

APPALACHIAN FOREST FARMER COALITION

GATHER TO GROW

FOREST FARMING CONFERENCE

"ROOTED IN & BRANCHING OUT"



OCTOBER 23 - 25, 2026 | BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

THE INN AT VIRGINIA TECH & SKELTON CONFERENCE CENTER

APPALACHIANFORESTFARMERS.ORG/GATHER-TO-GROW

WELCOME



Welcome to the **2nd Gather to Grow Forest Farming Conference**. This year's theme is *Rooted In and Branching Out*. The Appalachian Forest Farmer Coalition is thrilled to bring together a vibrant community to celebrate, learn, and share across Appalachia. Forest farmers, stewards, industry partners, and service providers: this weekend is for you to gather inspiration and resources, and grow together.

The pre-conference activities begin at **12:00 pm on Friday, October 23rd** on Virginia Tech's historic campus. Immerse yourself in the autumn outdoors in the nearby gardens, a riparian area, and old growth forest. Stop at demonstration stations, attend the guided forest tour, or participate in plant yoga. Kick off the main conference with the **Welcome Reception at 5:00 pm** in the ballroom.

Saturday, October 24th opens with a welcome and Graham Rigby's keynote. The day features concurrent sessions, the Southeast Seed and Plant Share, the Poster Session, Book Signing, and networking. Enjoy dinner and Elspeth Hay's keynote, followed by Appalachian music and dancing.

The **Forest Farming Expo** features exhibitors throughout the weekend.

Sunday, October 25th greets us with morning sessions and a panel to continue the conversations. Our time together at The Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center will conclude with **closing remarks at 11:30 am**.

Thank you for gathering to share knowledge and passion for growing forest farming across Appalachia and beyond.

The 2026 Gather to Grow Conference Planning Team
Appalachian Forest Farmer Coalition (AFFC)

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2026 GATHER TO GROW

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LOCATION

**The Inn at Virginia Tech
& Skelton Conference
Center**

901 Prices Fork Rd,
Blacksburg, VA

Main Line & Accessibility
Information:
(540) 231-8000



HOSPITAL & EMERGENCY INFORMATION

VelocityCare – Blacksburg: (540) 961-8040

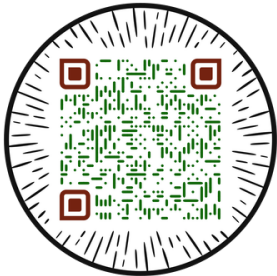
LewisGale Hospital Montgomery: (540) 951-1111

Virginia Tech Emergency: 911 (On Campus)

WELCOME SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS!

Thank you to the 2026 Gather to Grow Scholarship Sponsors:
Edwards Mother Earth Foundation, Southern SARE, Rural Action,
and Barnes-Berry Family Trust.

SCHEDULE

FRIDAY OCTOBER 23	SATURDAY OCTOBER 24	SUNDAY OCTOBER 25
Registration Foyer 10:30 AM - 6:00 PM	Morning Keynote Ballroom 8:30 AM	Sessions & Panels
Pre-Conference Activities	Sessions & Panels	Closing Remarks Ballroom 11:30 AM
VA Tech Campus 12:00 - 4:00 PM	Poster Session Foyer 4:00 - 5:30 PM	Forest Farming Expo Ballroom & Foyer Saturday & Sunday
Plant Energy Yoga Lower Drillfield 1:00 - 2:00 PM	Book Signing Latham Ballroom 4:00 - 5:30 PM	WEBPAGE View and download: Program Updates Session Descriptions Speaker Biographies
Old Growth Oak Tour Stadium Woods 2:00 - 3:00 PM	Dinner Keynote Ballroom 5:30 - 7:00 PM	
Welcome Reception Ballroom 5:00 - 8:00 PM	Appalachian Music Ballroom 7:30 - 9:30 PM	
Dinner on your own in Blacksburg	Forest Farming Expo Ballroom & Foyer	

	MORNING KEYNOTE GRAHAM RIGBY AMERICAN HERBAL PRODUCTS ASSOCIATION EVENING KEYNOTE ELSPETH HAY FOOD JOURNALIST & AUTHOR	
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EXHIBITORS

- Appalachian Sustainable Development
- American Herbal Products Association
- Association for Temperate Agroforestry
- Bat Cave Botanicals
- Bellyfull Plants Nursery
- Boring Ginseng Roots & Herbs
- Blue Sky Botanicals
- Catalyzing Agroforestry
- Elspeth Hay
- Family Forest Carbon Program
- LiKEN Knowledge
- Minority Landowner Magazine
- Northeast Forest Farmers Coalition
- Red Moon Herbs
- Rural Action
- Soulshine Earth
- Traditional Medicinals
- United Plant Savers
- Wishgarden Herbs
- Wild Hudson Valley
- Yew Mountain Center



Association for
Temperate Agroforestry



MINORITY LANDOWNER
MAGAZINE

APPALACHIAN
sustainable
DEVELOPMENT



ELSPETH HAY



Family Forest
Carbon Program



Rooted in Western North Carolina, the Barnes Berry Family Trust is dedicated to preserving Appalachian mountain landscapes and protecting regional ecosystems for future generations. Through generous support for local conservation and sustainable forestry, the trust helps strengthen rural mountain communities and safeguard native botanical heritage across the region.

SATURDAY MORNING

	SESSION 1 9:45 - 10:45 AM		SESSION 2 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM
BALLROOM	<u>Forest Farming in Practice: Approaches, Considerations & Crop Options</u> <u>Eric P. Burkhart</u> Penn State University		<u>[Panel] Rooted In: Grounding Modern Forest Farming in History, Culture & Traditional Practices</u> Host: <u>Shannon Bell</u> , <u>Dr. Ming, Ruby Daniels</u> , <u>Chris Parker</u>
SOLITUDE ROOM	<u>Forest Botanicals in Appalachian History, Culture & Community</u> <u>Shannon Bell</u> & <u>Mary Hufford</u> Virginia Tech & LiKEN Knowledge		<u>The Forest In Forest Farming: Site Selection from the Canopy Down</u> <u>Jim Hamilton</u> & <u>Shawn Swartz</u> NC State Cooperative Extension & NC Forester
DUCK POND ROOM	<u>So you Want to Forest Farm?</u> <u>Joe Ginseng</u> Up the Creek Farm	<u>Building a Mushroom Forest Farm</u> <u>Andrew Gedeon</u> & <u>Anna Kelly</u> Soulshine Earth	<u>Ramps Production and Practical Research Updates</u> <u>Eric P. Burkhart</u> Penn State University
SMITHFIELD ROOM			<u>Research Update: 50 Years of Forest Botanical Pricing Trends</u> <u>Holly Chittum</u> AHPA & Penn State University
DRILLFEILD ROOM	<u>Forest Farming Games</u> <u>Sara Jackson</u> & <u>Holly Chittum</u> AFFC and Virginia Tech, AHPA and Penn State University		<u>Plant the Seed</u> <u>Ed & Carole Daniels</u> Shady Grove Botanicals

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

	SESSION 3 1:30 - 2:30 PM	SESSION 4 2:45 - 3:45 PM	SESSION 5 4:00 - 5:00 PM
BALLROOM	<u>[Panel] Exploring Solutions to Forest Farming Barriers</u> Host John Munsell: <u>Victor Harris</u> , <u>Ruby Daniels</u> , <u>Jeanine Davis</u>	<u>[Panel] Branching Out: Industry Growth & Networking</u> Host <u>Holly Chittum</u> : <u>Graham Rigby</u> , <u>Ed Fletcher</u> , <u>Tanner Filyaw</u> , <u>Jeannie Dunn</u> , <u>Lauren Nichols</u> , <u>Michael Boring</u> , <u>Ed Daniels</u>	Book Signing & Poster Session
SOLITUDE ROOM	<u>Ginseng Genetics and Implications for Conservation and Policy</u> <u>Rachel Palkovitz</u> & <u>Nat Burr</u> James Madison University, Yale School of the Environment	<u>Forest Farming by U.S. Agricultural Producers: Findings from a National Survey</u> <u>Gary Bentrup</u> , USDA National Agroforestry Center	Regional Meetup <u>Midatlantic & Southeast</u>
DUCK POND ROOM	<u>Minimizing and Mitigating Risk on the Forest Farm</u> <u>Bill Rogers</u> Double R Bar Ranch & Farm		Regional Meetup <u>Northeast</u>
SMITHFIELD ROOM	<u>Forest Farming Mushrooms & Fungi</u> <u>Christopher Parker</u> Forest Farmacy	<u>Farm the Forest</u> <u>Roy Ramey</u> Avalon Farms	<u>Air Pruning Beds for Trees & Botanicals</u> <u>Nick Wrenn</u> Living Soil Tree Farm
DRILLFEILD ROOM	<u>Forest Fables: Multimedia Ecological Storytelling I</u> <u>Erica Marks</u> & <u>Sara Jackson</u> Yew Mountain Center & Virginia Tech	<u>Forest Fables: Multimedia Ecological Storytelling II</u> <u>Erica Marks</u> & <u>Sara Jackson</u> Yew Mountain Center & Virginia Tech	<u>Nature Crafts & Costumes</u> <u>Holly Chittum</u> AHPA & Penn State

SUNDAY

	SESSION 6 8:30 – 9:30 AM	SESSION 7 9:45 – 10:45 AM
BALLROOM	<u>[Panel] Experienced Forest Farmers Discussion: Realities & Opportunities Beneath the Canopy</u> Host <u>Jeanine Davis</u>: <u>Ed Daniels</u>, <u>Joe Ginseng</u>, <u>Andy Gedeon</u>, <u>Anna Plattner</u>	<u>American Ginseng, From Farming to Clinical Applications</u> <u>Dr. Ming Tao Jiang</u> Marathon Ginseng
SOLITUDE ROOM	<u>Value added Products and Affrilachian Herbs</u> <u>Ruby Daniels</u> USDA NRCS & Creasy Janes	<u>Wildlife and Forest Farming</u> <u>Ian Nichols</u> Virginia Tech
DUCK POND ROOM	<u>Wild Appalachian Sericulture: Collaborating with North American Silk Moths</u> <u>Mary Hufford</u> LiKEN Knowledge	<u>Securing the Forest Understory: Strategies for Safeguarding Forest Botanicals</u> <u>Sara Jackson</u>, <u>Anna Plattner</u> & <u>Eric P. Burkhart</u>
SMITHFIELD ROOM	<u>Growing Yellowroot (<i>Xanthorhiza simplicissima</i>) as a Forest Farming Crop</u> <u>Craig Mauney</u> NC Cooperative Extension	<u>African-American and Diasporic Practice of Agroecology</u> <u>Nailah Garard</u> Succotash Gardens
DRILLFEILD ROOM	<u>Plant Spirit Yoga (Youth)</u> <u>Holly Chittum</u> AHPA and Penn State	<u>Forest Farming Crafts & Games</u> <u>Erica Marks</u> Yew Mountain Center

EVENTS

SOUTHEAST SEED & PLANT SHARE

The Southeastern Seed and Plant Share has been sharing seeds, supplies, and educational plant propagation information for 30 years! Thank you to Lee Barnes & Friends for hosting. Stop by throughout the weekend to swap seeds, stories, and scions.



POSTER SESSION SATURDAY 4:00 - 5:30 PM

BOOK SIGNING SATURDAY 4:00 - 5:30 PM

- **Elspeth Hay** Feed Us With Trees
- **Jeanine Davis** Growing & Marketing Ginseng, Goldenseal, and other Woodland Medicinals
- **Jim Hamilton** The Last Entry
- **Chris & Katherine Parker** The Mycelial Healer
- **David A. Taylor** Ginseng, the Divine Root
- **Carol Bates** Cannabis, Vinegars and Wild Foods, Oh My!
- **Victor Harris** Minority Landowner Magazine 30th edition



SPONSORS



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ELSPETH HAY



Association for
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THANK YOU!



SCHOLARSHIPS
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SATURDAY EVENING
ENTERTAINMENT
TRADITIONAL MEDICINALS



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS
EDWARDS MOTHER EARTH
FOUNDATION

APPALACHIAN FOREST FARMER COALITION

The Appalachian Forest Farmer Coalition is a broad network of 3,300 forest farmers, stewards, land owners, universities, programs, and organizations that share a common goal of improving agroforestry opportunities and production capabilities among forest farmers across Appalachia.

Established in 2014, our collective aim is to increase awareness of forest-grown medicinal, edible plants and other non-timber forest products (NTFPs) through education and relationship building, and support conservation efforts through stewardship of existing plant populations and forest farming of botanicals.

JOHN MUNSELL, DIRECTOR

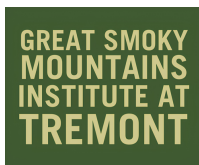
Dept. of Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation, Virginia Tech

MARGARET BLOOMQUIST, CO-DIRECTOR

Dept. of Horticultural Science, North Carolina State University

SARA JACKSON, WEBSITE & DEVELOPMENT

Dept. of Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation, Virginia Tech



AFFC PARTNERS



- Appalachian Sustainable Development
- American Herbal Products Association
- Edwards Mother Earth Foundation
- Future Generations University
- Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont
- Grow Appalachia
- North Carolina State University
- Organic Association of Kentucky
- Organic Growers School
- Penn State University
- Rural Action
- Sustainable Herbs Initiative
- United Plant Savers
- Virginia Tech
- Warren Wilson College
- Yew Mountain Center



PennState
College of Agricultural Sciences



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**THE FOREST
FARMACY**



SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

FRIDAY OCTOBER 23, PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS & ACTIVITIES

Slippery Elm Research

Korey Largo, Virginia Tech University

12 - 4 @ The Virginia Tech Greenhouses

To date, there has been little research on in situ or controlled reproduction practices of Slippery Elm that can be used by bark harvesters and other stakeholders to propagate trees and backstop population loss associated with destructive bark harvesting. This presentation covers novel research at Virginia Tech on clonal forest farming methods to artificially regenerate slippery elm from parent trees. The study consists of a live stake field trial in legacy forests on abandoned mine land and a live cutting greenhouse trial on Virginia Tech's campus (2026). The greenhouse trial is currently testing moisture regimes and rooting treatments on survival and performance through root emergence, hardening, and transplanting.

Soil Acoustics and Listening

Ian Nichols and Margaret Bloomquist

Virginia Tech University, NC State University

12 - 4 PM @ Duck Pond

Woodland Propagation Field Station

Tanner Filyaw and Margaret Bloomquist

Rural Action, NC State University

12 - 4 PM @ The Drillfield

Plant Energy Yoga

Brandy McCann, Virginia Tech University

1- 2 PM @ The Drillfield

This class is a nature-inspired, beginner-friendly yoga class. Participants can expect plant wisdom, gentle movement, and guided meditation. Plant Yoga is a hands-on activity that will demonstrate one way in which the values of Forest Farming communities can be incorporated into a multimodality practice. Participants learn techniques for plant ID, cultural lore around the plant, as well as edible and medicinal uses and will be offered a guided meditation with a focal plant to induce deep relaxation. The goal of a Plant Yoga class is an introduction to one plant in an effort to reduce "plant blindness" and connect with plants with a whole body perspective.

Old Growth Oak Tour

Dr John Seiler, Virginia Tech University

2 - 3 PM @ The Stadium Woods

Join Dr. Seiler for a tour of the rare old-growth urban forest near Lane Stadium on the campus of Virginia Tech! Covering approximately 11.5 acres, it contains over 250 large trees, including dozens of white oak trees that have been estimated by scientists to be over 300 years old. The woods are unofficially referred to as Stadium Woods. In a spot surrounded by pavement and concrete buildings, Stadium Woods absorbs rainwater and cools the vicinity in summer. The 2009 Virginia Tech Master Plan Amendment identifies the site as an environmental and cultural greenway, defined as "a significant reservation of lands, waterways, tree stands, and cultural landmarks for future generations."



SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

SATURDAY OCTOBER 24, 2026, SESSION 1 - 9:45 - 10:45 AM

Forest Farming in Practice: Approaches, Considerations, & Crop Options

Eric P. Burkhart, Penn State University

9:45 - 10:45 AM, Ballroom

Cultivation and stewardship of edible and medicinal plants and fungi of forestlands is referred to as forest farming—a type of agroforestry practice. In this session, attendees will be provided with an overview of some of the different approaches and considerations associated with forest farming by examining diversified native forest 'crop' examples including ginseng, ramps, mushrooms, and maple syrup.

Forest Botanicals in Appalachian History, Culture, and Community

Shannon Bell and Mary Hufford

Virginia Tech Department of Sociology, Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network

9:45 - 10:45 AM, Solitude

In this panel, sociologist Shannon Bell and folklorist Mary Hufford will discuss the historical and contemporary lifeways, traditions, and livelihoods that connect many Central Appalachian communities—past and present—to the medicinal herbs and wild foods of the forest understory. They will conclude by sharing the ways that the Forest Botanicals Region Living Monument and Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN) are working to support these connections.

[Farm Share] So you Want to Forest Farm?

Joe Ginseng, Up the Creek Farm

9:45 - 10:15 AM, Smithfield

Focus primarily on Ginseng, but also other NTFPs for a landowner wanting to utilize a woodlot to provide an alternative means of production with Ginseng, Goldenseal, Black cohosh, etc. Sharing via storytelling and personal mishaps or anecdotes of Forest farming along the way. This workshop is intended for people curious about getting into Forest Farming, and I leave plenty of time to field questions towards the end of the presentation.

[Farm Share] Building a Mushroom Forest Farm

Andrew Gedeon and Anna Kelly, Soulshine Earth

10:15 - 10:45 AM, Smithfield

On 10 acres in southeast Ohio, we run an 800+ log mushroom forest farm. We will talk about our journey building a forest farm from the ground up, to inform people about the strategies that we used. We hope that people will be inspired and have a better understanding of how this type of farm operates, generates income, and benefits the local community through connection to land and teaching. We will talk about the hands-on setup of the farm as well as the business side of things.

[Youth Activity] Forest Farming Games & Fun

Sara Jackson and Holly Chittum

Virginia Tech University, American Herbal Products Association and Penn State University

9:45 - 10:45 AM, Drillfield

Kick off Gather to Grow Youth Activity on Saturday with forest themed crafts, costumes, and classic games like WildCraft, Go Grow Botanicals and more!

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

SATURDAY OCTOBER 24, 2026 - SESSION 2 - 11 AM - 12 PM

[Panel] Rooted In: Grounding Modern Forest Farming in History, Culture & Traditional Practices

Host: Shannon Bell, VT Sociology, Dr. Ming (Marathon Ginseng International), Ruby Daniels (USDA NRCS & Creasy Janes), Chris Parker (Forest Pharmacy)

11 AM - 12 PM, Ballroom

The Forest In Forest Farming: Site Selection from the Canopy Down

Jim Hamilton and Shawn Swartz

NC Cooperative Extension

11 AM - 12 PM, Solitude

Site selection is one of the most important considerations for a successful forest farm. Your forest and its ecology, including species, canopy, shade, and soil, can make a big difference in the success of the crop you want to grow beneath the canopy. This session will approach site evaluation from the canopy down, focusing on the role of the forest in forest farming. In this session (in the field or in the classroom---where applicable and dependent on weather), forest ecology and management considerations will be discussed to highlight these important forest ecological characteristics and conditions to allow participants to assess their forests for farming.

Ramps Production and Practical Research Updates

Eric P. Burkhart, Penn State University

11 AM - 12 PM, Smithfield

In this session, Dr. Burkhart will provide an overview of ramp forest farming along with the latest research updates on related topics including what is known about the number of ramp species in North America, forest site selection guidance, nutritional/medicinal content, and sustainable harvest and propagation methods.

Research Update: 50 Years of Forest Botanical Pricing Trends

Holly Chittum, American Herbal Products Association, Penn State University

11 AM - 12 PM, Duck Pond

What can 50 years of forest botanical trade tell us about the opportunities and challenges facing forest farmers today? This presentation explores the history of the Appalachian forest botanical trade, from traditional plant uses and commercial demand to changing trade volumes and prices. Drawing on research examining eight commercially important forest botanicals, we'll look at longstanding assumptions about their value, what historical pricing reveals, and some differences among species. We'll also consider what these findings mean for forest farmers, including market opportunities, price transparency, production economics, and the future of sustainable forest botanical supply.

[Youth Activity] Plant the Seed

Ed and Carol Daniels, Shady Grove Botanicals

11 AM - 12 PM, Drillfield Room

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

SATURDAY OCTOBER 24, 2026 - SESSION 3 - 1:30 - 2:30 PM

[Panel] Exploring Solutions to Forest Farming Barriers

Host: John Munsell, Virginia Tech University, Victor Harris (Minority Landowner Magazine), Ruby Daniels (USDA NRCS & Creasy Janes), Jeanine Davis (NC State University)

1:30 - 2:30 pm, Ballroom

Ginseng Genetics and Implications for Conservation and Policy

Rachel Palkovitz and Nat Burr

James Madison University, Yale School of the Environment

1:30 - 2:30 pm, Solitude

Understanding the genetic origins of planting stock has practical implications for forest farmers. In this session, we share preliminary results from two population genomics studies of American ginseng in which we analyzed forest farmed, artificial shade cultivated, and purportedly wild populations from across the eastern United States. We compared genetic data to a recent study on grower perspectives, highlighting synergies between forest farming and conservation of genetic diversity. Finally, we discuss opportunities for forest farmers, conservation practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to join forces to address roadblocks to planting stock access.

Minimizing and Mitigating Risk on the Forest Farm

Bill Rogers, Double R Bar Ranch & Farm, LLC

1:30 - 2:30 pm, Smithfield

This interactive session helps participants move beyond viewing risk as something to objectively identify, evaluate, prioritize, and manage strategically. Whether operating a small hobby farm, diversified forest farm, agritourism venture, or commercial agricultural operation, participants will learn practical methods for assessing operational, financial, legal, environmental, and reputational risks within their own operations. Participants will leave with a working framework they can immediately use to enhance decision-making, improve resilience, support business planning, and insulate their farms for existing and future challenges.

Forest Farming Mushrooms & Fungi

Christopher Parker, Forest Farmacy

1:30 - 2:30 pm, Duck Pond

Dive into growing mushrooms in your forest. This session will talk about species strategies on how to work with what you already have. It is for advanced and beginner mushroom cultivators alike. Many species will be discussed as well as the nuances around these species. Mushrooms that are easy to grow and more difficult fungi will also be covered.

