



**SOUTHERN PIEDMONT AGRICULTURAL
RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER
VIRGINIA TECH.**

NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2025



Greetings From Our Director

As we wrap up another field season, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the past three months of collaborative efforts among Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station, Virginia Cooperative Extension, the state of Virginia, regional producers, and our local community.

This season has showcased resilience and productivity across our field studies, yielding valuable results and insights. Our Row Crops Field Day brought together producers, researchers, Extension agents, industry partners, and community members to see firsthand the innovative work developed by our programs. Family and Farm Day fostered meaningful connections and celebrated agriculture with the local community. Our internship program continued offering hands-on experiences to future ag leaders, while partnerships with livestock producers are expanding our forage and livestock research and education efforts.

Thank you for your continued support, trust and partnership during a season filled with progress and promise. We look forward to the next chapter and more opportunities to serve.

-Arash

In This Issue

- Southside Native Seed Project
- Staff Spotlight
- Field Days & Summer Tours
- Upcoming Events
- Publications & More



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DIRECTOR, PROFESSOR OF ENTOMOLOGY,
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-US-*





PARTNER WITH US FOR THE SOUTHSIDE NATIVE SEED PROJECT

FARMERS NEEDED TO GROW POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY NATIVE SEED

- Growers located in the Virginia Piedmont, south of Amherst
- **Beginning, socially disadvantaged, veteran, and limited resource farmers** encouraged to apply!

BENEFITS

- Receive an annual stipend of up to \$1100 per acre
- Receive plants and technical assistance
- Guaranteed buyer for initial harvests
- Learn about a new income-generating activity for your farm
- Grow a low-input crop with the support of regional experts
- Create wildlife habitat and support restoration in Virginia

JOIN THE GROWING NATIVE SEED INDUSTRY!

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PROJECTS, PLEASE VISIT:
[HTTPS://SOUTHSIDENATIVES.ORG/](https://southsidenatives.org/)



»» Contact Us ««

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ROW CROP FIELD DAY

JULY 31, 2025

The Row Crop Field Day began with welcome remarks and dinner, including new faculty introductions, followed by field tours featuring:

- Leaf Spot Trial - Yuan Zeng, Plant Pathologist
- Soybean Variety Trial - Carrie Ortel, Soybean Agronomist
- Native Seed Project - Phoebe Judge, Project Coordinator
- Entomology Research Update - Arash Rashed, Director
- Tobacco Varieties Trial and Irrigation Trial - T. David Reed, Tobacco Agronomist
- Corn Biostimulant Trial - Carol Wilkinson, Agronomist

Thank you to all involved in making this year's event a success!



Photos by Mike Parrish and Suzanne M. Pruitt.



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CONGRATULATIONS

POWERS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP 2025 RECIPIENT: ROBERT HITE

The Powers Memorial Scholarship was awarded to Robert Hite at the Virginia Tech Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC) Row Crop Field Day on July 31, 2025.

The scholarship was established in memory and honor of the contributions Danny Powers made to agricultural research at the Southern Piedmont AREC. One award of \$2,000 is made annually to an undergraduate student in Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Recipients must live in either Amelia, Dinwiddie, Lunenburg, or Nottoway counties.

Robert Hite, son of Richard and Mindy Hite, is a native of Lunenburg County where he was raised on a tobacco and beef cattle farm which also produces corn, soybeans, and organic vegetables. Robert is an agribusiness major in the Agricultural and Applied Economics Department at Virginia Tech. He worked as an undergraduate intern one summer at SPAREC in the tobacco agronomy program with Dr. David Reed. He is a member of the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity at Virginia Tech where he holds the office of Marshall. Robert has a passion for farming, has been actively farming with his father, and plans to return to the farm after he graduates from Virginia Tech.



(L to R) Sharon Powers and Robert Hite.
Photo by Carol Wilkinson.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MELODY MCGHEE, ADMINISTRATIVE & OFFICE SPECIALIST III

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

"I began my job at SPAREC November 2017, stepping into the shoes of Betty Lou Mayton, who had been doing this job for 38 years—so I had a lot to learn. My title is Administrative and Office Specialist III. As with anyone's job at SPAREC there are always changes, such as a change in software platforms and processes as well as the changes in personnel that keep things exciting."

What do you enjoy most about your job?

"I enjoy the people I work with here at Southern Piedmont. Having the opportunity to influence the future of our organization through dialogue and support functions is a privilege. Supporting the events we have at the station is my favorite part of my job."

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

"I find that one of the most challenging aspects of my job, which is not unique to me, is its unpredictability. You can start your day with a plan for completing your list of "A items" only to find that you must pivot and handle a whole new set of items that may not be "A items" but are prioritized necessities that you did not even know about that morning. With the wide range of responsibilities an AREC admin handles, it's easy to run out of time before you run out of tasks. That's where the "Semper Gumby" mindset—always flexible—really comes in handy."

