

SOLID GROUND NEWSLETTER



Meet our Consultants

Meet **Becca Toms**- the Food System Communications and Outreach Assistant who offers free consultations on marketing and branding! Becca has been farming for 10+ years and currently is co-farming with her business partner at Off Center Farm in Woodbridge. Over the years as she has worked at numerous farms and often found herself in the role of running social media, working on creating fliers and marketing tools for products, and navigating new ways of doing business. After finding the right tools, she found the work enjoyable because it was about getting to know people- what they liked, didn't like, and why they wanted to be part of the farm. It wasn't always easy because the good comes with the bad - if you want to sell, yes, looks do mean a lot...and so does social media, a presence on the internet in some format, having a point of sales system, and knowing how to best present yourself to customers. However, she also found that with

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Summer can be hard for us to find the time to get together as farmers and learn, but it can be one of the most valuable learning times- to see everything as it's happening and learn from other farmers in the field. That's why we started doing **SKILL SHARES** last summer. These small group meet-ups take place during the 2025 season and will give you the opportunity to learn with and from other farmers in the state. We will be putting together skill shares based on high tunnels, livestock in pasture, and land evaluation. Stay tuned for more details that will be coming your way soon!

a couple of tweaks, and trying hard to showcase the heart of an organization, that helped make some of the “hard” things much easier.

She loves working with farmers and seeing their logo ideas come to life and all the creative ideas farms have to bring their businesses to the community. That is what makes our small CT farms so unique and special- they are the reflection of the people who run them.

If you would like to sign up for a FREE consultations with Becca, or learn more about our consultants and what they have to offer you as a farmer, visit solidground.extension.uconn.edu/consultations/

SOLID GROUND

Upcoming Events

Ag Mechanics

All Ag Mechanics classes are \$25 each to help pay for the cost of the class. If this amount is a barrier to you, please reach out to see if there are resources available to assist you with sign up

March 15- [Chainsaw Safety & Use](#) - 9am-3pm, Mansfield Forests, **Wait list only!**

Mar 22- [Tractor Safety, Maintenance, and Operation](#) - 9am-3pm, Rockville High School, Vernon CT **Wait list only!**

Mar 29- [Intermediate Chainsaw](#) - 9am-3pm, Mansfield Forests, (Specific location shared closer to the date)

Apr 9- [BCS/Walk Behind Tractor](#) - 9am-3pm, River Ridge Farm, Portland CT

MARCH FARM TASKS: IT'S ABOUT THE SOIL

We encourage you to get your soil testing done in the fall, near the end of the growing season, but we know how things go.. and most of you are going to go out in your fields in the next month or two to get soil tested before planting, sowing seeds, letting livestock out, etc.

Haven't done soil testing before? As our UConn Soil Lab says, “Soil testing eliminates the guesswork many farmers face when deciding the kinds and amounts of fertilizers or soil amendments they should purchase and apply. Each soil test report contains recommended amounts of limestone and/or fertilizer needed for optimum plant growth. Knowing how much to apply saves time and money. It is a smart decision to test the soil every few years. Furthermore, it is particularly important in new bed installations or in established plantings that are not performing as well as expected.” Testing every few years is especially important for new plantings or struggling crops, but it doesn't hurt if you want to do it yearly!

If you need help, we're going to bring back an oldie, but a goodie- a “how to” video with famed Kip Kolesinskaskas on “How take a soil sample” in our video highlights section of this newsletter.

So, what does a soil test provide? At the UConn Soil Lab, results include:

- Levels of key nutrients (Calcium, Magnesium, Phosphorus, Potassium)
- Soil pH and lead presence
- Trace element analysis (Boron, Copper, Iron, etc.)
- Fertilizer and limestone recommendations

This data helps you fine-tune your soil management, ensuring balanced nutrients and tracking long-term soil health. And as you know, soil health is at the basis of any healthy farm. So get your soil tested! Instructions and forms are available at: soiltesting.cahn.uconn.edu

- The Solid Ground Team



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Upcoming:

Partner Events

[UConn Extension's Farm Biosecurity Workshop in New London County](#): Mar 20, New London County Extension Ctr, Norwich- 6PM to 7:30 PM

[UConn Extension's Farm Biosecurity Workshop in Litchfield County](#): Mar 22, Litchfield County Extension Ctr, Torrington- 6PM to 7:30 PM

[No More Normal: a Climate Adaptation Farmer Roundtable](#): Mar 24, Star Light Gardens, Durham- 2PM to 4:30PM

