

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

VIRGINIA SOIL HEALTH COALITION



LEFT TO RIGHT CLOCKWISE: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING AT SHALOM FARMS IN RICHMOND, VA; THE COALITION LED SOIL STATIONS WITH NRCS AT YOUTH CONSERVATION CAMP; SOIL YOUR UNDIES DISPLAY AT THE VIRGINIA STATE FAIR; EXTENSION AGENTS BETH SASTRE AND THOMAS BOLLES SHARED SOIL HEALTH DEMONSTRATION AT THE VIRGINIA FARM TO TABLE EVENT

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A BRIEF PROFILE

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition (the Coalition) is a statewide network of government agencies, nonprofits, academic partners, and businesses working to build soil health throughout Virginia. We have seen the topic of soil health take root in mainstream conversations and encourage our mission since the Coalition's formalization in 2021 through Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension. As of 2025, **49 partners** across the Commonwealth have joined the Coalition to identify opportunities, provide resources, and collaborate, and we've impacted **over 30,000 acres** of no-till, cover crop, and rotational grazing through farmer-to-farmer mentorship. Our wide array of partners provides the Coalition both a bird's eye view and a worm's eye view of the soil health needs around Virginia.

In support of our [2023-2025 Strategic Plan](#), the Coalition expanded soil health efforts through statewide resources and regional events. We learned ways to effectively work toward our common vision of healthy soil supporting productive farms, thriving ecosystems, and resilient communities. Our meetings and programs facilitated conversations and meaningful connections between conservation practitioners, farmers, educators, youth, and more. One of our priorities has been to build capacity in the Coalition, and in 2025 we were thrilled to **welcome our full-time Education and Outreach Specialist Dr. Summer Thomas**. Thanks to the help of external funding support, the Management Team now includes her role along with Director Mary Sketch Bryant. Their work is guided by a Steering Committee of 11 Coalition leaders, who collaborated on the strategic plan (see "On the Horizon" section).

We are excited to continue strengthening relationships and cultivating new ones, including throughout the pivotal Chesapeake Bay region. We're grateful for the many soil health champions across Virginia, and we look forward to continuing innovate programs, facilitating connections, and building healthy soils together.



MARY SKETCH BRYANT
Director



DR. SUMMER THOMAS
Education and Outreach Specialist

VISION

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

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

OUR 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

IMPACT IN NUMBERS

Since it was formed in 2021, the Coalition has

- Welcomed 49 partner organizations
- Held 14 quarterly meetings with an average of 50 participants per meeting
- Co-founded and increased engagement in a global-spanning soil health awareness initiative that includes 117 podcast episodes with 20,000 downloads and 5 original character puppets for youth education programs,
- Reached over 10,000 people at over 50 events
- Coordinated over \$3M in funding for collaborative soil work
- Facilitated 16 soil health trainings that reached over 250 practitioners
- Impacted over 5,000 acres of no-till, cover crop, and rotational grazing through farmer-to-farmer mentoring



LEFT TO RIGHT CLOCKWISE: LYDIA TAYLOR LED A SESSION AT A SOIL HEALTH DEMONSTRATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS; DR. VIJAY CHAGANTI PARTNERED WITH THE COALITION ON A SOIL HEALTH AND COMPOST PRESENTATION AT MASTER GARDENER COLLEGE; GUESTS AT THE VIRGINIA FARM TO TABLE EVENT

“THE RESULT IS HEALTHIER SOILS, STRONGER FARMS, CLEANER WATER, AND MORE RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES.”

~COALITION PARTNER IN 2025 SURVEY



>12,000 People engaged through direct and indirect outreach

18 Coalition meetings facilitated
Including full Coalition, Management Team, and work groups

12 Educational presentations or trainings provided

5 Conferences and events at which the Coalition provided resources and outreach

4 Farmer-centered events co-hosted and facilitated

PRIORITIES IN PRACTICE

1. BUILD THE COALITION'S CAPACITY FOR LEADERSHIP AND EXPANSION

EXPANDED STAFF CAPACITY

The Coalition doubled staff capacity as of June 2025, welcoming full time Outreach and Education Specialist, Dr. Summer Thomas. Summer greatly expanded our educational reach and engagement across the state. We also received partial permanent funding for the Coalition Director position.

