



# SOUTHERN PIEDMONT AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER VIRGINIA TECH

# NEWSLETTER

## JULY 2025



## Greetings From Our Director

Greetings on behalf of the Southern Piedmont AREC and welcome to the second issue of our 2025 newsletter! As we are approaching the midpoint of the growing season, let's reflect on the progress we have made and share the work still ahead.

This newsletter brings you our field season updates, spotlights ongoing research, introduces new team members, and highlights upcoming events designed to connect science with real-world agricultural needs. Everything we do here is grounded in our land-grant mission: to serve the people of Virginia through research, education, and extension that strengthen communities and support a strong agricultural future.

Thank you for being part of our journey, and we are looking forward to continuing the season alongside you.

-Arash

## In This Issue

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- Events
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- Publications & More



**ARASH RASHED**  
DIRECTOR AND ENTOMOLOGIST

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## NEW ROLES FOR SPAREC FACULTY

In addition to his role as the Director of Southern Piedmont AREC, Arash Rashed has recently been appointed Interim Associate Director of VAES. To ensure we continue to meet our goals effectively, Assistant Professor Yuan Zeng will provide support in the role of Assistant Director during this time.

Photos courtesy of Southern Piedmont AREC



## CONGRATULATIONS

After nearly six years of dedication and service at the Virginia Tech Southern Piedmont AREC, we extend our heartfelt thanks to applied forage systems specialist Katie Payne for her outstanding contributions to forage agronomy and extension work.

We are thrilled to share that Payne started a new role as Assistant Professor and Forage Agronomy Extension Specialist at West Virginia University beginning July 1.

Her passion for agriculture and commitment to supporting growers has left a lasting impact here in Virginia. We know she'll continue to do amazing things in West Virginia and we wish her the very best in this new chapter!



Photo by Margaret Kenny

## NEW FACULTY - JOSHUA MOTT

Joshua Mott will be joining the SPAREC team on August 10, 2025 as an Organic and Cropping Systems Specialist with a research and extension appointment.

Mott holds a Ph.D. in Crop & Soil Environmental Science from Virginia Tech and previously held positions with the USDA, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and James River Soil and Water Conservation District.

We are excited about the knowledge, enthusiasm, and fresh perspective he will bring to the Southern Piedmont AREC!



Photo courtesy of Joshua Mott

## CONGRATULATIONS

Ph.D. student Kamal Chhetri has received a 2025 APS Foundation Student Travel award for the Plant Health 2025 conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, which will take place August 2nd - 5th.

Photo courtesy of Southern Piedmont AREC







# BYDV FORUM & FIELD DAY

## May 7, 2025

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the Barley Yellow Dwarf Virus (BYDV) Forum & Field Day! Forum discussion covered topics such as BYDV symptoms, management, distribution in Virginia, and current research being conducted at locations across the state.

Help is needed with mapping BYDV hotspots in Virginia. We are looking for wheat and dominant grass samples from fields across the state. Test results will be shared with producers free of charge. For detailed information, please visit: <https://bit.ly/3S7q4tD>



Photos by Suzanne Pruitt for Virginia Tech



VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION  
SOUTHERN PIEDMONT AGRICULTURAL  
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# NEW FACES AT SPAREC



**Abderahmane Boucherf**  
Ph.D. Student and Visiting  
Scholar- Entomology



**Sterling Currin**  
Agricultural Specialist III



**Sammy Winderman**  
Agricultural Specialist III  
-Entomology

Photos courtesy of Southern Piedmont AREC

## WELCOME SUMMER INTERNS

Meet our wonderful group of SPAREC summer interns! Left to right:

- Matthew Gaskins (plant pathology)
- Timothy Foster (tobacco agronomy)
- Tori LaVelle (agronomy)
- Niamh Devlin (entomology)
- Sophia Gavasheli (plant pathology)
- Paige Biliski (plant pathology)



Photo by Suzanne Pruitt

## STAFF APPRECIATION



Photos by Margaret Kenny and Suzanne Pruitt

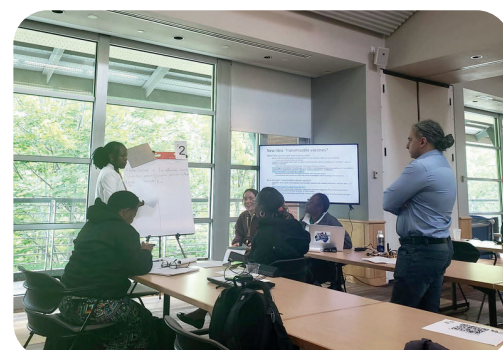
On June 11th, our incredible SPAREC team took a well-earned break to enjoy a delightful luncheon and a fun-filled outing!

A heartfelt thank you to **Acapulco Mexican Restaurant** for serving up a delicious meal, and to **Richlands Dairy & Creamery** for the engaging tour and the refreshing ice cream treats that topped off the day.

We're deeply grateful for our dedicated staff – your hard work and commitment make everything we do possible!







