

Virginia Soil Health Coalition

2024 Annual Report



Mary Sketch Bryant, Director, Virginia Soil Health Coalition



Our vision

Healthy soil supporting productive farms, thriving ecosystems, and resilience communities

Our mission

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition strengthens and supports a broad collaborative network that improves and expands soil health across all of Virginia's landscapes.

We believe in:

- Leveraging the power of a network that represents all of Virginia's diverse landscapes and communities
- Pursuing and sharing new and innovative science-based solutions
- Enhancing the resilience, productivity, and profitability of Virginia's farms
- Including and engaging all people who care for Virginia's lands, especially those who have been historically marginalized
- Protecting and nourishing Virginia's soil to benefit future generations of people, farms, communities, and natural resources.

Priorities:

1. Build the Coalition's capacity for leadership and expansion
2. Enhance partner collaboration to drive innovation, implementation, and impact
3. Cultivate awareness through education, outreach, and advocacy



Advancing Soil Health across Virginia in 2024

Productive Farms, Thriving Ecosystems, Resilient Communities

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition (VSHC) is a growing statewide network of agency, nonprofit, and academic partners that is embedded in Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension. The VSHC was formed to strengthen and support a broad, collaborative network that improves and expands soil health across all of Virginia's landscapes. The Coalition has been transformed over the last three years from an informal group of 12 organizations who endorsed Virginia USDA-NRCS' four core soil health principles to a diverse network of 47 public and private organizations working across the Commonwealth to increase awareness and implementation of practices that build soil health.

As a convener and coordinator, the Coalition has a unique, birds-eye view of what is happening on the ground, where there are gaps, and where there are opportunities for innovation and collaboration. By coordinating partners to address these gaps and opportunities, the network plays a key role in accelerating implementation to reach state and national water quality, climate, and other economic and environmental goals. Led by a Steering Committee, the VSHC serves as a convener, communicator, and coordinator. Our impacts since the Coalition was formalized in 2021 include:

- 47 partner organizations, growing from original 12
- 11 quarterly meetings (average 75 participants per meeting)
- 92 podcast episodes with >15,000 downloads
- Outreach at 45 events reaching >5,000 people
- >\$2.5M in funding received through the VSHC for collaborative soil health work
- 14 soil health trainings reaching over 200 practitioners
- >20,000 acres of no-till, cover crop, and rotational grazing through farmer-to-farmer mentoring.

The Coalition continues to expand, developing new partnerships and collaborations across the state and the entire Chesapeake Bay region in support of **our Strategic Plan** that runs through 2025. We have continued to expand our outreach and education efforts across the state with a specific focus on engagement of historically underserved producers. We look forward to continuing to innovate through programming and network development in 2025.



Our 2024 Impact

Build the Coalition's Capacity for Leadership and Expansion

Expanding Our Network

In 2024, our Coalition grew to include 47 partner organizations, a significant increase from our initial 12 in 2021 and 40 in 2023. New partnerships this year include the Virginia Turfgrass Council, Conservation Partners, the Conservation Management Institute, and others, reflecting our ongoing commitment to broadening our impact.

Serving Urban and Suburban Landscapes

As part of a Chesapeake Bay Trust Capacity Building Grant, the Coalition worked over the past year to expand our reach beyond the agricultural realm to serve urban and suburban landscapes. We brought on a part-time associate to lead our network mapping and capacity building work including leading trainings and workshops for urban and suburban landscape professionals.

Supporting Historically Underserved Producers

We facilitated crucial relationship-building efforts between the 2020 Farmers Cooperative and Virginia NRCS to enhance conservation delivery for historically underserved producers. This included hosting multiple “conservation speed dating” events that brought producers and service providers together in meaningful dialogue.



Enhance partner collaboration to drive innovation, implementation, and impact

Advancing Soil Health Training

We continued our multi-year soil health train-the-trainer program for agricultural service providers, which included hosting the Farm to Table Webinar Series with Dr. Elizabeth Heilman.