STRENGTHENED OUR NETWORK

This year the Coalition grew to include 49 partner organizations. We're excited to dig in and collaborate with our new partners, Friends of the Rappahannock, Henricopolis Soil and Water Conservation District, and Evergreen Soil and Water Conservation District. These new partnerships reflect our ongoing commitment to broaden our impact.

SERVED URBAN & SUBURBAN LANDSCAPES

Building off 2024's network evaluation and initial outreach, the Coalition continued to work over the past year to expand our reach beyond the agricultural realm to serve urban and suburban landscapes. Specifically, we led multiple trainings for the Virginia Turfgrass Council, Virginia Master Gardeners, and Virginia Master Naturalists.

EXPANDED & ENERGIZED STEERING COMMITTEE

We collaboratively updated and clarified our Steering Committee framework and structure in 2025 to better suit the needs of our partners and the Coalition, which included adding two new members. The Steering Committee led the design of a revised Collaborative Strategic Plan to guide the Coalition from 2026 to 2028.



A SOIL PIT DEMONSTRATION AS PART OF AN INNOVATION ROUND TABLE MEETING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SUSTAINABLE CHESAPEAKE, VIRGINIA TECH, AND AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

PRIORITIES IN PRACTICE CONTINUED

2. ENHANCE PARTNER COLLABORATION TO DRIVE INNOVATION, IMPLEMENTATION, & IMPACT

ADVANCED SOIL HEALTH TRAINING

We hosted several well-attended, full-day trainings for service providers and practitioners including a soil health demonstration training and a Grow More training on outreach and messaging approaches.

FACILITATED FARMER-TO-FARMER MENTORING

We continued facilitating a farmer-to-farmer mentoring network in partnership with Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, Virginia No Till Alliance, and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Together we have impacted over 5,000 acres of no-till, cover crops, and rotational grazing in 2025.

CO-HOSTED THE INAUGURAL VIRGINIA FARM TO TABLE HARVEST CELEBRATION

Nearly 200 participants joined us for the first ever Virginia Farm to Table Harvest Celebration, supported by months of dedicated planning meetings with our diverse Planning Committee. The Celebration was an evening of good food, live music, farmer storytelling, and interactive displays to honor the collective work of Virginia's soil health and farm-to-table partners.

STRENGTHENED FARMER-FOCUSED PARTNERSHIPS

We continued our close collaboration with the Virginia Tech/NRCS Integrated Conservation Agronomy Program to advance farmer-led innovation, research, and on-farm demonstration. 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.

LEVERAGED ADVANCING MARKETS FOR PRODUCERS' PROJECTS

Our continued coordination efforts brought together partners across Virginia working on USDA Advancing Markets for Producers (formerly Climate Smart Commodity) Projects. We expanded the effort in partnership with American Farmland Trust to be Chesapeake-Bay wide, including quarterly virtual gatherings and support of partners as they navigate funding freezes and reapplications.

SHARED RESEARCH & IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH COMMUNICATION

Three quarterly meetings in 2025 featured research from Virginia Tech specialists, updates on statewide and regional initiatives, policy discussions, and strategic planning. We continue to maintain a monthly newsletter featuring research, partner news, and announcements as well as various communication channels via our website and sharing at partner events.



