This Month

Team Talks - Meet Saquana

January Farm Tasks: Crop Planning

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DIY Video Series

Partner Highlight

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Team Talks

Hi, I'm Saquana Seltzer. I joined the Solid Ground team in November of this past year and am excited to work alongside everyone to launch our new course called "The Business of Farming." This is a seven-week course which begins on January 19th and will end on March 1st. The course is designed for beginning farmers with 0 - 3 years' experience farming. This unique cohort will connect farmers with information about crafting a business plan, implementing/forecasting financial projections, marketing, and so many other necessary skills for a farm to succeed as a business.

I look forward to sharing my corporate and compliance management expertise as the Project Coordinator for this course. Our goal is to advance farmers with key insights and lasting business acumen to establish their journey of being a productive farmer.

When to Start

Though it's hard to change gears from the outdoors work of the growing season, Crop Planning should really begin before you order any seeds. Of course, you can make a wish list of all the seeds you'd like from the seed catalogs, but if you end up ordering seeds before your crop plan, you 1) may have more seeds than you need, and 2) may end up over-working yourself to keep up with planting dates!
To help yourself prepare, it’s always good to look over the past season and assess which crops did really well for you. Those are ones that you want to definitely include in your next growing season. Perhaps some only did okay or you want to include new varieties. This is a great opportunity to compare notes with other farmers through something like the Annual Seed Variety discussion that New CT Farmers Alliance does every year. Unfortunately, it has already passed, but you can find the recording here. And obviously, if something didn’t perform well, despite your best efforts and attention, it’s probably best to nix it from this year’s growing calendar.

How to Build a Crop Plan

There are lots of different ways you can build out a crop plan. From creating spreadsheets from scratch and tracking all the tasks throughout the months, or by utilizing one of many apps and programs available online. The key is to have planting (direct seed or transplant) on the calendar and see if you’re capable of seeding the varieties that you have chosen. Obviously, there will always be wiggle room, and the Crop Plan never gets followed to a “T” but it should provide guidance so that you don’t get overwhelmed by the spring tasks and you can estimate your time.

Some helpful tools that are currently free to use is the Seedtime app, a calculator from Johnny’s, and a google spreadsheet template from Kat the Farmer, and more you can find with a quick google search. You can edit these to include your crops and adjust it to fit your needs, do succession planting, etc. There are many levels of things to try if you’re overwhelmed by spreadsheets!

And if you’re looking to get an overall view of when you should be timing things, our friends over at the IPM program (UConn Extension) have put together the below pdf which should guide you on general tasks and planting times for your crop planning (click on the photo for the pdf!)
Farmers have a never-ending list of projects. One of the ways we want to help you with those is through our DIY video series on our website and youtube. This month, we’re highlighting our first project in the series- Coolers built using the Cool-bot system. Each video shows a different way that a space can be used for a cooler and all of them are fitted with AC units that utilize the cool-bot system to help store crops. Give them a look if you’re planning on building one during the off-season.

You’ve already heard about our NEW Business of Farming Class that has already started, but did you know that we have some other great classes that we run online? These classes run asynchronously so you can fit them in with your schedule!

Starting Jan 31st- **CT Soils and Soil Health Course**: 10 online modules led by Kip Kolesinskas covering soil health, assessing farmland, conservation practices, etc. Sign up online by Jan 30th
Cost: $60 with $30 refund at completion of course

Starting Jan 31st- **Climate Smart Adaptation Strategies for Beginning Farmers**: Complete 10 of 12 online asynchronous modules designed for farmers in years 0-3. Learn to adapt climate smart agricultural practices from experts in different fields so that you can be prepared for the changing climate we are all farming in! Sign up by Jan 30.

**Upcoming: Partner Events**

**Learn to Repair Your Farm Equipment**: Jan 29, United Ag & Turf, Windsor- 8:30AM to 10AM
**Business Planning and Financial Benchmarking**: Feb. 6, Tolland County Ext. Center- 9AM to 2PM

The Venture Farming Institute for Farmers of Color: Application Due Feb 6, Virtual and in person
**Farmer Veterans: Go-To Market Strategy: Approaching Stores, Markets & Restaurants**
February 8, Virtual- 6PM to 7PM
**Farmer Veterans: Website Makeover: Improving Your Website**
February 15, Virtual- 6PM to 7PM

**NCTFA Town Hall with Dept of Ag**:
Feb 15, Virtual- 6:30PM to 8PM

**Options to Mitigate Farm Financial Losses**: Feb. 26th, Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Museum- 1PM to 4PM

**2024 Urban Farmer Training Program**: Starting March 5- Virtual Tuesday evenings from 6:30 -8:30

**2024 FSMA Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course**: Mar 6 & 7, Middlesex County Extension Center

**CT Compost Conference**: March 14th, Connecticut College, New London- All Day Event
**CT NOFA Winter Conference**: Mar. 23rd, Eastern Connecticut State University- 8 AM to 8PM

**Grants Open Now**

**CT Dept of Ag Farmland Restoration, Climate Resiliency & Preparedness Grant**: DUE JAN 31ST
**Dairy Promotion Grants for Farmers**: DUE FEB 2ND
**Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund**: DUE FEB 14TH
**Dairy Food Safety & Certification Grant**: DUE FEB 22

**Solid Ground Online**

COOLER BUILD

Video Highlight

Farmers have a never-ending list of projects. One of the ways we want to help you with those is through our DIY video series on our website and youtube. This month, we’re highlighting our first project in the series- Coolers built using the Cool-bot system. Each video shows a different way that a space can be used for a cooler and all of them are fitted with AC units that utilize the cool-bot system to help store crops. Give them a look if you’re planning on building one during the off-season.

**View the series here**
The CT NOFA farm share program is now open for farmers interested in participating for the 2024 season! How it works is CT NOFA provides funds for up to 50% of predetermined farm shares during the summer season, paid directly to you. This makes farm shares accessible to folks in need of financial assistance, while making sure farmers are fully paid.

Eligible Farm Share program recipients pay up to 50% of the total farm share cost upon program acceptance. Payment is made directly to the farm.

If you become a participating farm, you are asked to commit to at least one or two fundraising practices to support a portion of the share cost. We provide farms a custom fundraising link to promote on your website and through social media.

To sum up Farm Responsibilities:
- Promote the program
- Fundraise
- Communicate with CT NOFA:
- Collect share payment

Find out more here

See you next month!

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