Facilitating Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring

Ongoing facilitation of a farmer-to-farmer mentoring network in partnership with Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, Virginia No Till Alliance, and Virginia Cooperative Extension resulted in over 5,000 acres of no-till, cover crops, and rotational grazing in 2024.

Co-Hosting the Virginia Farm to Table Conference

Nearly 200 participants joined us for the annual Virginia Farm to Table Conference, supported by months of dedicated planning meetings with our diverse Planning Committee.

Leveraging USDA Climate Smart Commodity Projects

Our coordination efforts brought together partners across Virginia working on USDA Climate Smart Commodity Projects. Key activities included an in-person forum with 30+ attendees in July and a virtual Quarterly Gathering in November with 50 participants.

Strengthening Farmer-Focused Partnerships

We collaborated with the Virginia Tech/NRCS Integrated Conservation Agronomy Program to conduct training and outreach activities, including multiple field days. Additionally, we supported the Innovation Roundtable in partnership with Sustainable Chesapeake, Virginia NRCS, and Virginia Tech. The Roundtable brings together innovative grain producers across the state for knowledge exchange, field trial development, and more.



Cultivate awareness through education, outreach, and advocacy

Expanding the 4 The Soil Awareness Initiative

4 The Soil is an initiative of the Virginia Soil Health Coalition and Virginia Cooperative Extension to raise awareness of soil as a critical natural resource for current and future generations. In 2024, the 4 The Soil Awareness Initiative reached new heights:

- Produced 26 biweekly episodes of the “4 The Soil: A Conversation” podcast, featuring farmers, researchers, and entrepreneurs, with over 5,000 downloads.
- Published biweekly newsletters for a growing listserv of approximately 600 subscribers.
- Designed and distributed the 4 The Soil coloring book to more than 700 individuals, along with distributing over 1,000 soil health stickers, bookmarks, shirts, and other materials at events statewide.
- Maintained a vibrant social media presence to amplify the initiative’s reach.
- Published “We are 4 The Soil” song and music video by the Flip Charts with over 2,000 views to date

Engaging Through Events

The Coalition Provided outreach and promotion at conferences around the state including the Virginia Association for Soil and Water Conservation Districts Annual Conference, Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program Conference, and the Environment Virginia Symposium, among others.

We co-hosted and partnered on multiple field days and workshops including a Cover Crop Grazing Workshop with American Farmland Trust, a Profitable Soil Health Field Day with multiple partners, and a Regenerative Agriculture Field Day with Common Grain Alliance.



Our Partners

Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley
American Farmland Trust
Appalachian Sustainable Development
Center for Natural Capital
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Colonial Soil & Water Conservation District
Common Grain Alliance
Conservation Innovation Fund
Conservation Management Institute
Conservation Partners
Fauquier Education Farm
Foodshed Capital
Ferrum College of Agriculture
Green Fin Amendments
James River Association
Luck Ecosystems
Maryland and Virginia Milk Producer's Association
Mountains to Bay Grazing Alliance
National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)
Soil for Water
Natural pHuel
Old Dominion Land Conservancy
Piedmont Environmental Council

Piedmont Soil & Water Conservation District
Smith Creek Watershed Partnership
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE)
Soil and Water Conservation Society, Virginia Chapter
Sustainable Chesapeake
Thomas Jefferson Soil & Water Conservation District
Virginia Agribusiness Council
Virginia Association of Biological Farming
Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
Virginia Farm Bureau
Virginia Forage and Grassland Council
Virginia Master Gardeners
Virginia Natural Resources Conservation Service
Virginia State University College of Agriculture
Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation
Virginia Tech School of Plant & Environmental Sciences
Virginia Turfgrass Council Environmental Institute
Virginia Working Landscapes
Wills Soil & Stream
2020 Farmers Cooperative

Thank You to Our Funders



NFWF



Chesapeake Bay Program
Science. Restoration. Partnership.

Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund

AGUA FUND, INC.



Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation



Chesapeake Bay Trust

Empowering people. Restoring nature.



Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL, LEADERSHIP,
AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION