse, which will double the size of the station. The new washing/drying station will be covered with a fixed shade structure approximately 50 feet long by 20 feet wide. The chickens will be staying in their current space, but their run will be expanded by approximately 75%. The chicken run will be covered by a hard-topped shade structure, and additional solar panels will be installed on the top of the newly expanded run.



In a Nutshell

The recent atmospheric rivers that have devastated some parts of Ventura County appear to have spared the Farm. Cold, soggy weather has slowed down the growing cycles for many of the crops, but no lasting damage was done. One area that was impacted was the chicken run. The run is currently open to the elements and there was some standing water after the heaviest of the rains. Once the weather cleared, Farm Construction Manager Karl swung a pickaxe into action and dug a French drain just outside the current run's fencing. Keeping the chickens warm and dry is critical to improving egg production (and poultry happiness).



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

Harvests & Planting

Harvests in February continue to focus on the dark, leafy greens that nutritionists love. Chard, kale and lettuces of all colors are strong crops this month. Potatoes, eggs, and a little citrus fruit rounds out the list. But signs of Spring are popping up on the Farm. Blueberries planted last Fall are fruiting early (and taste delicious) and five rows of sweet peas are starting to come on.

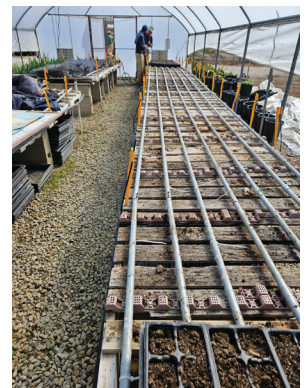


Meanwhile, work in the greenhouse is starting to ramp up for Summer crops. During a recent visit, volunteers Gail Leos, Gary Speck, and Annette Reed were prepping plans for rotating out of the Winter crops of 2023 and into the Summer crops of 2024. As the “rainy” crops are finished, the “dry” crops will be planted. The team plots the germination time needed for the dry season crops and starts seedlings in the greenhouse so that they will be ready for planting. Rather than starting all the seedlings at the same time, the team is working toward a just-in-time approach that ensures the right seedlings will be ready for planting at the

appropriate time. In mid-February, the team was working on germinating tomatoes, sweet potatoes, peppers, and eggplant. Each week they’ll focus on which rainy crops are played out and start working on their dry season replacements.



Preparations for the next crop of mushrooms are well underway. The straw used in the growing process has been pasteurized and is ready for moving into the growing buckets with the mycelia. The grow cycle for mushrooms is approximately six weeks, and Farm Managers are optimistic about a strong crop of oyster mushrooms as the Mushroom Shed is at full capacity in terms of growing buckets, and the environment most favorable to mushrooms in terms of moisture, growing area, and pasteurization, is in place.



In the Fall, the Farm significantly upgraded its orchards with the arrival of new fruit trees. As Winter transitions to Spring, Farm Manager Karl has been keeping a close watch on the new arrivals. He’s recently overseen spraying the trees with horticultural oil to kill any pests that made it through the Winter rains. This follows an initial spraying that occurred soon after their planting. In addition, a light pruning to ensure the new trees receive adequate light and space has also occurred. And, some trees have been given braces to help branches to spread out evenly as they grow.



Another area of the Farm getting some much-needed love are the grapevines. Last year, powdery mildew attacked the grapes and resulted in a smaller-than-hoped-for crop. Spraying the vines with horticultural oil has occurred and the vines have also been pruned using the “spur” technique. Spur pruning is commonly used with

grapes that are grown for wine. Although the Farm is focusing exclusively on table grapes, the spur technique lends itself to the Farm’s environment as it is easy to establish and maintain, especially for volunteers. Both spur pruning and spraying will improve the long-term health of the vines.

Our Volunteers in Action

The Farm's loyal crew of volunteers has made a huge difference in keeping the Farm humming through the recent rains. Their willingness to come out and dedicate their time is greatly appreciated, especially as the work begins to transition for the all-important Spring/Summer growing seasons.

Members of Amgen's finance team were also out recently, and the contribution from these larger groups is invaluable. 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