VSU Welcomes 14th President
Makola M. Abdullah

Small Farm Outreach Helps Farmers Make Big Impact

Urban Agriculture Update

Ag Research at VSU

College of Agriculture Academic Highlights

Calendar of Events
from the Dean

M. Ray McKinnie
Interim Dean/1890 Extension Administrator
Virginia State University College of Agriculture

One year, many changes. Those four short words may best describe the last 365 days at VSU. I arrived at the university last summer and shortly thereafter was asked to take the helm of the College of Agriculture, following Dr. Jewel Hairston’s departure. Former VSU President Keith T. Miller had stepped down and Interim President Pamela V. Hammond was leading the university, meticulously steering VSU through some precarious financial and accreditation waters. In February VSU selected its 14th president, Dr. Makola M. Abdullah, who is shaping VSU to be “Virginia’s Opportunity University’ and who has incorporated into his vision to bring VSU back to its land-grant roots.

Meanwhile this year, the College of Agriculture has been steadfast and busily about the business of the college. We’ve secured $1.6 million in grants for research and Extension projects aimed at improving the health and prosperity of Virginia’s citizens and businesses. We’ve welcomed Dr. Charles Nealis as a new 4-H STEM Specialist, Dr. Berkita Bradford as the interim chair for our Department of Hospitality Management, and Katrina Johnson as USDA’s 1890 Program Liaison. And we’ve doubled—and in some cases tripled—attendance at our Extension workshops and public programs. We’ve even launched a new website exclusively for our Extension department (ext.vsu.edu), so you can find information faster and easier.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Extension Connection, in which you’ll learn more about the positive impacts VSU’s College of Agriculture is making in and on the lives of the people we touch. And if you haven’t been to the campus or to one of our programs lately to see and feel these changes, I personally invite you to do so.

Sincerely,

M. Ray McKinnie, Ph.D.
Interim Dean, VSU College of Agriculture

ON THE COVER: Customers come first for produce retailer and VSU alumnus Nathaniel Fleming ’56. For 10 months during the year, he sells fresh fruits and vegetables. He also donates perishables to local food banks, churches and charitable organizations.
What attracted you to the Presidency of Virginia State University?

I am truly a fan of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and now I have the privilege of being VSU’s President and its biggest fan. VSU holds the distinction of being the first state-supported HBCU in the nation. It has remained true to its mission for 134 years. That mission of creating opportunities remains as relevant today as it was in 1882. VSU is filled with promise and I am honored to be a part of the promise of this University which continues to transform lives.

My vision for VSU is based upon five tenets which will empower us to embrace our Opportunity for Excellence at VSU:

• Providing a transformative experience for our students
• Strategically investing in our academic programs
• Embracing our position as a top land-grant university
• Embracing our role as Virginia’s Opportunity University
• Partnering together as a university to tell our story

In addition, we have begun strategies to ensure that VSU will have firmer financial footing and increased enrollment, and we have put strategic plans in place to continue growing our university to its greater potential.

What do you see as some common misconceptions or myths about VSU?

VSU has always been great. Unfortunately, we have missed many opportunities to share with the world how great we are. One of my priorities is to have our entire university family—students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends—partnering with us to share the transformative stories that come out of our University every day. When we take responsibility for telling our own story, in our own words, on our own terms, we don’t have to concern ourselves with misconceptions or myths. We are telling the real story of how VSU is transforming lives and creating opportunities.

Given recent publicity around the role and significance of HBCUs in higher education, what role will VSU play in educating today’s and tomorrow’s youth?

I love HBCUs. I have a long history of understanding the mission of these universities. HBCUs represent opportunity in America. I am a product of an HBCU, and both of my children will enroll in an HBCU in the fall. Again, HBCUs are as relevant today as they ever were. Many of the students who entrust their education to HBCUs are providing hope for themselves; and in many cases, they are the hope of their families. A measure of the
effectiveness of a university lies in the accomplishments of its alumni. VSU alumni have proven how effective and significant their HBCU experience was for them in providing transformative educational experiences and opportunities. That is what we have always done, and what we will continue to do.