[Farmers Market Nutrition Program Farmer Certification Meetings](#): Mar 26 & 31 and Apr 11 & 23, Locations vary- 10AM to 12 OR 1:30PM to 3:30PM

[CT Compost Alliance On-Farm Compost Tour](#): Mar 27, Long Table Farm, Lyme CT- 4PM to 6PM

[Pasture Based Systems for Sustainable Livestock Production Series](#): Mar 31 & Apr 9, online- 10AM to 12PM

[Climate Mitigation Field Day](#): Apr 15, Gresczyk Farms, New Hartford- 3PM

[Climate Mitigation Field Day](#): Apr 16, Bishops Orchard, Guilford- 9:30 AM

[3rd National DisABILITY and Agriculture Conference](#): Apr 16, Camp Harkness, Waterford- 8AM to 4PM

Grants

[Small Farms Innovation Projects](#): DUE MAR 15

[CoFund Regranting Program](#)- DUE MAR 31

[Northeast Regional Food Business Center Business Builder Sub-Awards](#): DUE- APR 7

[Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure \(RFSI\) Program](#)- DUE APR 16



Through CT-NOFA's TOPP project, Steadfast Farms (Bethlehem, CT) announced that its processing and slaughter facility is pending USDA Organic Certification for Poultry Processing. With final validation expected in May 2025, this milestone will enable Steadfast Farms to support poultry producers with organic-certified processing services for chicken, duck, and turkey—a crucial step in strengthening New England's local and sustainable food systems.

As part of the rigorous certification process, Steadfast Farms has worked closely with Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) in Connecticut and Massachusetts for the past six months to ensure full compliance with organic processing standards. This involved comprehensive checks on all aspects of operations, from cleaning supplies to processing techniques, in accordance with USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulations.

Many other farms are experiencing aid from CT NOFA in getting their operations certified organic and are even mentoring with local farmers that have been through the process and can share their wisdom. If you would like to be involved in this process and transition your farm operation to certified organic, check out the link below to see how you can get help!

[LEARN MORE HERE](#)



SOIL HEALTH SERIES

Video Highlight

Our soil is the foundation of all that we do in farming, so it is integral that we understand our own soils, how soil is tested, and how soil reacts to different conditions. This month, we wanted to re-highlight some videos we've put together which dive deep into how to take a soil test, what work goes into testing and understanding your soil, and how different soil types react to extreme rainfall events. Give them a look and see what you can learn about YOUR soils!

[View the Videos here](#)



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SMALL FARM

INNOVATION

PROJECTS



FIND OUT MORE
AND APPLY

SMALL FARMS INNOVATION PROJECT

Do you love the creativity in finding new solutions to old farm problems? Do you have an innovative idea that you don't feel you could get together on your own? Our partners over at the UConn College of Engineering and CAHNR have put together a project: Small Farms Innovation Projects, where students and faculty work to make your ideas reality. You can apply to get a participation stipend, technical assistance, and up to \$2000 in supplies to support your project.

Ideas can include a new tool, scaling down larger equipment, making existing designs you created more durable, data tracking/management ideas, or upgrades to current infrastructure!

To be eligible you must:

- be a production farmer located in CT
- have at least a year production experience operating your own farm
- have a cool farm innovation idea that will better your operation!

Deadline to apply is **March 15!**

[Find Out More](#)



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

Soil Health Survey

At UConn Extension, we're conducting a survey to better understand your experiences, needs and interests to inform new soil health programming. Your input is highly valuable to help plan and design training, events, resources and guidance. Beyond the benefit of informing new programming at UConn, by completing this survey, you will also have the opportunity to enter a prize draw to receive either a \$30 Johnny's Seeds gift card or \$30 Premier 1 gift card.

Your participation in this assessment is anonymous, and should not take longer than 5-10 minutes

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Amelia Magistrali by emailing amelia.magistrali@uconn.edu or phone 860-255-8667.

[Fill out the Survey here](#)

Grass Fed Beef Hides

Northeast Grass-Fed Beef Initiative (NGBI) is working on a grant-funded project aimed at developing a value chain for the leather hides from regeneratively-raised cattle. The goal is to support producers and prevent waste. This project is focusing in Southeastern New England [with 2-minute survey here.](#)

Questions? contact Cristin Nelson, Northeast Grass-Fed Beef Initiative, cristin@ngbi.org.

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