

SOLID GROUND NEWSLETTER



Team Talks

Hello, my name is Melanie Desch and I am one of the Solid Ground Co- Coordinators! I've been farming in CT for 4 years and started a flower and herb farm in 2022, called Foliota Farm.

The transition from working on a farm to being the one making all the decisions presented a lot of unexpected challenges! When it came time to battle a new pest invasion, plan a CSA, or figure out how to manage our soils and water, I kept rushing to the internet. Online advice can be difficult to wade through as we jump from scientific, research-based publications, to YouTube videos that don't take cost or labor into consideration. This is where the new Skill Share training series that I am currently working on (starting in June) comes in!

A Skill Share is a group-based learning opportunity, with farmers who come together to learn a new skill. Skill Shares give you the opportunity to visit great Connecticut farms and learn

This Month

Team Talks- Meet Melanie

April Farm Tasks: Soil Prep & Transplanting

Upcoming Events

Grants Open

TOPP Consultations

Wash Station Video Series

Partner Highlight: AFT Soil Testing



SOIL PREP AND TRANSPLANTING

The weather is warming bit by bit, and there are actually days where we can see the sun coming out. That means it's time to prep fields and get ready for transplanting all the seedlings you've been caring for, or direct seeding those crops that are ready to go straight into the soil.

With the rush that spring creates to get everything ready for the growing season, we all want to try and do things that are best for our land and soil, but sometimes things slip past, get forgotten, etc. So we're going to try and provide you with some friendly reminders

from ag professionals and farmers who have their systems down pat.

Each Skill Share group will meet several times over the growing season, to deepen your knowledge, see topics as they progress throughout the season, and hear from others farms how they are dealing with similar issues on their properties. Topics offered this year include CSA Management, Cover Cropping, Land Evaluation, Chicken Processing, and more. I can't wait to learn alongside you this summer and I hope that you'll consider [joining one of these new Skill Shares!](#)

of resources that you can access to make sure your spring is successful.

-First, if you haven't tested your soil (yes we know we're a broken record), test it! Of course the [UConn Soil Lab](#) is what we encourage folks to use but...

-If you're having trouble understanding your soil tests regardless of where you got them from, or are working on land that has changed or is new to you, perhaps it's time to utilize a FREE consultation with our [Soil Expert- Kip Kolesinskas](#). You can sign up for an on site visit where he'll help you understand your soil and fields better so you have a better outcome with your crops!

-Wondering about what kind of amendments you might need, or concerned about plant health and fertilization? Schedule a FREE consultation with our Extension veggie experts [Shuresh or Maggie](#)- you don't have to wait until disease starts showing up on your summer squash or bugs start eating your tomatoes. They are willing to come out *now* to help you understand your plant health so your transplants thrive.

-Speaking of Maggie and Shuresh, they've put together a great fact sheet about [Managing Cover Crops in Spring](#) that you can read to help you understand termination and planting for weed suppression, soil health, and attracting beneficial insects.

-And for planting out, which kind of mulch should you use? [This article from Univ. of Minnesota](#) explores different mulch options that you can use, but if you're set on plastic, consider using biodegradable plastic mulch which our Extension Educator Shuresh Ghimire has done tons of research on (as represented [in this article here!](#))

Happy planting! And crossing our fingers for good weather, low winds, and lack of frosts!



SOLID GROUND

Upcoming Events

Walk-Behind Tractor Training:
Apr. 13, Keney Park
Sustainability Project, Hartford
- 9AM to 3PM

Irrigation & Water on the Farm: April 20, Brown Farm, Scotland - 9AM-3PM

Safe and Efficient Water Management: Apr. 28, Russo's Roots Farm, Canterbury- 1PM-4PM *FREE*

Energy Efficiency on the Farm
Date: May 5, Four Root Farm, East Haddam- 1PM-4PM *FREE*

Soil Health Assessment 3 Ways:
May 11, Sunset Farm, Naugatuck- 10AM-2PM *FREE*

Soil Health Benefits of No-Till Production: Jun. 2, Sweet Acre Farm, Lebanon- 1PM-4PM *FREE*

Upcoming:

Partner Events

Online Microscopy Training with CT NOFA: April 10, 17, & 24, Virtual- 5PM to 6:30PM- Full, ask about waitlist.