How does being an 1890s land-grant institution fit into the university’s mission?

I’m very proud of our land-grant mission, and I want to make sure it is incorporated throughout the entire campus to reinforce the idea that we are a land-grant institution, not an institution with land-grant programs. As an 1890 land-grant university, VSU partners with Virginia Tech to offer a robust Extension program to the citizens of Virginia. VSU’s role in this partnership is to focus on the small or new farmer and on reaching socially and economically disadvantaged citizens. This is just another example of how VSU truly is “Virginia’s Opportunity University.”

What is VSU’s role in, and contributions toward, driving this state’s economy?

Virginia’s number one industry is agriculture and forestry, by a lot. The hospitality industry is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. And engineering majors continue to be some of the consistently highest earning people in the workforce. VSU has excellent programs in these and other areas to fill the skilled workforce that our state needs to grow economically. Additionally, our land-grant mission allows us to engage in research and extension programs that help our citizens and businesses succeed in an ever-changing environment.

STEM Specialist Seeks to Engage, Energize, Motivate Youth

Dr. Charles “Charlie” Nealis, new STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) extension specialist at Virginia State University, portrays today’s student as a curious, passionate, techno-savvy innovator destined to change the world. Shortly after arriving at VSU, Nealis has hit the ground running, his sights set on increasing awareness of STEM opportunities and encouraging youth to pursue STEM careers.

“STEM subject matter helps students develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving capabilities vital to success in nearly every profession,” Nealis says. “Employers have come to expect this from their employees.”

Nealis says he’ll work closely with 4-H programs and local school systems to engage community youth in unique, cutting-edge, hands-on activities designed to equip them for the future. “My job is to corral and funnel their creativity and enthusiasm to position them for success in our global, technological society,” he adds.

A Gainesville, Florida native, Nealis earned each of his academic degrees from the University of Florida. His bachelor’s degree is in food and resource economics; his master’s degree in agricultural education and extension; and his doctorate in soil and water science.

An ardent Florida Gator fan, Nealis’ first priority is spending time with his wife and infant daughter. During his spare time, he enjoys basketball, hiking and fishing.

For more information about 4-H STEM Extension programs, contact Charlie Nealis at (804) 524-2583 or email cnealis@vsu.edu.

When students begin to narrow their choices for college, what advice would you offer them?

It is important to me that each student chooses the college or university that is right for him or her. I encourage them to explore a number of options. Look at the majors offered, the cost, the environment, the location; and determine what is the right fit. There is no “one size fits all” when it comes to higher education. Diversity in higher education is essential. Certainly, VSU is a great, viable, and cost-effective option; however, I recognize that VSU may not be the right fit for everyone, but if VSU is a good fit for you, we will gladly welcome you to our Trojan family.

VSU is an opportunity university that continues to grow in greatness and achievement. We are proud of our new $84-million Multipurpose Center, which we believe will be a driving economic force in our region. In addition to its economic, educational and athletic impact, it also serves as a visual icon of Trojan pride on our campus. At VSU, we take our academics and the success of our students seriously. To that end, we are excited about our newly formed Academic Center for Excellence (ACE). ACE is a resource to help ensure the success of our students by providing free accessible academic support to encourage personal responsibility and provide opportunities for success. We are proud of our students and their accomplishments, the accomplishments of our scholar athletes (2016 CIAA basketball champions), and the amazing accomplishments of our alumni. I know that VSU is a life changer, and I am honored to be the President of this transformative historic University. I am proud to be VSU’s number one fan. Hail State!
Small, limited-resource and beginning farmers and U.S. military veterans who want to make improvements that offer big impacts on their farm productivity and profitability can benefit from the resources available from VSU’s Small Farm Outreach Program (SFOP).