THE COALITION'S "SOIL YOUR UNDIES" DISPLAY IN PARTNERSHIPS WITH FLUVANNA COUNTY FARM BUREAU WOMEN'S COMMITTEE AND THE STATE FAIR

PRIORITIES IN PRACTICE CONTINUED

3. CULTIVATED AWARENESS THROUGH EDUCATION, OUTREACH, & ADVOCACY

EXPANDED 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 2025, the 4 The Soil awareness initiative reached new heights:

- Produced 26 biweekly episodes of the “4 The Soil: A Conversation” podcast
 - Featured farmers, researchers, and entrepreneurs
 - Over 5,000 downloads
 - Celebrated 100th podcast episode in August
- Published biweekly newsletters for a growing listserv of over 600 subscribers
- Distributed soil health stickers, bookmarks, shirts, and other materials to >2,000 people through conferences, field days, state fairs, and other events and activities
- Maintained ongoing social media presence and consistently grew audience
- Posted soil health stories, perspectives, and resources regularly on the blog
- Hosted monthly 4 The Soil work group meetings



EXPANDED EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

With the addition of a full time Outreach and Education Specialist, the Coalition was able to expand their educational reach in 2025 including outreach at the State Fair, Virginia Ag Expo, Central Virginia Ag Expo, and other state and regional events, curriculum at Youth Conservation Camp and Harrisonburg’s Farm to School Week, among other efforts.



LEFT: THE COALITION LED SOIL STATIONS WITH NRCS AT YOUTH CONSERVATION CAMP; **TOP MIDDLE:** SUMMER THOMAS LED SOIL HEALTH EDUCATION AT A FARM TO SCHOOL EVENT; **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** 4 THE SOIL PUPPETS AT THE VA FARM TO TABLE EVENT; **RIGHT:** 4 THE SOIL YARD SIGN DISPLAYED OUTSIDE THE FRIENDLY CITY FOOD COOP IN HARRISONBURG, VA

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
 Evergreen Soil and Water Conservation District
 Fauquier Education Farm
 Foodshed Capital
 Ferrum College of Agriculture
 Friends of the Rappahannock
 Green Fin Amendments
 Henricopolis Soil and Water Conservation District
 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 (NRCS)
 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

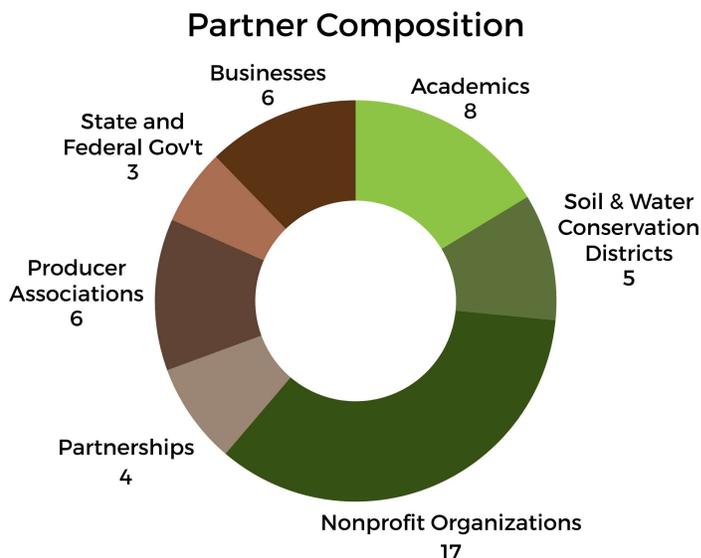
“By translating cutting-edge soil science into practical, field-ready tools, the Coalition strengthens our ability to deliver demonstrations and solutions that improve farm profitability, landscape health, environmental stewardship, and long-term land resilience.

~Coalition partner in 2025 survey



DEBUT OF THE 4 THE SOIL TRAILER AT A SOIL HEALTH DEMONSTRATION TRAINING IN BLACKSTONE, VA

OUR PARTNERS CONTINUED



HIGH TUNNEL NEAR PETERSBURG, VA



The Virginia Soil Health Coalition plays an important role in my work by supporting collaboration and proposal development and helping connect partners across research and Extension

— Yongfa You, Virginia Tech



92% felt their **knowledge of soil health efforts across Virginia has increased** since being engaged with the Coalition

85% strongly agree or agree that **the Coalition supports and accelerates collaborative initiatives** in Virginia

85% strongly agree or agree that **the Coalition contributes to a shared understanding of soil health principles and messaging**

77% felt their **connectivity with partners has increased** since being engaged with the Coalition

77% felt their **organization’s capacity to support soil health has increased** since being engaged with the Coalition

OUR FUNDERS



“ We value the Virginia Soil Health Coalition as a key partner in advancing soil health across Virginia. Their leadership and collaborative spirit help align agencies, organizations, and districts toward common conservation outcomes that benefit producers and communities statewide. ”

~Coalition partner in 2025 survey



Thank you to Coalition partners and funders!