[Youth Activity] Forest Fables - Multimedia Ecological Storytelling I

Erica Marks and Sara Jackson

Yew Mountain Center, Virginia Tech University

1:30 - 2:30 pm, Drillfield

There are worlds of adventure under the canopy of an Appalachian Forest! Learn about fascinating ecological relationships and get creative to bring these stories to life. We will have a variety of media available including shadow puppetry, a crankie box, illustration supplies, and musical instruments.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

SATURDAY OCTOBER 24, 2026 - SESSION 4 - 2:45 - 3:45 PM

[Panel] Branching Out: Industry Growth & Networking

Host: Holly Chittum, American Herbal Product Association, Penn State University, Graham Rigby (AHPA), Ed Fletcher (Native Botanicals), Tanner Filyaw (Rural Action), Lauren Nichols (WishGarden Herbs), Michael Boring (Boring Roots), Jeannie Dunn (Red Moon Herbs), Ed Daniels (Shady Grove Botanicals).

2:45 - 3:45 pm, Ballroom

Forest Farming by U.S. Agricultural Producers: Findings from a National Survey

Gary Bentrup, USDA National Agroforestry Center

2:45 - 3:45 pm, Smithfield

Forest farming has long been practiced in the United States, but no national dataset has documented the extent or adoption. The National Agroforestry Producer Survey addressed this gap, with 5,682 respondents, including 453 using forest farming on agricultural operations. Producers reported multiple approaches: wild-stewarded (70%), wild-simulated (57%), and woods-grown (41%). Average forest farming acreage was 52 acres, and 56% of systems were over 15 years old. Common management included tree thinning, pruning, and understory removal. Key benefits were product income, wildlife habitat, aesthetics, and cultural tradition while challenges included labor, complexity, and costs.

[Farm Share] Farm the Forest: Conservation, Opportunity, and Income from the Appalachian Woodlands

Roy Ramey, Avalon Farms

2:45 - 3:45 pm, Duck Pond

What opportunities are growing beneath your trees? Farm the Forest explores how farmers, homesteaders, and aspiring growers can turn forest land into productive, sustainable enterprises. Learn how medicinal herbs such as ginseng, goldenseal, cohosh, and ramps can be cultivated while helping conserve declining wild populations. We'll also explore maple syrup, mushrooms, and other forest products that can provide food and supplemental income. Whether you already own woodland or are simply looking for new agricultural opportunities, discover how forest farming can combine conservation, practical production, and entrepreneurship.

[Farm Share] Air Pruning Beds for Trees & Forest Botanicals

Nick Wrenn, Living Soil Tree Farm

2:45 - 3:45 pm, Duck Pond

Discover how to efficiently propagate native hardwood trees using low-cost air pruning beds. Built simply from lumber and hardware cloth, these innovative setups prevent taproots from circling, encouraging a dense, fibrous root system ideal for bare-root transplanting. Learn how these elevated beds naturally safeguard rare and local ecotype seed sources from devastating rodent damage during critical early growth. This presentation offers practical, budget-friendly insights for nursery growers, conservationists, and plant breeders aiming to successfully grow resilient, high-quality native trees from seed to dormant bare-root harvest.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

[Youth Activity] Forest Fables - Multimedia Ecological Storytelling II

Erica Marks and Sara Jackson

Yew Mountain Center, Virginia Tech University

2:45 - 3:45 pm, Drillfield

There are worlds of adventure under the canopy of an Appalachian Forest! Learn about fascinating ecological relationships and get creative to bring these stories to life. We will have a variety of media available including shadow puppetry, a crankie box, illustration supplies, and musical instruments.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 24, 2026 - SESSION 5: 4- 5PM

Booksigning

4 - 5:30 pm, Ballroom

Poster Session

4 - 5:30 pm, Foyer

Northeast Regional Meet-Up

Host: Nat Burr, Yale University

4 - 5 pm, Solitude

Midatlantic & Southeast Regional Meet-Up

Host: John Munsell, Virginia Tech University

4 - 5 pm, Smithfield

Midwest Regional Meet-Up

Host: Tanner Filyaw, Rural Action

4 - 5 pm, Duck Pond

[Youth Activity] Nature Crafts & Costumes

Holly Chittum, American Herbal Products Association, Penn State University

4 - 5 pm, Drillfield

SUNDAY OCTOBER 25, 2026 - SESSION 6: 8:30 - 9:30 AM

[Panel] Experienced Forest Farmers Discussion: Realities & Opportunities Beneath the Canopy

Host: Jeanine Davis, NC State University, Ed Daniels (Shady Grove Botanicals), Anna Plattner (Wild Hudson Valley), Joe Ginseng (Up the Creek Farm), David Brown (Meadow Cove Forest Farm), and Andy Gedeon (Soulshine Earth)

8:30 - 9:30 am, Ballroom

Value added Products and Affrilachian Herbs

Ruby Daniels, USDA NRCS, Creasy Janes

8:30 - 9:30 am, Solitude

Discover the rich heritage of Afrolachian herbal traditions and explore how culturally rooted plants can inspire unique business opportunities. This interactive session will introduce participants to herbs with historical and regional significance, demonstrate ways to transform them into value-added products, and provide practical brainstorming tools for product development. Through guided discussions and creative exercises, attendees will learn how to identify marketable ideas, connect stories to products, and develop concepts that reflect their community and mission. Whether you're an entrepreneur, farmer, artisan, or educator, you'll leave with actionable steps to grow your business and impact.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Wild Appalachian Sericulture: Collaborating with North American Silk Moths **Mary Hufford, Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)**

8:30 - 9:30 am, Smithfield

If you've spent time in Appalachian forests, you've probably encountered the Saturniids, also known as North American Silk Moths: lunas, cecropias, prometheus, polyphemus, los, and more. Have you ever wondered how, and even more importantly, why, to integrate these magnificent creatures into your forest farming? You'll discover a few of the many resources available to you for weaving Saturniids into the evolving history of Appalachian Forest Farming, as well as into the world history of wild, non-violent sericulture (Ahimsa). We'll explore a few of the aesthetic, ecological, and economic benefits of protecting Saturniids, and how, as models of transformation and beauty, Saturniids have inspired, and continue to inspire, art and ecological design from viewpoints of more-than-human others.

Growing Yellowroot (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*) Successfully as a Forest Farming Crop

Craig Mauney, NC Cooperative Extension

8:30 - 9:30 am, Duck Pond

This forest farming lecture on yellowroot (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*) will bridge traditional Appalachian wildcrafting with sustainable agroforestry. The session will feature site evaluation, propagation techniques, and ethical wildcrafting practices focused on this low-maintenance, berberine-rich medicinal understory shrub native to the Eastern US.

[Youth Activity] Plant Spirit Yoga

Holly Chittum, American Herbal Products Association, Penn State University

8:30 - 9:30 am, Drillfield

SUNDAY OCTOBER 25, 2026 – SESSION 7: 9:45 – 10:45 AM

American Ginseng, From Farming to Clinical Applications

Ming Tao Jiang MD PHD, Marathon Ginseng International Inc.

9:45 - 10:45 am, Ballroom

American Ginseng has been traded to Asia for 242 years and yet its medicinal use has not been fully recognized and used. Dr. Jiang will showcase a series of clinical cases from terminal pneumonia to Coma to Hematopoiesis post chemotherapy recovery. Observations showed how powerful American Ginseng can be in restoring natural vitality, the key is the dosages. I will also share our efforts to help conserve the wild ginseng with the Bob Beyfuss Memorial Ginseng Stewardship project which has helped distribute about 20 million free seeds.

Wildlife and Forest Farming

Ian Nichols, Virginia Tech University

9:45 - 10:45 am, Solitude

Best practices for attracting and supporting wildlife in forest farming are still being developed; with work by organizations like Audubon's Bird Friendly Maple program highlighting several key themes. These practices include leaving dead standing trees and fallen trees on the ground, which provide habitat and food resources for wildlife. There are also mutualistic relationships and detrimental wildlife species like moles and voles. An overview of some ways to protect NTFPs from wildlife will be provided as well as attendees sharing their experience. Options to protect plantings from wildlife and the benefits brought by more wildlife include a healthier forest ecosystem, but also enrich our time in the forest. What is a walk in the forest without the songs of nature?

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Securing the Understory: Strategies for Safeguarding Forest Botanicals

Sara Jackson, Anna Plattner, & Eric P. Burkhart

Virginia Tech University, Wild Hudson Valley, & Penn State University

9:45 - 10:45 am, Smithfield

A multi-pronged approach to address growing concerns and complex topics of theft of ginseng and other botanicals. A toolkit designed to help build important resources and contacts, as well as identify and implement unique strategies that can be useful in preventing - and if needed, prosecuting - theft.

African-American and Diasporic Practice of Agroecology

Nailah Garard, Succotash Gardens

9:45 - 10:45 am, Duck Pond

Inspired by African-American history and American and African folk healing practices, this experiential learning circle will explore agroecological growing methods and plants that are culturally important to African-American medicine and food ways. Deeply informed by *Working the Roots* by Michelle E. Lee and *Farming While Black* by Leah Penniman and the agroecological methods we practice at Succotash Gardens, a small-scale forest garden based in Long Island, NY. History and cultural practice of foraging. Honoring the diverse cultural-historical narratives, folklore, spiritual meaning, and medicinal uses that participants have to share. Sharing seeds for people to take home.

[Youth Activity] Forest Farming Crafts and Games

Erica Marks, Yew Mountain Center

9:45 - 10:45 am, Drillfield

The Northeast Forest Farmers Coalition

Building a community of practice to grow forest farming opportunities and education within the Northeast



Applied on-farm
research,
workshops, events,
and resources



Connecting farmers,
researchers, land stewards,
technical service providers,
businesses, non-profits, and
conservation practitioners

Catalyzing a grassroots forest farming movement grounded in healthy ecosystems and economic resilience for local communities

northeastforestfarmers.org

[@northeastforestfarming](https://twitter.com/northeastforestfarming)



Join the coalition:



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

MORNING KEYNOTE GRAHAM RIGBY

AMERICAN HERBAL
PRODUCTS ASSOCIATION



[Panel] Branching Out: Industry Growth & Networking

Graham Rigby is President & CEO of the American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) and the AHPA ERB Foundation. With over 20 years of experience in health, wellness, and nutrition, Rigby has led innovation and product development at New Chapter, Organic India, Care/of, and Infinite Garden. He also helped launch IngredientAI, an AI-driven insights platform for the supplement industry. Rigby holds a B.S. in Economics from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. He is passionate about the role of botanicals, nutrition, and technology in holistic health and is committed to fostering innovation, integrity, and sustainability across the herbal products landscape.



EVENING KEYNOTE ELSPETH HAY

FOOD JOURNALIST & AUTHOR

Book Signing

[Panel] Rooted In: Grounding Modern Forest Farming in History, Culture & Traditional Practices

Elspeth Hay is a writer, public radio host, and creator of the Local Food Report, a weekly feature that has aired on CAI, the Cape & Islands NPR Station, since 2008. Deeply immersed in her own local food system, she writes and reports for print, radio, and online media with a focus on food and the environment. Elspeth's work has been featured in the Boston Globe, NPR's Kitchen Window, Heated with Mark Bittman, The Provincetown Independent, and numerous other publications. Through her conversations with growers, harvesters, processors, cooks, policy makers, Indigenous knowledge-keepers, scientists, researchers, and visionaries, she aims to rebuild our cultural store of culinary knowledge—and to reconnect us with the people, places, and ideas that feed us. Elspeth lives with her family on Cape Cod, MA.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Shannon Bell, Virginia Tech University

Gary Bentrup, USDA National

Agroforestry Center

Margaret Gove Bloomquist, NC State

University

Eric Burkhart, Penn State University

Nat Burr, Yale School of the Environment

Holly Chittum, American Herbal Products

Association & Penn State University

Ed & Carole Daniels, Shady Grove

Botanicals

Ruby Daniels, USDA Natural Resources

Conservation Service

Jeanine Davis, NC State University

Tanner Filyaw, Rural Action

Nailah Garard, Succotash Gardens

Andy Gedeon & Anna Kelly, Soulshine

Earth Forest Farm

Joe Ginseng, Up the Creek Farms

Jim Hamilton, NC State Cooperative

Extension

Victor Harris, Minority Landowner

Magazine

Mary Hufford, Livelihoods Knowledge

Exchange Network

Sara Jackson, Virginia Tech University

Ming Tao Jiang, Marathon Ginseng

International

Korey Largo, Virginia Tech University

Erica Marks, Yew Mountain Center

Craig Mauney, NC Cooperative

Extension

Brandy McCann, Virginia Tech University

Ian Nichols, Virginia Tech University

Rachel Palkovitz, James Madison

University

Christopher Parker, Forest Farmacy

Anna Plattner, Wild Hudson Valley

Roy Ramey, Avalon Farms

Bill Rogers, Double R Bar Ranch & Farm,

LLC

Shawn Swartz, NC Forester

Nick Wrenn, Living Soil Tree Farm

Shannon Bell, Virginia Tech University

Forest Botanicals in Appalachian History, Culture, and Community

Panel Host: Grounding Modern Forest Farming in History & Traditional Practices

Dr. Shannon Bell is a professor in the Department of Sociology at Virginia Tech, where she teaches classes on environmental sociology and Appalachian studies. Professor Bell leads the Forest Botanicals Region Social Ecology Lab, which conducts research and outreach to support the traditions, lifeways, and livelihoods connecting Appalachian people to the forest understory. Since 2023, she has worked with Appalachian Sustainable Development, the City of Norton, and community partners to create the Forest Botanicals Region Living Monument, an education and outreach initiative that celebrates the cultural, historical, medicinal, ecological, and economic importance that Appalachian forest botanicals have long held for a diversity of people, stretching from before colonization to today.

Gary Bentrup, USDA National Agroforestry Center

Forest Farming by U.S. Agricultural Producers: Findings from a National Survey

Gary Bentrup is a research landscape planner at the United States Department of Agriculture, National Agroforestry Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. His research focuses on developing evidence-based tools and resources for designing multifunctional agroforestry practices. Recent work includes illustrated buffer design guidelines and plant selection decision support tools. The shelterbelt on his family's farm was his first learning environment, and he even considered using it for forest farming to help pay his way through college.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Margaret Gove Bloomquist, NC State University Propagation Station

Margaret Gove Bloomquist is a Research Scholar for the NC Alternative Crops & Organics Program, Department of Horticultural Science, NC State University, since 2012. She is based in western North Carolina and specializes in medicinal herbs, woodland botanicals, organics, and other specialty crop efforts, and is a frequent invited speaker on those topics. Margaret is a leader of the NC Medicinal Herb Growers and the Woodland Stewards groups, co-director for the Appalachian Forest Farmer Coalition and professionally serves the Association for Temperate Agroforestry, the Agroforestry Coalition, and the Liliun Initiative. She has dedicated her career to sustainable agriculture and rural community development through applied research, collaboration, and extension.

Eric Burkhart, Penn State University

Forest Farming in Practice: Approaches, Considerations, and Crop Options Ramps Production & Insights

Securing the Forest Understory: Strategies for Safeguarding Forest Botanicals

Dr. Eric Burkhart is a botanist, ethnobotanist, and agroforester at Penn State University, where he is Teaching Professor in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management. For the past 25 years, he has worked on topics pertaining to forest-based (in situ) stewardship and agroforestry crop development of Appalachian non-timber forest products (NTFPs). In recent years, he has also been working in Central America (Belize, Costa Rica) and the Caribbean (US Virgin Islands) on agroforestry and ethnobotany projects. Dr. Burkhart maintains a highly interdisciplinary research and education program addressing questions surrounding Appalachian Forest plants including their botany, ethnobotany, ecology, phytochemistry, and agroforestry potential.