Program instructors and agents start from the ground up by sharing business tools and strategies for financial management that include information on loan and grant funds from both state and federal government agencies. An approved USDA FSA Borrower Training Vendor, the SFOP’s financial and business management programs and its Agribusiness and Financial Management course are innovative, culturally sensitive, level-appropriate and practical.

From there, farmers get expert advice and hands-on demonstrations to help improve their growing and marketing practices during field days at VSU’s Randolph Farm or at local and regional farm tours. Local groups can receive assistance to develop community gardens that will have positive impacts in their neighborhoods, especially in areas without easy access to fresh, local produce. Finally, the SFOP can provide resources for farm transition and estate planning to help aging farmers plan for a successful retirement.

Small Farm Outreach Program education, training and technical support are designed to help farmers grow and sustain successful farm businesses. Contact the SFOP office at (804) 524-5626 or your area agent (see a list on page 7) to learn more about how you can get connected.

Retirees Find Reward in “New-Style” Farming

According to a 2014 USDA Economic Research Service report, 20 percent of principal farm operators in the United States are retirees.

Of the approximate 1,800 small Virginia farmers being assisted by VSU’s Small Farm Outreach Program, almost 40 percent are retired, said SFOP Director William Crutchfield.

Meet two of them—Susan Hill of Hill Farm in Louisa and Thomas Roberson of Botanical Bites Provisions in Spotsylvania.

Hill Farm

An accountant by profession and former high school teacher, Susan Hill is a Montana native who grew up on a cattle, horse and sheep farm. Following retirement, Susan and her husband Scott, a military retiree, opted to forgo her classroom lesson plans to delve full-time into tilling the land in 2011.

Excited to be part of ushering in what she calls a new-style farming movement, Susan explains, “Robbing the land of nutrients, old-style farmers spent dollars upon dollars to combat pests and diseases. Now, we speak of compost and nutrients—treating soil with molasses, trace minerals, rock phosphate and worm castings to grow tasty, nutrient-dense vegetables.”

In four high tunnels, they apply natural solutions to control pests and fertilize seasonal produce, which is grown year-round.

The Hills participate in a small CSA (community-supported agriculture) arrangement whereby community residents subscribe for direct access to fresh, local produce; and in a 70-farmer local food hub organization that supplies local produce to restaurants.

Even as she maintains a busy production schedule, Susan still finds time to teach business planning classes for VSU’s SFOP.

Botanical Bites

“Souls rooted to the soil” is how Thomas Roberson and his wife Anita describe their affinity for farming. On their 10-acre farm, they produce and sell fresh cut flowers and naturally grown, pesticide-free vegetables.

After retiring as a physician’s assistant and Army medical officer, Thomas returned to his agronomic beginnings. The Lynchburg native was reared on a farm under his grandparents’ tutelage. Anita, whose grandparents also were Virginia farmers, retired from the federal government.

—continued on next page
Octogenarian is a Customer-Friendly, Old-School Entrepreneur

To hear 82-year-old Nathaniel Fleming tell it, he’s living the good life. Operating as Fleming Enterprises for the past 25 years, he’s been selling produce full-time from April through January from a roadside stand in Petersburg. He sells an assortment of fruits and vegetables that he buys wholesale from farmers in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. Accompanied by his loyal, canine companion, a beagle-hound mix named Sarge, Fleming sets up shop on South Crater Road across from Walmart.

Fleming readily admits he has not become rich as a result of this endeavor, but is quick to point out how his life has been enriched. “I love what I’m doing and don’t consider it a job,” Fleming said. “It’s basically a non-stressful hobby that allows me lots of freedom. I meet plenty of people and I must be doing something right because they not only return year after year, but they bring others with them.”

A Powhatan native and current Prince George resident, Fleming was reared on his family farm. Expected by his father to return to take over the farm after graduating from college, Fleming said he had other intentions. “During those days, we didn’t have modern farm equipment and we’d work from sunrise to sunset and still be broke most of the time,” he said.

He chose to attend Virginia State University in the 1950s because it offered the best opportunity for him and his family. Fleming said he couldn’t go to Virginia Tech (that excluded admission to black students until 1953), and private schools like Virginia Union were unaffordable. An older sister and younger brother also graduated from VSU.

Fleming fondly recalls his undergrad days as an agricultural education major. He said his instructors were very dedicated and great mentors. His work ethic was industrious. He chuckles about working in VSU’s dining hall for four years where he earned a $1 per day salary. He also worked for the dean of students, processed chickens on the school’s farm for delivery to the dining hall, and arose early to deliver the Richmond Times-Dispatch newspaper to faculty and staff on campus.

Fleming earned his bachelor’s degree in agricultural education from VSU in 1956 and soon afterward was drafted into the U.S. Army. He fought in Vietnam, retiring as command sergeant major after 25 years of active duty.

Upon retirement, he returned to VSU to earn his master’s degree in agricultural education. In 1979, Fleming accepted an assistant county supervisor position with Farmers Home Administration. There, he worked five years providing loans to farmers in Dinwiddie and Prince George. Seeking a less confining avocation, Fleming first started a landscape business, establishing and maintaining lawns, and planting flowers and shrubbery for his clients. When he tired of landscaping, he turned to peddling produce in Petersburg neighborhoods. Fleming Enterprises originated from this venture.

“During my time, agriculture grads basically taught school,” said Fleming. “Now, agricultural career opportunities are more plentiful, abundant and much more involved with businesses.”

Extremely comfortable with the niche he has carved for himself, Fleming said, “I love what I’m doing, and I’ll continue for as long as I’m able.”
Finance and Stress Management Workshop Designed for Business Owners, Supervisors

Dr. Larry Connatser, family financial management specialist with Virginia Cooperative Extension, has created a one-day, interactive, professional development workshop for supervisors and managers in business, industry, healthcare and government agencies to provide knowledge, tools and techniques to improve employee success and increase productivity.

During this workshop, business owners, managers and supervisors will:

- Discover how attitudes about money and behavior affect decision-making and workplace relationships. Learn how to assist team members to improve.
- Learn about worry, stress and anxiety related to money and how to improve team members’ abilities to cope.
- Identify useful resources, tools and techniques for better communication, relationships and employee engagement to improve workplace success.

To learn more details or schedule a program to be held at your business, email Larry Connatser at lconnatser@vsu.edu or call (804) 524-5253.

Video Highlights
Specialist’s Work With Strawberry Growers

Watch the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpDSMI1x0v4

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VSU College of Agriculture & Cooperative Extension present educational programs, workshops and field days for farmers throughout the year. These programs feature a variety of live and online presentations with training designed to match participants’ experience levels.

See page 14 for a list of upcoming events and workshops or visit www.ext.vsu.edu.

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Virginia State University College of Agriculture  ■  www.ext.vsu.edu  ■  www.agriculture.vsu.edu
USDA Recognizes Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center Project One of Year’s Best

In 2015, USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) named VSU’s Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center one of its top five funded projects at historically black colleges and universities. NIFA is also celebrating the partnership developed with the nation’s land-grant universities like VSU, who play a critical role teaching students to meet the high quality, innovative research needs that are vital to the production of our country’s food, fuel and fiber. NIFA provides support to historically black colleges and universities that were designated as land-grant universities in the Second Morrill Act in 1890. Grants to these 1890 universities support research, extension and teaching in the food and agricultural sciences by building the institutional capacities of these schools.

NIFA provided grants funding to Virginia State University to purchase facilities where for teaching aquaponics and urban farming. The operation entails raising fish and growing vegetables in a symbiotic environment.

Renovation Grant Supports Culinary Arts and Workforce Development

The Cameron Foundation provided the Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center with a $60,000 grant to renovate a kitchen. The kitchen will be used to give culinary instruction to VSU students and members of the community. This grant was requested to address the needs of Petersburg’s growing demand for healthier food options.

