

SOLID GROUND NEWSLETTER



Team Talks

Hi, I'm Nancy Barrett, a Program Coordinator with the Solid Ground team. In addition to my work at UConn Extension my family and I have a diversified farm in Somers producing Pick-Your-Own berries, a beef herd of Belted Galloway cattle and cut flowers specializing in dahlias for event designers and florist.

Currently I'm working on coordinating our **1st Annual Farm Manager Summit** (Tues. Feb. 13) because I know that being an employer is not an easy task. Farm owners/managers are faced with payroll obligations, rules that can be overwhelming, and the logistics of hiring. We as managers typically have to work with a wide range of personalities, work ethics and expectations and pulling all these individuals together to function cohesively can be stressful during a growing season.

As I've been working with the team on the Summit, we been focusing on

This Month

[Team Talks- Meet Nancy](#)

[February Farm Tasks: Seed Starting](#)

[Upcoming events](#)

[Grants Open](#)

[Solid Ground Consultations](#)

[DIY Video Series](#)

[Partner Highlight](#)



Seed starting is always a great joy to us over at Solid Ground. We love getting to have our fingers back in some earthy goodness and seeing the little cotyledons popping up. It's so exciting...or frustrating. We've all been there when half the tray of seedlings sprouted, or they got overwatered, OR you left them in too hot of a spot and they got burned. So many things to go wrong with these little guys, but its exciting when they make it. We don't have all the answers, but let's talk out some of the key components of seed starting.

farmers who are scaling up and hiring their first employees, and on farmers who have been running a farm crew for years but are in need of honing their management skills. Farmers in both positions need key skills that we'll be focusing on throughout the day.

Many of the speakers are folks I have talked with as I have gone through the ins and outs of hiring, and I'm so glad they'll not only be able to share their first-hand experience, but also their knowledge in financial obligations, labor management, employee retention and more.

With a keynote by Emily Landek, (farmer owner/manager of Riverland Farm in Sunderland MA) and a closing panel discussion of some great CT Farmers, we're hoping this will be the perfect time to focus on learning skills that will help managers effectively supervise their crews and achieve their farm's growth potential.

[Join us and register here](#) as we all learn to become better farm managers together!

SOLID GROUND

Upcoming Events

Solid Ground Farm Manager Summit: Feb. 13, Chrysalis Center, Hartford- 9:00AM to 3:00PM

Small Engine Maintenance & Repairs: 4-Stroke: Feb. 29 & Mar. 7th, Middletown High School- 5:30PM to 8:30PM

Walk-Behind Tractor Training: Apr. 13, Keney Park Sustainability Project - 9AM to 3PM (sign up coming soon!)

Climate Smart Field Day – Water Management: Apr. 28th, Russo's Roots Farm (sign up coming soon!)

Field Irrigation: April 20, Brown Farm, Scotland (sign up coming soon!)

There are TONS of potting mixers to choose from to start your seeds. Based on an informal poll of farmers in the state that happened through the [NCTFA Listserv](#), lots of farmers seem to prefer Vermont Compost Fort Vee, though other farms have found they enjoy Buxton Hollow Farms Nourished Coir, New England Compost Seed starting mix, and ProMix MP organic with mycorrhizae, and more! **Experiment** and find what's best for you!

Next is Equipment- lots of folks use soil blockers, flats, or biodegradable pots! Whichever one you choose depends on seed variety, the needs of the seed to access warmth, and even your preference. To get a little more in depth reading on this, it has a lot to do with research, but [here's a little article](#) to help you along the way.

Before you start seeding however...we know that you are thrifty farmers and reuse! SO, sanitize whatever tray you are using beforehand- diseases can carry over in trays from previous seedlings!

Now you're ready to plant and are diligently following growing conditions required for your varieties, but how much warmth and light do they need? Is it necessary to have a heat mat? Do you need a certain type of light to start them? Of course, each plant requires you to look up it's own needs, but [this article](#) goes over using heat to start your seeds and the University of New Hampshire Extension has [provided a great overview](#) of determining the type of light you should be using.



Once they start growing, do you need to fertilize them? To give them that extra boost you may have to give them additional nutrients to help them endure the stressful transportation and transplanting that they'll be facing. But how much? And when? [Check out this article](#) that explores some options and the "whens"

Lastly, hardening off: [This article from Growing For Market](#) gives you a good perspective on how different farms manage the hardening off process when they have thousands of seedlings.

Lots of steps to manage, but our farm experts are here to help so let us know if you're seeing problems- Happy planting and good luck!

Upcoming:

Partner Events

CT Farm Energy Workshops from CTRC&D: Feb 13, 20, 29: Various locations/times

Legal Food Hub Winter Webinars: Feb. 15, 22, 29, Mar. 7, virtual- 12PM to 1:30PM

Growing Power Conference: Feb 24th, 45 Wyllys Avenue, Middletown- 9AM- 3PM

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

Planning for the Future of Your Farm: Feb. 27, Ellington Town Hall Annex- 6PM to 7:30PM

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

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

Free Movement Workshop for Farmers: March 7, Sweet Ring Farm- 10AM to 12PM

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

SNEFCC 2024 Farm Tool Stipends DUE FEB 9TH

Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund- DUE FEB 14TH

Dairy Food Safety & Certification Grant- DUE FEB 22

Ignite Women's Business Development Council Grant: DUE MAR 15

Climate Smart Ag. Grant, Round 2- DUE APR 5

Solid Ground Consultations

We know you appreciate it when Extension Educator Shuresh Ghimire helps you figure out exactly what pest is bothering your broccoli crop in your fields come July, or when Soils and Conservation Expert Kip Kolsinskas walks your fields to help you.

Just like farmers, our consultants have a little quieter season right now, and this could be the perfect opportunity to address some of last season's problems before they show up again on the farm in the heat of summer.

So if you are looking for a little help and can make the time, sign up for a one-on-one consultation with our professionals.

We have consultations in:

- Vegetable and Hemp Production (Shuresh Ghimire)
- Vegetable Production (Maggie Ng)
- Fruit Production (Evan Lentz)
- Soil, Conservation and Land Use (Kip Kolesinskas)
- Urban Farming (Jacqueline Kowalski)
- NEW: Branding and Marketing for your Farm (Becca Toms)

SIGN UP HERE



Video Highlight

We're all about the Farm Hacks- ingenious ways that farmers deal with common problems to make their farm run a little smoother and make their lives a little easier. Winter is the perfect time to tinker with some of those ideas rolling around in your head and we'd love for you to take some inspiration from the DIY series we put out this past fall on Farm Hacks. Check out a mini high tunnel, creative animal shelters, critter protection for raised beds, and a custom dibbler!

View the series here





Completed Thresher Project

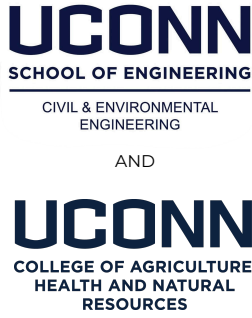
Partner Highlight

Speaking of farm hacks, 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 are putting 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 15th so get your applications in now!



Find out more here 

See you next month!

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



PLANNING TO HIRE, LEADING A FARM CREW, AND PAYING FOR IT!

WHY:
FARM SUCCESS OFTEN DEPENDS ON EFFECTIVE FARM MANAGERS WHO CAN HIRE AND RETAIN GOOD EMPLOYEES

WHEN:
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 13, 2024
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

WHERE:
CHRYSLIS CENTER
255 HOMESTEAD AVENUE, HARTFORD

COST:
\$40 PER PERSON
\$25 FOR ADDITIONAL FARM CREW MEMEBERS
LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED

REGISTER HERE

THE DAY INCLUDES:

- KEYNOTE SPEAKER**
- BREAK-OUT SESSIONS (11)**
 - FARM FINANCIALS**
 - LABOR MANAGEMENT**
- CT FARMER PANEL**



In partnership with:  **DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**



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