Regenerative Farming for Livestock Feed Crops: Apr. 16 North Stonington Grange- 6:30 PM

Finding Your Market Seminar: Apr 18, Young Building, Storrs- 6 to 7:30PM

In-Person Microscopy Training with CT NOFA: May 4, 9, 18, & Jun 8, Multiple locations- 11AM to 2PM

Urban Ag Conservation Tour: Apr. 29 th, Reservoir Community Farm, Bridgeport- 1PM to 3PM

2nd Annual Northeast Disability and Agriculture Conference: May 18, Simsbury United Methodist Church, Simsbury- 10AM to 3PM

Grants Opportunities

Connecticut's Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG): DUE APR 14

Climate Smart Agricultural Implementation Grant for Northwest CT: DUE MAY 31

Ocean Hour Farm Grant Giving program: DUE MAY 31

Job Opportunity

County Program Technician position, located in the New London FSA County Office, in Norwich, CT DUE APR 29TH

Avian Flu Update

Critical news alert! The highly pathogenic avian flu has now been detected in Dairy Cows in the U.S. In order to help you stay up-to-date, Dept of Ag has put together a webpage to provide best practices and help you stay aware of its development. [You can find this website here.](#)

TOPP Consultations

You've started your farm, or are getting ready to start it, but in addition to wanting to learn best practices for farming, there are multiple questions you have surrounding your farm business. This consultation is meant to provide new and beginning farmers with the support to find resources in acquiring funding, farming with the climate in mind, transitioning or beginning to farm organically, marketing your farm, or where to find resources that you know are out there, but you haven't been able to pin down yet.

Saquana Seltzer and Becca Toms- UConn Extension Solid Ground team members, are here to help by scheduling a 1 hour video meeting with you to address questions you may have as you enter, or continue, in the field of farming. Each consultation will be tailored to the information you provide and will try to connect you with the appropriate resources throughout the state to give you the support you need to farm well, and run your business well too!

SIGN UP HERE



Video Highlight

We know many of you have crops that are growing and need to be washed during the winter months, but many of you will be getting ready to drag hoses out and clean out sinks in the next couple weeks to prepare for all the washing that needs to happen. Well we did a video series on wash station set ups last year that perhaps you'd like to check out- whether you're revamping the old or creating something! These videos highlight how Muddy Roots, River Ridge, Northwest Corner, and Beets & Blooms Farms have set up their spaces to keep things clean!

View the series here





AFT- New England Soil Health Survey

Partner Highlight

American Farmland Trust New England and the USDA ARS Food Systems Research Unit have a new program! Farms in Connecticut are eligible to receive free soil health testing on up to three fields after completing a short survey.

This New England Soil Health Survey will build our understanding of the impacts of conserving farmland and conservation planning on soil health in New England. Over the next two years, our goal is to reach 200 farmers and collect soil samples on 600 fields. Farmers and conservation staff can collect and submit samples independently or request support from AFT staff. To request AFT staff support, please reach out to the New England Soil Health Specialist, Kevin Antoszewski, at kantoszewski@farmland.org.

Data collected as a part of this project will be anonymized. We hope to learn about how farmers think about soil health, what practices achieve results, and how farm planning impacts soil health outcomes.

Find out more here



See you next month!

For questions surrounding this newsletter,
please reach out to
rebecca.toms@uconn.edu

Summer Skill Shares!

Check out our newest series of learning events coming this growing season: Skill Shares! These groups will meet 2-4 times throughout 2024 in smaller groups (8-10) to discuss:

- **Soil Health and Microscopy**
(June 5, 12 & 19 Virtual and June 22nd at Common Ground)
- **Poultry Processing for Retail**
(June 29- Coruscant Farm, July 10t - Muddy Roots, and Aug 23 at Tolland Ag Center)
- **CSA Operation and Management** (June 22- Long Table Farm, July 24- Cloverleigh Farm, and August 23rd-Provider Farm)
- **Evaluating Land for Agricultural Use** (Sept. 8- Gunther Farm and Sept. 15- Off Center Farm and Beets and Blooms)
- **Cover Cropping and Crop Rotation** (June 3, Aug 12, and Sept. 23 at Massaro Farm)
- **Hemp Fiber Cultivation**
(more info coming soon)
- **Natural Weed and Pest Management Strategies**
(more info coming soon)

Keep your eyes on our [Upcoming Trainings page](#) on our website and on our listserv for more details!