Dominion Foundation Helps Build a Garden Grove and Learning Oasis

The Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center received a $25,000 grant from the Dominion Foundation and Dominion employees helped plant a vegetable garden and fruit tree grove in Petersburg. Funds from this grant are also being used to construct a classroom where people can participate in workshops for professional development, culinary arts and leadership.

VSU Supports Richmond Urban Ag Initiative

VSU partnered with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and others to help build the Second Baptist Church of South Richmond community garden, named “Eden’s Community Garden.”

Led by Dr. Leonard Githinji, this VSU urban agriculture partnership was supported by Virginia First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe, who spoke in support of initiatives that help to address Virginia’s food insecurity.
A Perfect Time for Hop Research

Virginia State University has “hopped” onto the Virginia craft beer bandwagon by embarking on the first large-scale hops research project ever conducted in the commonwealth.

To date, the state’s growing number of hop growers who are aiming to supply the more than 100 Virginia craft breweries with locally sourced hops, are attempting to grow their plants based on research and experiences from far beyond Virginia’s borders. As a result, these growers are choosing varieties, trellising methods, pest-management and irrigation methods all based on climate, soil composition and experiences from outside the mid-Atlantic region.

That’s a big risk on the hefty investment that goes towards starting a hop yard. That’s why the Virginia Department of Agriculture awarded Virginia State University a $30,000 grant last year to jumpstart a hop research program at the institution. The grant was used to break up the soil, and to erect a 1.4-acre, 18-foot trellis system.

Thereafter, the program secured a $500,000 competitive grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that is funding a three-year project to study fertilizer and irrigation management and pest and disease interactions in select hop varieties. This work is being conducted in conjunction with North Carolina State University and Virginia Tech with the aim of identifying key management practices and hop varieties best suited to the different agro-ecological zones of the mid-Atlantic region.

Dr. Laban Rutto, associate professor at the Agricultural Research Station, leads the project that is being conducted at the university’s Randolph Farm in Ettrick. He reached out to local growers from the Old Dominion Hops Co-op, whose membership spans Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland, to discuss their needs and challenges. Now, he’s testing more than 40 hop varieties with special attention to irrigation, fertilization and disease susceptibility.

“It’s all a question of will it survive, will it thrive, and more importantly, will it produce?” Rutto said. “Our environment is hot, humid, and fungal diseases love it.”

Hops is the ingredient in beer that gives it a refreshing bitter taste and unique aroma. Unlike mass-produced factory beers with watery, non-descript flavors, craft brewers aim for bold flavors, which rely heavily on hops. Different hop varieties impart different flavors and aromas, so it’s critical for the craft beer industry to have as wide a variety as possible at their disposal.

The most common variety grown in Virginia currently is Cascade. “But brewers are getting tired of Cascade,” Rutto said. “They want something new.” The more varieties of hops that thrive in the region, the more choice in terms of flavor and aroma will be available for brewers to work their magic.

This research comes just in time for the growing number of craft breweries in the mid-Atlantic region. So far, Rutto says, he remains confident the research will generate useful information on varieties most suited to local conditions and identify pitfalls to be avoided by growers in Virginia and its neighboring states.

“We got very good survival after the winter; almost 100 percent with all the varieties, but we are already starting to see disease problems and clear differences between varieties,” he said. “When we eventually get a good harvest, we have selected brewers to test the quality of different hop varieties grown here.” Rutto said his long-term plan is to identify a variety that can grow sustainably at Randolph Farm, and based on it, work with a brewer to release a VSU-themed ‘Trojan Ale.’
The New Crops Program at VSU’s Agricultural Research Station is providing technical assistance to agricultural scientists in Guatemala with the aim of improving food production. This effort, funded by USDA-Foreign Agricultural Service from 2014-2016 and modeled after the “Feed the Future” Program, is being undertaken by professors Dr. Harbans Bhardwaj and Dr. Michelle Corley, along with Extension Specialist Dr. Reza Rafie.

In December 2015, Dr. Bhardwaj supplied seeds from 100 pigeonpea lines to Guatemalan farmer Hugo Zurita for planting.

