

VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

March 2024 Newsletter



In a Nutshell

Early March days were rainy and cool, but nicer weather has arrived, and the Farm is looking quite Spring-like. These warmer Spring days are kick-starting the budding and flowering processes for our late Spring and early Summer harvests. The fruit trees at the Farm's entrance are currently sporting lovely blossoms. If you haven't seen the Farm in Spring, it's well worth a visit!



Highlights

The new shipping container is fully operational. Tool storage, office workspace, and the produce packing station are finished and outfitted to the Farm Managers' specifications.



Work on extending the chicken run is well underway. In mid-March, the footings for the shade structure were completed and efforts to enclose the enlarged space were advancing. Once the new shade structure is complete, the new solar panels will be mounted. The new solar capacity means Farm Managers can heat the chicken coop and the greenhouse and run the expanded produce washing station simultaneously, without outages.

Volunteers have been sprucing up the Farm entrance, lining the driveway into the Farm with decorative rocks. Making the Farm beautiful as well as productive demonstrates the pride that volunteers have in the Farm's mission. Decorative signs for the orchard are another recent volunteer initiative.

The composting project at the Farm continues to be a huge success. Farm Managers recently had soil tests run to determine the quality of the Farm's soil. The test results showed organic matter levels — the foundation of a plant's nutrient density — twice as high as those typically found in large-scale organic farms in California. Knowing the health of the soil allows Farm Managers to tailor the amount of compost added to the soil prior to new planting, and to apply fertilizer blends specific to the needs of the crops. Volunteer Mitch's composting work has paid demonstrable dividends on the Farm.



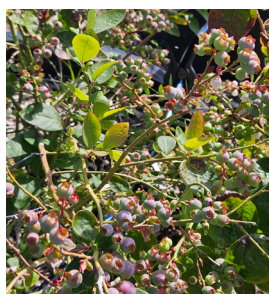
WE COULD USE YOUR HELP! PLEASE CONSIDER BECOMING A FARM VOLUNTEER. SEE PAGE 3

Highlights continued

While produce from the Farm is primarily distributed directly to seniors' doors or to various congregate meal sites tasked with improving the nutrition of Ventura County's older adults, the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging also has a small farm stand at its office in Ventura. Clients visiting the VCAAA are encouraged to sample the Farm's wares and learn firsthand about the work of the Farm.



Harvests & Planting



Harvests in March are comprised of the usual Winter vegetable suspects. Dark, green and leafy varieties are at the top of the hit parade: chard, kale, lettuce, and broccoli. Peas, red and Yukon gold potatoes, and beets round out the list. And the chickens have been pulling their weight by averaging more than five dozen eggs per week. The early blueberries are ripening quickly, so they'll be on the list by month's end.

The greenhouse is busy with seed-starts and seedlings. Eggplant, tomatoes, and peppers are growing quickly and are being planted throughout March and April. Cherry and slicer tomatoes make up the bulk of the tomato seedlings, while jalapeno, habanero, serrano, poblano and anaheim peppers are in process of being planted.

Just inside the front of the greenhouse there is a small pilot program for growing pulses and legumes. New VCAAA dietitian Aurora Meadows asked if the Farm could add a handful of new superfood crops to the rotation. Seedlings of red lentils, black beans, edamame, and peanuts were planted in the green house to determine how well they might thrive at the Farm. Expanding crop diversity with nutrient-rich foods is a key driver of the Farm's mission.



Despite the soggy start to March, the recent string of sunny days has been a boon to the Farm overall. However, one crop that continues to struggle with ripening is bananas. The banana grove has produced significant fruit, even through the Winter, but the colder weather has slowed the ripening process. The Oxnard Plain is an agricultural wonder, but bananas are not native to the area. Yet the bananas will grow and ripen impressively when our really warm weather kicks in. Until that time, Farm Managers are considering harvesting the fruit while green, and letting it ripen fully in the greenhouse. If it works in a grocery store ... Stay tuned for updates on banana harvests in future newsletters.

Our Volunteers in Action

Farm Managers continue to be bowled over by the consistent, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and generous contributions of Farm volunteers. On any given day, at least five highly motivated individuals turn up to help with the Farm's mission — providing fresh, nutritious, organic food to Ventura County older adults. Their contributions of time, expertise, and can-do attitude are critical to the Farm's success and provide inspiration to all involved in the Farm.

In addition to the efforts of our superstar individual volunteers, the Farm has also been pleased to host teams from Ventura County Credit Union, Goodwill Industries, and Harbor Freight. Volunteer groups are particularly helpful to Farm Managers, as “many hands make for light 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

Public-Private Partnership

The Farm Managers appreciate donors' interest in contributing to the Farm. The Farm is supported with a combination of government funding and private funds raised by a local nonprofit. To learn more about supporting the nonprofit VCAAA Foundation, visit www.vcaaaf.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