4 THE SOIL CHARACTER PUPPETS, CRAFTED BY RUBY GERTZ AND INSPIRED BY SOCIAL IMPACT STUDIO



ON THE HORIZON



The previous Strategic Plan helped guide the Coalition's programs and clarified our work. Now, three years later, we are proud to share the refreshed Strategic Plan for 2026-2028 that builds on those lessons and reflects our growth. These priorities position us to deepen and broaden our impact of building healthy soils that support productive farms, thriving ecosystems, and resilient communities.

PRIORITY 1: STRENGTHEN THE COALITION'S ORGANIZATIONAL & LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

We aim to build a more resilient and connected Coalition by building lasting partnerships, broadening who is at the table, ensuring stable resources, and learning from others across the region and nation.

1. Cultivate relationships with existing partners to leverage our network's skills and expertise.
2. Engage new partners that represent all landscapes of Virginia.
3. Secure sustainable funding sources to support Coalition functions.
4. Connect with and learn from broader regional and national soil health, agriculture, and conservation networks.

PRIORITY 2: ENHANCE PARTNER COLLABORATION & PARTICIPATION TO DRIVE RESEARCH & IMPLEMENTATION

We aim to strengthen coordination, communication and ultimately collaboration among partners by sharing knowledge and resources, supporting farmer-driven research, and creating spaces for coordination and innovation that move soil health science and practice forward together.

1. Facilitate resource and information sharing through meetings, online platforms, and continuous communication among partners.
2. Support innovative, farmer-driven research in partnership with universities and communicate findings to organizations implementing soil health on the ground.
3. Develop formal and ad-hoc work groups as needed to enhance coordination, communication, and collaboration on topics such as policy, communications, and science.
4. Identify, seek funding for, and promote projects that advance partner capacity and implementation of soil health approaches.

PRIORITY 3: PROMOTE SOIL HEALTH BY EDUCATING DIVERSE AUDIENCES, CONNECTING PARTNERS TO ALIGN ADVOCACY EFFORTS, & DRIVE MEANINGFUL ACTION

We aim to strengthen collective communication and outreach to broaden soil health understanding and engagement, while fostering a coordinated approach that translates shared knowledge and values into actionable policy outcomes through partner collaboration.

1. Sustain and enhance communications strategies through the 4 The Soil Initiative that resonate with a broader constituency such as youth, consumers, and urban constituents.
2. Provide resources and educational materials to allies working on advocacy for sharing with decision makers.
3. Organize and convene partner organizations to align advocacy messages, explore potential legislative approaches, and advance policy that promotes soil health best management practices.
4. Convene partners, farmer mentors, and agency leaders to inform state programs and administration to effectively incorporate soil health.

PRIORITY 4: EVALUATE & SHARE THE IMPACT OF THE COALITION'S NETWORK CAPACITY

We aim to understand and share how the Coalition's network capacity, partnerships, and coordination support soil health progress and water quality priorities statewide.

1. Link Coalition soil health impacts to state and regional water quality goals.
2. Develop an impact monitoring plan to track Coalition outcomes and broader soil health progress across the state.
3. Track and create a social network map including connections, growth of relationships, and capacity of partner organizations.
4. Synthesize and share evaluation findings annually through accessible products to support learning and partner alignment.



JOIN OUR GROWING NETWORK OF SOIL HEALTH PARTNERS

To learn more and sign up for our newsletter, visit www.virginiasoilhealth.org

