

VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

April 2024 Newsletter



In a Nutshell

Work on the new-and-improved chicken run continues and is on pace for completion in May. The project includes a 75% expansion of the flock's run, drainage capabilities to accommodate the types of heavy rains experienced the past two winters, and a hard-topped shade structure that will have new solar panels mounted on top. Once complete, the chickens will have more room in the enclosed run, their feet will be drier during heavy rains, and the solar panels will provide heat to their roost in the winter. Bravo to the Farm Managers for keeping their chickens warm, safe, and dry!



Highlights

As a follow up to last month's newsletter — picking the bananas before they are ripe and allowing them to ripen off the tree totally works! Walking around the banana grove, it's easy to see that there are many new racks of bananas that have recently fruited. Now Farm Managers can allow them to grow to maturity, but won't need to wait for them to completely ripen on the tree, thus shortening the cycle time to harvest and distribution.



One challenge that has plagued Farm Managers for the last several seasons has been pests. Gophers, mice, squirrels, and rabbits can be a menace. As an example, last year the Farm had its first crop of blackberries and raspberries, but by January all the bushes and vines had been completely gnawed away. Organic farming is not for the faint-hearted, so over the past month new blackberries and raspberries have been planted. But, the team is taking action. Farm Managers have contracted with a local pest service that uses non-toxic and organic farming compliant methods to fight back. Realistically, crop loss to pests will always be an issue. But this Summer, the team intends to level the growing field.



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

Harvests & Planting

The first Spring harvests have begun. The Farm is still producing Winter favorites like chard, kale, lettuce, spinach, and beets, but Spring produce is now also being picked. Fava beans, radishes, peas, brussel sprouts, lettuces, baby bok choy, and cabbages are also coming into season. Squashes are also coming on strong. Warm sunny days are working their magic, and all over the Farm there are trees, crops, flowers, vines, and bushes putting forth fruit and blossoms. Orange blossom, rosemary, lavender, and wildflowers have the Farm smelling and looking heavenly.



Activity in the greenhouse is humming as the team is pursuing a “just-in-time” planting strategy this year. Instead of starting all the seedlings for the Summer at the same time, this year the seedlings are started based on the optimal time to plant them in the ground. All seedlings have different growing times and not all are ready to go in the ground at the same time. More precise scheduling means putting the healthiest seedlings into ground at just the right time. So far this year, the strategy has worked extremely well with tomatoes, peppers, and squashes.

Nutritional Bite

Focus on *potassium*

a mineral that protects from the effects of having too much salt and can lower blood pressure.

*Better than a banana--
can you name these top
sources of potassium?*



961 mg



911 mg



600 mg



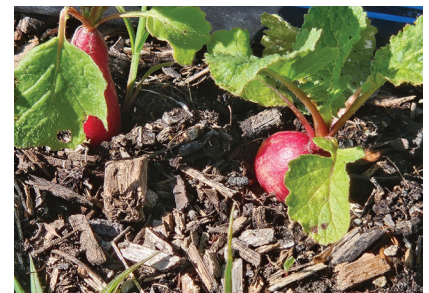
560 mg



550 mg

answers on the other side

The seedlings currently growing in the greenhouse include tomatoes, peppers, Chinese eggplant, and hot peppers. Peanuts, red lentils, edamame, and black beans are all faring well and are almost ready to start the transition to the fields. Also thriving in the greenhouse are seedlings from the bean/pulse pilot mentioned last month. This was developed in conjunction with a registered dietitian from the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging. See the “Nutrition Bite” box on incorporating a diverse range of local, organic produce into a healthy diet.



Our Volunteers in Action

In April, Farm Managers were thrilled to work with groups from organizations such as Rostar Filters, Sage Publishing, and Newport Academy. When groups come out to the Farm, everyone wins. The teams have fun while doing rewarding work and the Farm Managers receive much-appreciated help with projects. Groups from businesses, schools, and community organizations are all welcome to come and help out. 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.vcaaa.org.

The Farm offers a big thank you to Alec Giffin, who recently donated a 10-foot-long, hand-built table, which will be used for produce packing!

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
"Nutritional Bite" by VCAAA registered dietitian Aurora Meadows

"Nutritional Bite" answers: chard, sweet potatoes, cod fish, dried apricots, broccoli rabe