Top row, L to R: Visiting scholar Abderrahmane Boucherf works in the lab with our new qPCR machine • Arash Rashed speaks during the VA Small Grain Field Day in Warsaw • planting tobacco

Bottom row, L to R: Summer intern Tori LaVelle uses a SPAD (soil plant analysis development) meter to measure leaf chlorophyll concentration in corn • Assistant Professor Doug Higgins (Eastern Shore AREC), VAES Director Mary Burrows and Ph.D. candidate Shirin Parizad during the VA Small Grains Field Day in Warsaw • Arash Rashed teaches a workshop at the annual Biology of Vector-Borne Diseases course at the University of Idaho

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: JIMMY MORRIS, AG SPECIALIST III

How long have you been at SPAREC and how has your role changed during that time?

"I have been at SPAREC since March 25, 2007. I started as an Agriculture Specialist and still have the same title. I still do the same things I did when I started but now I do a lot more – such as doing more herbicide applications, equipment maintenance and filling in for the Farm Manager when he is out. I also help train the new hires."



Photo by Suzanne Pruitt

What do you enjoy most about your job?

"I like the diversity of having something different to do each day. Some days we are working on the crops and other days we are working with the cattle."

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

"We have more graduate student projects we are working on but have less people on the field crew. It can be challenging making sure we get everyone's work done in a timely fashion, especially when the weather does not cooperate."

What personal interests or hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

"I love to fish. I also enjoy working with my beef cows around my farm. My wife and I enjoy visiting National Parks."



## UPCOMING EVENTS



THURS  
JULY  
31

## 2025 SOUTHERN PIEDMONT AREC ROW CROP FIELD DAY

2375 DARVILLS ROAD | BLACKSTONE, VA 23824

REGISTRATION 4:30 PM | DINNER 5:00 PM

FIELD CROPS RESEARCH TOUR FOLLOWING DINNER

NATIVE SEED TRIALS | TOBACCO VARIETIES  
TRIAL | SOIL MOISTURE MONITORING OF  
TOBACCO SOILS | CORN BIOSIMULANT  
TRIAL & SOYBEAN VARIETY TRIAL |  
HAZELNUT VARIETIES | LEAFSPOT  
MANAGEMENT

PLEASE REGISTER:

[HTTPS://FORMS.GLE/HDKDRGGY7IEJ7XR86](https://forms.gle/HDKDRGGY7IEJ7XR86)



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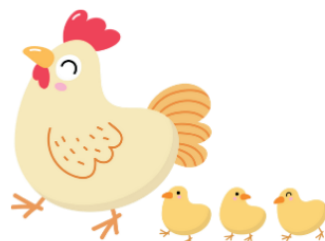
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## FAMILY & FARM DAY 2025

JOIN US FOR A DAY OF FUN, HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES  
ABOUT VIRGINIA AGRICULTURE !

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13TH  
FROM 9 AM - 2 PM

VIRGINIA TECH SOUTHERN PIEDMONT AREC  
2375 DARVILLS ROAD | BLACKSTONE, VA 23824



FREE EVENT! RAIN OR SHINE! DOOR PRIZE!



Gangwar, P., Xu, X., Pollok, J., Sedghi, N., Flanagan, R. D., & Zeng, Y. (2025). First report of *Neopestalotiopsis vaccinii* in Delaware and *Neopestalotiopsis rosae* in Virginia associated with similar disease symptoms in strawberry (*Fragaria× ananassa*). *Plant Disease*, <https://doi.org/10.1094/PDIS-04-25-0825-PDN>

Gangwar, P., Erickson, L., Barts, S., Johnson, C. S., Reed, T. D., & Zeng, Y. (2025). Identification and pathogenicity of *Fusarium* species associated with Fusarium wilt of flue-cured tobacco. *Plant Disease*, <https://doi.org/10.1094/PDIS-12-24-2715-SR>

Cruzado-Gutierrez, R. K., Piaskowski, J., Wenninger, E. J. & A. Rashed. 2025. Effect of cold temperatures on the survival of *Bactericera cockerelli* (Šulc) (Hem., Triozidae). *Entomologia Generalis*, DOI: [10.1127/entomologia/3150](https://doi.org/10.1127/entomologia/3150)

## RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

### YUAN ZENG, PLANT PATHOLOGIST CALS RESEARCHER OF THE MONTH - JUNE 2025

Yuan Zeng's Hatch project emphasizes comprehensive soil testing to build a disease forecasting model, helping growers manage destructive soil-dwelling pathogens.

Read the full story here: <http://bit.ly/4IF2ykP>

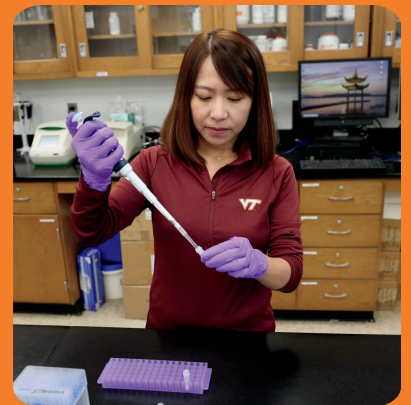


Photo by Suzanne Pruitt

# Thank You

TO EVERYONE WHO SUPPORTED OUR

## Ag Awareness Day

CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN!

TOGETHER WE RAISED \$756

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