Nat Burr, Yale University

Ginseng Genetics and Implications for Conservation and Policy

Nat Burr studies forestry at the Yale School of the Environment and serves as the program manager for the Northeast Forest Farmers Coalition. Nat's research takes a place-based and transdisciplinary approach, employing grower knowledge, forest ecology, and population genomics to evaluate genetic variation and diversity of wild and cultivated American ginseng in the northeastern United States.

Holly Chittum, American Herbal Products Association, Penn State University

Research Update: 50 Years of Forest Botanical Pricing Trends

Panel Host: Branching Out: Industry Growth & Networking

Nature Crafts & Costumes, Plant Spirit Yoga (Youth)

Holly Chittum is a Project Scientist with the American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) and a PhD student at Penn State University, where her work focuses on botanical supply chains, market dynamics, and sustainability. She has worked extensively with forest farmers, researchers, and stakeholders to advance sustainable production and sourcing of Appalachian forest botanicals. A founding partner and former Project Co-Director of the Appalachian Beginning Forest Farmer Coalition, Holly brings experience spanning ethnobotany, herbal medicine, agroforestry, and botanical trade. Her research explores the economic and market conditions influencing forest botanical production, with particular attention to opportunities and challenges facing growers and harvesters.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Ed & Carole Daniels

Plant the Seed

[Panel] Branching Out: Industry Growth & Networking

Ruby Daniels, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Value added Products and Affrilachian Herbs

[Panel] Grounding Modern Forest Farming in History & Traditional Practices

Ruby Daniels is a Natural Resource Specialist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), where she has served for the past five years helping landowners implement conservation practices and sustainable land management solutions. She is the owner of Creasy Jane's Herbal Remedies, a business dedicated to preserving and promoting traditional herbal knowledge through handcrafted products. Ruby earned a Master of Science degree from Maryland University of Integrative Health, combining academic training with a passion for plant-based wellness. An African American storyteller, she weaves history, culture, and community into her work, celebrating the rich traditions of Appalachia and the African diaspora.

Jeanine Davis, NC State University

[Panel Host] Experienced Forest Farmers Discussion: Realities & Opportunities

Book Signing

[Panel] Exploring Solutions to Forest Farming Barriers

Dr. Jeanine Davis is an associate professor and extension specialist in the Department of Horticultural Science at NC State University located in western NC. For over 38 years, she has researched medicinal herbs, forest farming, new crops, vegetables, and organic agriculture and shared her knowledge on these topics with farmers and gardeners across the country. Current efforts are on native woodland botanicals, truffles, Chinese medicinal herbs, and organic tomatoes. She is the lead author of the book "Growing and Marketing Ginseng, Goldenseal and Other Woodland Medicinals". Jeanine and her family operate Our Tiny Farm where they raise and board mini-donkeys.

Tanner Filyaw, Rural Action

Propagation Station

[Panel] Industry Growth & Networking

For more than 20 years, Tanner has been working to promote Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP's) as a sustainable forest management strategy for woodland owners in southeast Ohio and the central Appalachian region. He currently serves as the Sustainable Forestry Program Director at Rural Action, located in Athens county, Ohio. In his spare time, Tanner works with his wife at Equinox Botanicals, where he helps manage forest plantings, beehives, and mushroom production.

Nailah Garard, Succotash Gardens

African-American and Diasporic Practice of Agroecology

Nailah Garard is a farmer, community organizer and researcher based in Long Island, NY. She is the Director and Founder of Succotash Gardens, a small-scale community food forest and mutual aid hub in Roosevelt, NY. Nailah cares deeply about issues of food and land access for small-scale farmers, land-use policy, and water conservation, as she seeks to be an advocate for equitable agriculture on Long Island as young farmers face unique challenges in our politics, economy and climate. In her consulting work with Khuba International and the Southwest Conservation District, she also builds coalitions with several urban farmers located in Ithaca, NY, and New Haven, CT who desire technical support in community agriculture and agroforestry. She holds a Master of Arts in Religion at Yale Divinity School (YDS) and a Master of Environmental Management at Yale School of Environment (YSE), which has fostered her technical skills with an eco-womanist theology or a faith that centers the voices of Black & Indigenous women as they engage in earth justice. She brings her love for people, plants, and the arts into oral history that collects the intimate food histories of growers and community organizers.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**Andy Gedeon & Anna Kelly, Soulshine Earth Forest Farm
Building a Mushroom Forest Farm**

[Panel] Experienced Forest Farmers Discussion: Realities & Opportunities

Andy Gedeon has a B.S. in Biology (Pre-Medicine) from Ohio University. He spent time in Beijing learning about Traditional Chinese Medicine as well as working in the bio-medical industry. Anna Kelly previously managed an organic farm, as well as ran their farmer's market operation. Andy & Anna met in 2011 and purchased their land in 2016. Starting with an empty lot, they built their house and homestead with their own two hands. In 2021 they decided to start their mushroom forest farm and have been growing their farm and mushroom supplement business ever since.

Jim Hamilton, NC State Cooperative Extension

The Forest In Forest Farming: Site Selection from the Canopy Down

Book Signing

Dr. Jim Hamilton has been a college instructor, Extension agent, and County Extension Director in western North Carolina for 25 years. While his formal education and training focused on forestry & Christmas tree production, he has way more fun working with landowners who want to learn more about forest farming. He's also the author of *The Last Entry* a coming-of-age novel set under the backdrop of the ginseng trade.

Joe Ginseng, Up the Creek Farms

So You Want to Grow Forest Farmed Ginseng and other Woodland Medicinals?

[Panel] Experienced Forest Farmers Discussion: Realities & Opportunities

Joseph moved to the High Country of western North Carolina after his combat deployment to Iraq created a desire to find peace, balance, and healing through working with the land. He found his "dharma", or path, when he discovered the immense biodiversity of the Appalachian Mountains and the iconic American Ginseng. With family land, he began growing Ginseng and other medicinals over 25 years ago, and now creates his own product with the roots. He teaches workshops about Ginseng, its history, uses, and growing information to a wide variety of groups including combat veterans, wellness retreats, and student groups.

Victor Harris, Minority Landowner Magazine

[Panel] Exploring Solutions to Forest Farming Barriers

Book Signing

Victor L. Harris is founder and president of Cierra Publishing Company, and publisher and editor of Minority Landowner Magazine, which celebrates 20 years this year. Minority Landowner chronicles the challenges and successes of farmers, ranchers and forest landowners across the country. Its mission is to help farmers improve productivity, increase profitability, and maintain ownership of their land. He's a graduate of Tuskegee University and North Carolina State University earning his Bachelor of Science in forestry at NCSU. Victor worked 20 years with state forestry agencies in Virginia and North Carolina. A native of Athens, Georgia and the seventh born of 10 children, he spent his childhood exploring the forest surrounding the housing project where he grew up.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Sara Jackson, Virginia Tech University

**Securing the Forest Understory: Strategies for Protecting High Value Botanicals
Forest Farming Games, Forest Fables 1 & 2**

Sara Jackson is grateful to work as an Agroforestry Project Coordinator at Virginia Tech. Working remotely from her forest farm Bat Cave, NC, she collaborates with VT Agroforestry, NC State, and regional Appalachian Forest Farmer Coalition (AFFC) partners to advance forest farming resources, non-timber forest products, and woodland stewardship across the Appalachian region and beyond. She manages the AFFC and Catalyzing Agroforestry websites, including other initiatives, platforms, and community outreach for the AFFC and the Agroforestry Regional Knowledge Exchange Network (ARKx). Beyond this role, she is a forest schooling mom, forest and digital consultant, naturalist, photographer and educational game creator who loves the company of creeks, trees, forest botanicals, and moss.

Ming Tao Jiang, Marathon Ginseng International

American Ginseng, From Farming to Clinical Applications

[Panel] Grounding Modern Forest Farming in History & Traditional Practices

Dr. Ming Tao Jiang, MD, PhD, is a physician-scientist, ginseng grower, and international entrepreneur. Trained in cardiology in China, he earned his PhD in Physiology in 1995 and conducted cardiovascular research at UW-Madison and the Medical College of Wisconsin. He founded Marathon Ginseng International in 2010. His work has attracted coverage from The New York Times, CCTV, TV Tokyo, and Nikkei Asia. Honored with a 2026 Congressional Medal for Outstanding Asian Americans, he will share 16 years of experience in American ginseng cultivation, international trade, and emerging clinical applications, bridging traditional medicine and modern biomedical science.

Korey Largo, Virginia Tech University

Forest Farming of Slippery Elm in Eastern Kentucky

Korey Largo is a graduate student at Virginia Tech working with the Agroforestry team in the Department of Forest Resource Environmental Conservation. He grew up in New Mexico and attended Warren Wilson College in North Carolina for his undergraduate degree. Korey has an expansive career in forestry, urban forestry and silviculture.

Erica Marks, Yew Mountain Center

Forest Fables - Multimedia Ecological Storytelling I, II & Forest Snacks and Crafts

Erica Marks is the director of the Yew Mountain Center where people learn about and practice forest farming in Pocahontas County, WV. She enjoys producing creative shows with youth, writing and playing music, teaching science, and riding bikes.

Craig Mauney, NC Cooperative Extension

Growing Yellowroot (*Xanthorrhiza simplicissima*) Successfully as a Forest Farming Crop

Craig Mauney has worked as an Extension agent for the NC Cooperative Extension for over 25 years. He is presently the Extension Area Specialized Agent in commercial vegetable and fruit production in the 39 Western most counties of North Carolina. He graduated from Berea College, Berea, Kentucky and has a lot of experience in all aspects of commercial vegetable and fruit production. His special interests are woodland botanicals and unusual edibles like pawpaw. He grew up in the mountains of Western North Carolina and has a small forest farm in Zirconia, NC – Shady Hollow Farm.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Brandy McCann, Virginia Tech University Plant Energy Yoga

Brandy Renee McCann's (PhD, Human Development) research and writing is focused on Appalachian culture and wellness across the life span. Brandy is from the WV coal fields and is a wild plant enthusiast with over 20 years experience practicing yoga. Plant Energy Yoga combines her interest in aging, yoga, and bioregional herbalism.

Ian Nichols, Virginia Tech University Soil Acoustics

Wildlife and Forest Farming

Ian Nichols started his career as a wildlife photographer focused on conservation issues and earned his PhD to pursue science, outreach, and conservation. He has taught in the classroom, lab, and in field studies, though feels more at home when teaching in a natural setting. Utilizing camera traps and acoustic recording units, his research focuses on managing landscapes for people and biodiversity. As someone who has visited parts of the world few have, and seen wildlife that is rarely seen, Ian wants to share the importance of nature with others, and to help lift-up the next generation of conservationists.

Rachel Palkovitz, James Madison University Ginseng Genetics and Implications for Conservation and Policy

Rachel Palkovitz is an Assistant Professor in the School of Integrated Sciences at James Madison University. Her research focuses on the many connections between plant biology and human livelihoods, especially native medicinal plant species like American ginseng.

Christopher Parker, Forest Farmacy Forest Farming Mushrooms & Fungi

[Panel] Grounding Modern Forest Farming in History & Traditional Practices Book Signing

Christopher Parker, a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, is a Culture Keeper—maintaining fungal culture libraries, seed and spore banks, and the living knowledge of how to use fungi to regenerate forests and feed people. He brings decades of hands-on experience in mushroom cultivation, forest tending practices, and regenerative design. He's the grounded Appalachian soul of this place.

Anna Plattner, Wild Hudson Valley Securing the Forest Understory

[Panel] Experienced Forest Farmers Discussion: Realities & Opportunities

Anna Plattner is a farmer and educator with Wild Hudson Valley, a forest farm and educational organization based in New York State's Catskill Mountains and Hudson Valley. Husband-wife team Anna Plattner and Justin Wexler manage large-scale wild-simulated ginseng plantings, a mushroom laying yard, a diversified native fruit & nut tree orchard, and a wide variety of wild-stewarded plants and mushrooms. Wild Hudson Valley's Eco Camp offers overnight stays, guided walks, and workshops. The forest farm offers seasonal foraged CSA boxes, ginseng roots and tea blends, and ginseng and ramp/wild leek planting stock. Anna holds a BS Cum Laude in Natural Resources from Cornell University, where she met and trained with the late American ginseng expert Bob Beyfuss to oversee the planting of over 250 acres of wild-simulated ginseng.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Roy Ramey, Avalon Farms

Farm the Forest: Conservation, Opportunity, and Income from the Appalachian Woodlands

Roy Ramey, the Minuteman Farmer from West Virginia, is a farmer and educator focused on regenerative agriculture, forest farming, and maple syrup production. Drawing from hands-on experience, he teaches others how to work with their land and natural resources to build productive, sustainable farming practices. Roy is also a retired Army officer whose military career included leadership, professional military education, and teaching in both classroom and field environments. Today, he brings that experience as an instructor and practitioner to helping others explore practical opportunities in farming, homesteading, and forest-based agriculture.

Bill Rogers, Double R Bar Ranch & Farm, LLC

Well... Dang! Minimizing Risk to Maximize Profit

Bill's 30-year career has spanned international defense advisory work, government contracting, litigation, compliance, organizational transformation, military operations, and corporate strategy. I have advised senior military leaders, federal agencies, executive teams, and boards of directors on risk management, governance, operational resilience, workforce strategy, and complex legal and business operations. Building a diversified agritourism and rural lifestyle business in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley centered on regenerative farming, including sheep and alpacas, camping and farm tours, historic Airbnb accommodations, wedding and event venues, and family-oriented outdoor experiences.

Shawn Swartz, NC Forester

The Forest In Forest Farming: Site Selection from the Canopy Down

Shawn Swartz has been a forester for nearly three decades. He is a silviculturist with a special interest in forest restoration. His approach to forest management is one in which landowner objectives are met through the application of forest ecology and an understanding of the natural disturbance regimes. He has extensive experience in agroforestry including silvopasture, alley cropping, mushroom production, and forest farming. He has also worked to restore forest communities such as bottomland hardwoods, shortleaf and longleaf pine, and spruce-fir. Shawn also has worked to restore individual species to the landscape such as eastern hemlock, American chestnut, and various birds. He has technical experience in forestry such as invasive species control, prescribed fire, forest recreation, and small-scale timber harvesting and lumber production.

Nick Wrenn, Living Soil Tree Farm

Air Pruning Beds for Trees & Forest Botanicals

Nick Wrenn has had a lifelong connection with trees, transitioning from a childhood in the woods and a background in landscaping and civil engineering to professional plant work in 2020. After completing the Soil Food Web School courses in 2021, he expanded his expertise into permaculture, compost production, and agroforestry. For the past four years, Nick has operated a tree nursery and food forest in Cedar Grove, NC, growing thousands of mostly native, food-producing trees. Now living in Bassett, VA, he established a second nursery site in 2024 while using the NC location to research low-input tree establishment techniques.

POSTER SESSION

SATURDAY OCTOBER 24TH FROM 4-5:30PM

Berson, Rachel. School of Integrated Sciences, James Madison University.

