

# VCAAA Senior Nutrition Farm

June 2024 Newsletter



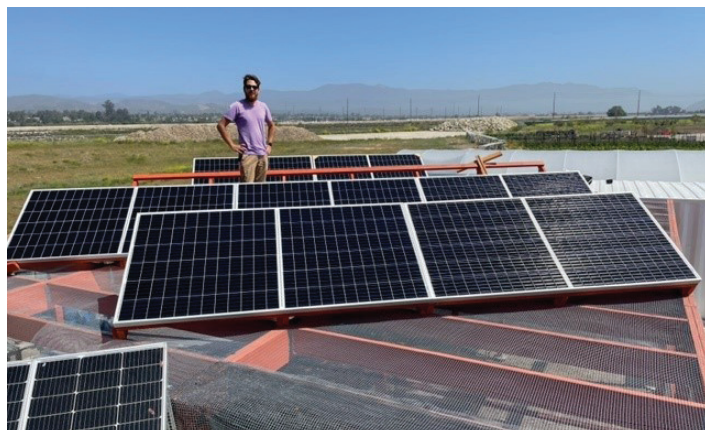
## In a Nutshell

June Gloom came back like clockwork. While they may not be the sunniest, these are the longest days of the year, as well as some of the busiest. In mid-May, the Senior Nutrition Farm bade a fond farewell to Christopher Fiorello. Christopher was a long-term volunteer before becoming a Farm Manager two years ago. As Christopher heads back to New York to begin a new journey, Farm Managers Mark LaBorde and Karl Yost have picked up the slack and are moving full speed ahead to complete the transition to summer crops and finalize key infrastructure projects. So, if you have time to spare in the weeks ahead, come on out to the Farm and dig in! Beautiful crops await you.



## Highlights

The latest upgrade to the Farm's power supply has been completed. Under the planning and supervision of volunteer Austin Dent, the new solar arrays and batteries are in place and the power supply has jumped from 1,000 to 4,800 watts. If you've never been to the Farm, it is completely "off the grid," with no ability to connect to regular electricity sources. So, keeping the chickens and greenhouse warm, the irrigation supply consistent, and the picked produce washed and dried year-round is dependent upon our solar capacity. A newly donated generator can supply emergency backup (up to about 12 hours on a single tank of fuel), but the daily power needs of the Farm are met by the solar array.



Installing the new solar panels was no small task. It was a significant construction effort (hot, sweaty work all around), but it is the elegance of the construction plan that is most noteworthy.



The plan called for the new panels to be installed on top of a newly expanded chicken run. So, while the Farm increased its power supply almost five-fold, the chickens scored a considerably larger, safer, and drier home base: a win-win.

The flock is happy, and it's growing! The number currently stands at 26. There are 13 producing hens and one rooster. There are four "teenagers" that are about two months old and eight baby chicks that are closing in on four weeks old. The mature hens are currently producing about 45 eggs per week.



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

Assuming the teens and babies all grow up to be hens, the flock will just about double. Fresh organic eggs provide an excellent source of protein for older adults, and they just taste better.

Next up on the infrastructure to-do list is moving and expanding the produce washing/drying station. Originally set up near the Farm entrance, the new



location will be between the greenhouse and the new shipping container. Hose bibs and electrical work have been installed; the next steps include preparing/leveling the site and building a shade structure that will ensure newly picked produce stays cool prior to transport. Plans call for the washing/drying station to be relocated by late June/early July.

Lastly, Farm Manager Karl has recently received his certification from the University of California Master Gardener program. Congratulations on this achievement!

## Harvests & Planting

The transition from Winter to Summer crops is almost complete. 75% of the crops now in the ground are for a Summer harvest. Some crops like kale, chard, and lettuces are planted and harvested year-round. Others like brussels sprouts, cabbages, and garlic are just about done, and Summer crops are now replacing them. Tomatoes, peppers, squashes, sweet potatoes, and eggplants have recently been planted and there are more to come in the greenhouse. By the end of June, Farm Manager Mark predicts the Farm will be 95% planted.

As mentioned earlier, June Gloom was back, and it came on the heels of a significant number of May Gray days. The combination of cool temperatures, overcast skies, and damp mornings meant that crops could be slow to take root and were more susceptible to diseases, such as blossom rot on squashes. Farm Manager Mark is monitoring the crops closely and rotating new seedlings into rows as needed. Fortunately, the greenhouse is full of seedlings, thanks in part to a generous donor, Darren Sasaki.

Farm Manager Mark has also been working to expand a new area of the Farm. Known as the “K” rows, these 16 rows are newly planted with squashes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and peppers. Since these rows are being cultivated for the first time, the soil is not as rich as on other parts of the Farm. Adding compost to the soil at every planting season enriches the soil over time, so while the plants are coming in, the team believes that harvests from new these rows will improve as they work to enhance the soil going forward.

Even if May Gray and June Gloom were relentless, the team has been seeing impressive weekly harvests. In the first week of June, the Farm yielded almost 620 pounds of produce, including more than 100 pounds of lettuce and 300 pounds of squashes. Beets, carrots, leeks, garlic broccoli, and blueberries made up the balance of the weekly total.





# Our Volunteers in Action

In May and June several groups came out to work at the Farm, including Newport Health Care, Villa Esperanza, ARC of Ventura, Comfort Keepers, Ventura County Credit Union, and Wild + Free.

Many of these groups are frequent volunteers and the Farm Managers are extremely grateful for their assistance and willingness to help!

The Farm also benefits from the participation of individual volunteers, whose ongoing presence makes the Farm a successful operation. Starting next month, we will highlight some of these longtime volunteers, who bring unique skills and knowledge along with their commitment to the Farm.

Join us at the Farm by becoming a volunteer!

Contact Leslie Suarez at (805) 477-7354 or [leslie.suarez@ventura.org](mailto:leslie.suarez@ventura.org), or visit [vcaaa.org/volunteer](http://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.vcaaf.org](http://www.vcaaf.org).

Donations to the Farm come in all sizes and all are very appreciated. Whether it be the 14 flats of tomatoes and eight flats of squash from Sasaki Sustainable Nursery, the new generator from the VCAAA Foundation, or the anonymous gift of new work gloves for the volunteers, all contributions are gratefully received.

Thank you to the following companies and organizations!



Stories and pictures provided by Farm volunteer Kathleen Khirallah