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

"When I am not at work, I spend my time with my family and enjoy sewing and quilting."



Photo courtesy of
Southern Piedmont AREC.

CALS FACULTY AND STAFF AREC TOUR - AUGUST 18, 2025

Members of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences faculty, marketing and communications staff, and the advancement team joined us for an inside look at the Southern Piedmont AREC research and Extension programs.

From lab walkthroughs to hands-on field tours, our guests got a front-row seat to the work we're doing to support Virginia agriculture.

Photos by Alex Hood and Margaret Kenny.



SPES STUDENT TOUR - AUGUST 20, 2025

Students from the Virginia Tech School of Plant and Environmental Sciences visited the Southern Piedmont AREC, and for many, it was their first time experiencing an Agricultural Research and Extension Center—and a firsthand look at the innovative research happening here.

Throughout the day, our visitors connected with faculty, staff, and SPAREC students during lab tours and field visits to our tobacco and corn plots, gaining insight into the science and collaboration that drive agricultural progress.

Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt.



KANSAS FARM BUREAU TOUR - AUGUST 27, 2025

The Kansas Farm Bureau was welcomed to Virginia Tech's Southern Piedmont AREC by Director Arash Rashed, Virginia Cooperative Extension Director Mike Gutter, and CALS Dean Mario Ferruzzi. Tobacco Agronomist David Reed gave an overview of our programs and facilities, followed by a field tour.



Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt.

20th ANNIVERSARY

FAMILY & FARM DAY 2025

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13TH



We couldn't have asked for a better way to celebrate our 20th Family & Farm Day—sunshine, smiles, and over 1,000 attendees from 16 Virginia counties and beyond!

Huge thanks to our amazing faculty, staff, and students whose dedication made the day run smoothly, to our generous sponsors, community partners, and fantastic exhibitors, and of course, to everyone who came out to enjoy the festivities. Your energy and enthusiasm made this milestone truly special!

Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt.



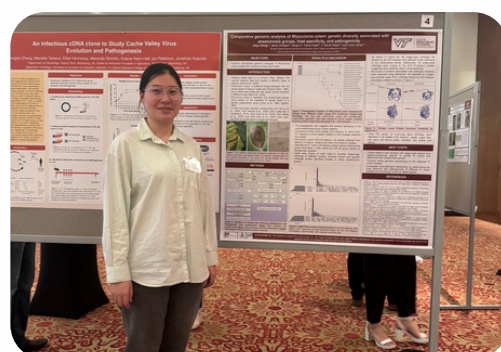
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Top row, L to R: The Entomology and Native Seed Project Teams during Row Crop Field Day tours •

Director Arash Rashed at the VA Ag Expo in Locust Grove, VA • SPAREC field crew harvesting biostimulant corn

Bottom row, L to R: Assistant Professors Mario A. Ortezt and Shourish Chakravarty attending the Central Virginia Crops Expo in Brookneal, VA • PhD Student Kamal Chhetri and Visiting Scholar Abderrahmane Boucherf check out the new drone with hyperspectral camera on board • PhD Student Jiayu Dong at the APS Plant Health Conference in Hawaii

Photos courtesy of Southern Piedmont AREC.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Fadaei, E., Mehrabadi, M., Bagheri, A., Rashed, A. & Fathipour, Y. (2025), An ecofriendly approach to broad mite (*Polyphagotarsonemus latus*) management: integrating pepper resistance and predatory mite (*Neoseiulus californicus*) in a tritrophic system. *Pest Management Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ps.70153>

Chhetri, K., Langston, D., & Zeng, Y. (2025). *Tar Spot of Corn* (SPES-726NP). Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech. <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/SPES/SPES-726/SPES-726.html>



VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
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Bull Breeding Soundness Exams

October 17, 2025
8:00 am - 2:00 pm



ALL
EXAM SPOTS ARE
NOW FILLED!

Virginia Tech FREC Agricultural Spray Drone Webinar Series & Live Demos



The Virginia Tech Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation (FREC), the Eastern Shore Agricultural Research Extension Center, in partnership with the Center for Advanced Innovation in Agriculture (CAIA), is providing a webinar series paired with two in-field live demonstrations. This informational series is designed for agronomists, drone operators, Virginia Cooperative Extension personnel, and farm operators. There is no cost to attend, but registration is required for the Webinar and/or live demonstrations.

Demo 2: Southern Piedmont AREC, Blackstone, VA.

Date: 30th of October

Time: 11:00 AM -2:00 PM

Location: 2375 Darvills Rd, Blackstone, VA.

SCAN ME



Webinar Series Information and Registration here: <https://tinyurl.com/SprayDroneWebinar>

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Ag Awareness Day

CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN!

Learn more: <https://crowdfund.vt.edu/project/46427>

Your gift sparks inspiration and education, empowering students to become informed, responsible leaders of tomorrow!



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