Biotechnology Applications for Medicinal Plant Conservation and Cultivation

Cultivating medicinal plant species sustainably requires continuous and diverse sourcing of genetic material, including from wild plant populations threatened with extirpation in their native habitats. This project explores the convergence of biotechnology and environmental sustainability through two primary objectives: 1) developing an integrated germplasm conservation conceptual framework involving seed-banking, ancient DNA (aDNA), and hydroponics, and 2) developing and validating a standardized protocol for cultivating medicinal species within a tailored hydroponic system. In doing so, I evaluate the challenges and benefits of seed banking for long-term genetic preservation and posterity, aDNA for understanding historical genetic shifts and resilience, and the use of controlled hydroponic growth systems to optimize nutrient delivery and control for confounding variables in common garden experimental models. Finally, I explore how integrating these biotechnological applications provides a scalable model for research as well as science outreach and education, effectively decoupling medicinal production from the exploitation of wild habitats. Ultimately, the goal of this work is to contribute to stabilizing herbal medicine supply chains, safeguarding the genetic integrity of medicinal plant species for future generations.

Chamberlain, Jim [1], Small, Christine [2], Huish, Ryan [3], Commender, Katie [4], Taylor, Marquitta [5]. 1, Forest Farmer, Independent, 2, Professor of Biology, Radford University, 3, Associate Professor of Biology, University of Virginia's College at Wise, 4, Director of Agroforestry, Appalachian Sustainable Development, 5, Radford University.

Goldenseal: Toward Sustainable Harvesting of an Iconic Native Medicinal Plant

Hydrastis canadensis L. (Goldenseal) is one of the most sought-after medicinal plants from Appalachian hardwood forests. It is essential to regional biodiversity and to the livelihood of many of the region's communities. The harvest and sale of the plant's roots and rhizomes have and continue to contribute to the forest-based bioeconomy of this economically marginalized region, with deep and strong cultural connections to edible and medicinal forest natural resources and support for the global herbal products industry. Ensuring that the gathering and growing of goldenseal is sustainable requires science-based knowledge of harvest impacts on plant populations, best propagation practices, and phenological characteristics today and under changing climatic conditions. Using established ecological and agricultural research methods, this study examined the influence of harvesting and growing practices on natural and cultivated goldenseal populations and implications for improved forest farming. This study has improved our understanding of goldenseal phenology, changing perspectives on harvest timing. The study of goldenseal, and other medicinal forest plants, is critical to the health and well-being of our forests and the economy based on these natural resources. The future of the herbal products industry is dependent on sustainable gathering and growing of these ecologically and culturally significant forest resources.

POSTER SESSION

Juster, Lauren. Post Doctoral Researcher, Virginia Tech.

Non-Timber Forest Product Knowledge, Access, and Livelihood Value in a Northwest Uganda Refugee Settlement

Kissin, Audrey. Adaptive Agroforestry Principles and Teaching (ADAPT) - University of New Hampshire

Testing forest farming systems for sustainable co-production of timber and non-timber forest products in New Hampshire

The practice of forest farming is quickly gaining popularity for many reasons but importantly for its ability to provide short term income since overstory species are managed on a much longer time frame. This supplemental income can assist landowners in making sustainable management decisions while also bolstering the local economy and conducting restoration work of threatened species. While the cultivation of forest edibles and medicinals has exploded in Appalachia, the systems developed there are not directly applicable in New England due to the differing forest and soil types. My proposed research will focus on integrating the cultivation of selected high value herbaceous species into current sustainable forest management practices. The aim of this research is to build the knowledge base needed for providing practical guidelines for the implementation of forest farming. Therefore, the project will test both the effects of adding fertilizer and lime in addition to variable light conditions on the growth of the selected species. The current proposed high value herbs include American ginseng, goldenseal, black cohosh, bloodroot, and saffron. These species have been selected with both physiological and economic feasibility in mind. The results of this project will highlight the appropriate silvicultural treatments and soil amendment practices to implement in the cultivation of the selected herbaceous species. These outcomes will help guide the integration of forest farming and silvicultural systems in New England and provide forest landowners with an ecologically sound and yet profitable method of forest management to add to their toolbox.



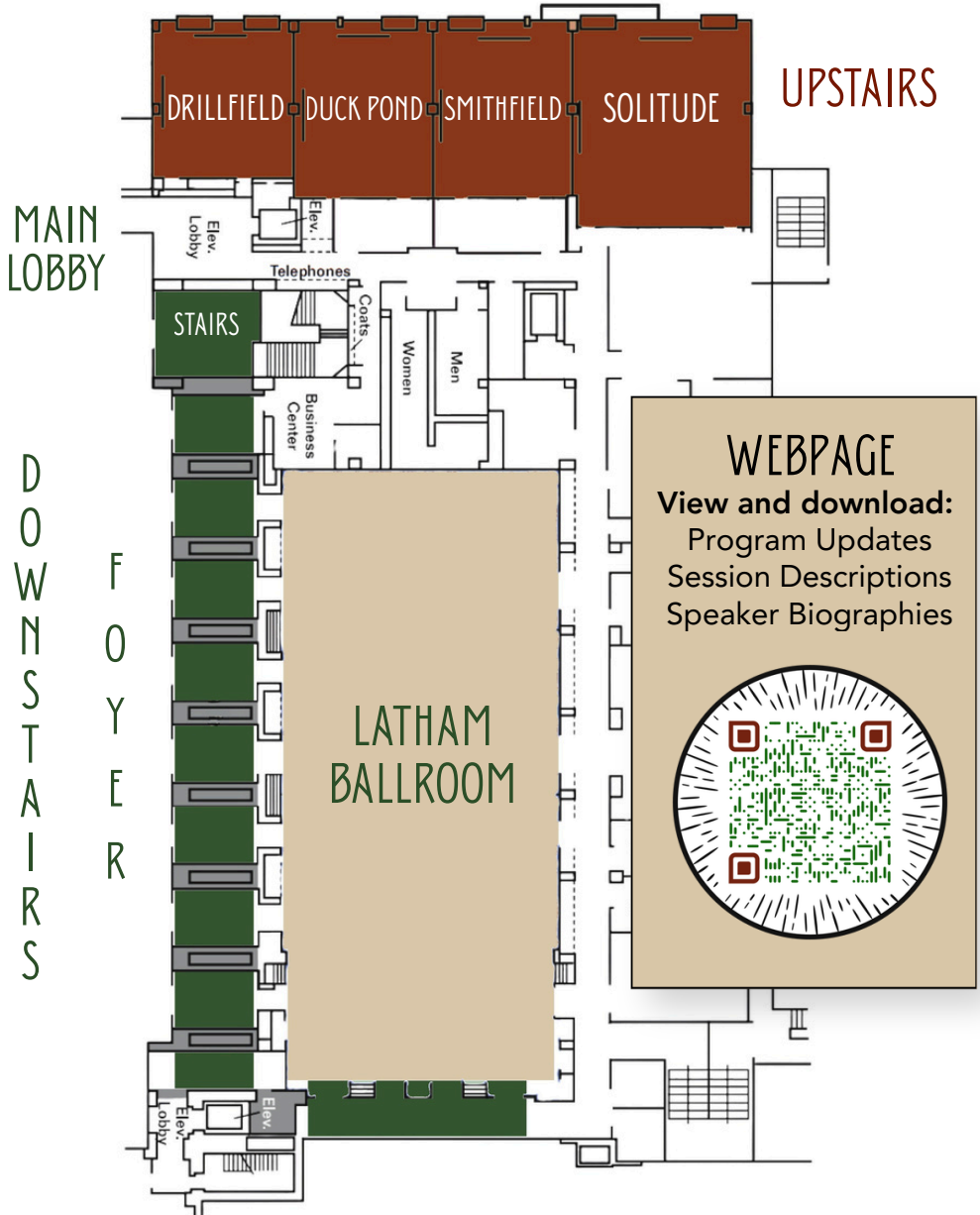
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