Pigeonpea (Cajanus cajan) is a summer food legume. Pigeonpea makes an important contribution to nutrition, as it contains vitamin B and high levels of protein with important amino acids. The grain is described as having a nutty, earthy flavor. Pigeonpea also is an important crop for small-scale farmers in semi-arid areas as it is drought resistant.

VSU scientists plan to visit Guatemala in the future to further advise the country’s farmers about selection and establishment of superior pigeonpea cultivars.

Assistant Professor Yixiang Xu at VSU’s Agricultural Research Station is conducting tests to find out if grape pomace, the by-product of wine production that might otherwise be discarded, can be a value-added product for wineries in Virginia.

In 2015, Xu found evidence that links the grape pomace to bacteria-killing agents that can possibly be used to combat Listeria and staph bacteria in the packaging of meat products.

Grape pomace is made of the solid remains that come out of the pressing of grapes for juice or wine—the skin, pulp, seeds and stems left over from the process is the actual pomace.

Large quantities of this grape pomace come from the juice and wine industries each year; over 16 million tons of grape by-products were reportedly produced in 2010. That is quite a lot of waste, and potential income for this industry.

For the most part, grape pomace is currently used for animal feed and organic fertilizers.

Grape pomace also holds the potential to be a natural source of bacteria-killing microorganisms, antioxidants and dietary fiber that can be used in food products, medicine or makeup.

The beneficial properties of the pomace may change depending on the grape variety, and may be affected by factors such as farming practices and environmental conditions.

Researchers, led by Xu, have performed studies to find the amount of composition and concentration of bacteria-killing compounds in pomaces from the top four Virginia-grown grape varieties: Cabernet Franc and Chambourcin (red), Viognier and Vidal Blanc (white).

Research, supported through funding from the USDA-NIFA 1890 Institution Capacity Building Grant program, is being conducted to assess the antioxidant and antibacterial activities of each grape variety to figure out its value as a prospective source of natural antioxidants and antimicrobials. Pomaces from white grapes have a higher yield to produce the bacteria-killing agents than those from red wine grape varieties. Cabernet Franc had the highest bacteria-killing content and antioxidant capacities.

So far, each grape pomace variety exhibited antibacterial activity against Listeria and staph infections, but not against E. coli or Salmonella.

Additional research may also be conducted to determine the effectiveness and potential use of grape pomace extracts as an antioxidant and antimicrobial agent to be used in deli meat packaging and as a new ingredient to aid in salt reduction in processed meats.

Study Shows Promise for Grape Pomace

Yixiang Xu

Assistant Professor Yixiang Xu at VSU’s Agricultural Research Station is providing technical assistance to agricultural scientists in Guatemala with the aim of improving food production. This effort, funded by USDA-Foreign Agricultural Service from 2014-2016 and modeled after the “Feed the Future” Program, is being undertaken by professors Dr. Harbans Bhardwaj and Dr. Michelle Corley, along with Extension Specialist Dr. Reza Rafie.

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New Crops Program Helps Agriculture in Guatemala

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Meet Katrina Johnson, VSU’s USDA Program Liaison

Katrina Johnson, 1890 Program Liaison for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, joined the team at Virginia State University College of Agriculture this spring to ensure that students have the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue careers within the USDA. She also will work to advance agricultural programs across the state of Virginia.

Prior to her arrival at VSU, Johnson served the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach. Within the agency, she had also served as a senior program analyst at USDA’s Office of Budget and Program Analysis, where she provided recommendations and briefings to policy officials and senior management to support informed decision-making regarding programs and policies including budgetary, legislative, and regulatory actions.

Previously, Johnson served as an instructor, facilitating professional development workshops in the United States and abroad, and in advocacy and communications positions at non-profits, including AARP. She earned a bachelor’s degree in government from the College of William & Mary and a master’s degree in legislative affairs from George Washington University. She is also a senior fellow with the Partnership for Public Service, Excellence in Government Fellows program.

“Agriculture is a complex industry, with complex challenges that require a multi-faceted approach to solving them... In my role as a liaison, I will be bringing USDA, VSU and stakeholders together to come up with solutions to help address these issues here in Virginia.”

Johnson credits her work in USDA’s budget office for allowing her to gain experience in building relationships and forging strategic partnerships to deliver positive results. “There are two main things that I hope to accomplish while here at the university,” Johnson said. “First, I would like to build a strong relationship with students, faculty and local businesses that will enable me to assist the university in attracting and retaining top students who go on to have successful careers in agriculture. Second, I would like to improve access to USDA programs for minority farmers and minorities in natural resources. And, I hope that through my work we see an increase in minorities participating in farming and natural resources.”

With USDA’s interest in developing students to become part of the next generation of agricultural leaders in Washington D.C., Johnson sees the relationship between USDA and 1890 land-grant universities as a special one. “One of the goals of the 1890 Program is to recruit and train outstanding students from groups traditionally underrepresented for careers in agriculture and agriculture-related industries,” she explained. “One of the opportunities offered to students at VSU is the 1890 National Scholars Program. Since 1992, USDA has permanently employed over 600 of these program scholars.”

USDA also offers internships to current VSU students in its Pathways Programs. These experiential learning programs are developmental opportunities for recent graduates. In addition, the Presidential Management Fellows Program provides a two-year appointment at USDA that may lead to a permanent position to those who have recently earned advanced degrees.

“As someone who is married to a small farmer and whose family has spent over a century farming in Virginia’s Powhatan and Buckingham counties, I know how important VSU is to the advancement and promotion of agriculture in the area,” Johnson continued. “I was thrilled when the opportunity arose for me to bring my experience in professional development and outreach to the university to help students achieve their career goals.”
African-Americans continue to be disproportionately impacted by chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Health outcomes are improved when individuals receive medical nutrition therapy and counseling from a registered dietitian (RD). In addition, studies suggest that patients are more receptive to education when health professionals resemble them. According to the February 2016 Commission on Dietetic Registration statistics (www.cdrnet.org), less than three percent of RDs are African-American.

VSU’s Dietetics Program is in a unique position to train African-Americans as food and nutrition experts. Over the past five years, VSU alone has contributed to the training of almost 15 percent of the total number of African-American RDs. VSU offers the Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) as well as the Dietetic Internship Program. Students can fulfill this requirement by completing either their bachelor’s degree in family and consumer sciences (dietetic concentration) or a post-baccalaureate certificate in nutrition and dietetics. The dietetic internship is a post-baccalaureate program that provides supervised practice experiences and requires a minimum of 1,200 supervised practice hours in the field. Both programs are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Dietetic Education in Nutrition and Dietetics.

In order to close the health disparity gap and to increase African-American representation in the dietetics field, the VSU Dietetics Program was awarded a national Diversity Promotion Grant from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics in 2014. This grant provides a stipend and career-building opportunities for undergraduates. In addition, participants are offered admission into the VSU Dietetic Internship Program.

Many outstanding alumni have graduated from both programs, including the following African-American RDs who have successfully completed both their didactic training and supervised practice experiences at VSU:

- **Katrice Mayo, MS, RDN** is a 2007 graduate of the VSU Certificate Program in Nutrition and Dietetics and a 2008 graduate of the VSU Dietetic Internship Program. She is currently a clinical dietitian practicing at CJW Medical Center, Chippenham Campus. She has a master’s degree in Health Sciences from James Madison University and is the founder and owner of Real Nutrition, a nutrition education consultant business.

- **Danielle Somoza, RDN** is a 2011 graduate with a bachelor’s degree in family and consumer sciences, dietetics concentration and a 2013 graduate of the VSU Dietetic Internship Program. She is currently a registered dietitian practicing with Bon Secours Diabetes Treatment Center. She is the founder and owner of Eat to Live Nutrition Solutions, LLC.

- **Felicia Reese, MS, RDN, CPT** is a 2010 graduate with a bachelor’s degree in family and consumer sciences, dietetics concentration and a 2014 graduate of the VSU Dietetic Internship Program. She is currently a Clinical Pediatric Sales Representative for Abbott Nutrition. She is a certified personal trainer with a master’s degree in nutrition from Virginia Tech.

- **Lanita Benjamin, RDN** is a 2012 graduate of the Nutrition and Dietetics Certificate Program and a 2015 graduate of the VSU Dietetic Internship Program. She is a registered dietitian for Virginia Department of Health’s Women, Infants and Children Program in the Peninsula Health District.
Representing VSU’s Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, Dr. Alice Joyner and Dr. Badiyyah Waajid traveled to Cuba to explore ways to further the university’s goal of building a sustainable international studies program that will provide global experiences at all academic levels. They were joined by professors from other institutions, including North Carolina A&T State University and Morgan State University. The trip was part of a study tour to examine the feasibility of establishing an international study experience for students enrolled in family and Consumer Sciences programs.

The group visited the Institute Superior de Arte, the country’s top art academy, that includes departments of music, modern dance, drama and visual arts. They met with the director of international relations to examine university level arts pedagogy in Cuba and visited the studio of Joe’ Rodriguez Fuster, one of the most important Cuban ceramists and painters today, as well as other notable sites of culture and education.

The vision of VSU’s Department of Family and Consumer Sciences is to advance student development by building skills and competence for careers in the 21st century. International study experiences promote global awareness, help students to embrace diversity and prepare them to interact with culturally diverse populations. As students live and work with international populations, they may become competent leaders and decision-makers to solve global problems.
SEPTEMBER

20-22  7th National Small Farm Conference  
Virginia Beach Convention Center, Virginia Beach, VA

28  Small Farm Day at The Virginia State Fair  
Meadow Event Park, Doswell, VA

OCTOBER

October has been renamed “Goatober” at VSU Cooperative Extension, where our specialists aim to introduce goat meat to Virginia consumers by raising awareness on how to prepare tasty goat dishes and where to find local producers.

Find information and recipes online at: http://vsugoatober.wixsite.com/2016
Goatober wraps up on October 21 with the Small Ruminant Field Day that is open to the public.

4  Silvopasture / No Till Demonstration  
(10am - 12pm) Nelson County, VA

6  USDA Programs and Resources for Small Farmers  
(8:30am - 11am); King William County

11  Sweet Potato Varieties Demonstration  
Caroline County

12  Cut Flower Workshop  
(2pm - 4pm)  
Randolph Farm, Petersburg, VA

20  Precision Agriculture Field Day  
(9am - 2pm)  
Location TBD

20  Aquaculture Field Day  
Randolph Farm, Petersburg, VA

21  Small Ruminant Field Day  
Randolph Farm, Petersburg, VA

NOVEMBER

10  Ginger/Turmeric Field Day,  
(9am - 12pm)  
Randolph Farm, Petersburg, VA

17  Estate Planning and Farm Transition  
(1pm - 4pm)  
Public Works Building, Orange, VA

22  USDA Programs and Resources for Small Farmers  
(9am - 12pm); Stuart, VA

Agribusiness & Financial Management Course for Small Farmers

Especially for limited resource farmers, this six-part course is designed to meet the mandatory USDA/FSA financial and production management borrower training requirements, assist in boosting farm profitability and income for farm families and local communities, and offer hands-on training to develop valuable skills in financial management and crop production.

(2-Day Course, $50 fee. Continuing Education Credit Available.)

Nov. 17 & 18  Institute for Advance Learning  
Danville, VA

Jan. 5 & 6  Wilder Building, Virginia State University

Feb. 16 & 17  Emporia Extension Office, Emporia VA

March 9 & 10  Keysville Community College

March 23 & 24  Fauquier County Extension Office

April 20 & 21  Eastern Shore Community College

FARM TOURS

Nov. 17  Hudson Heritage Farm, LLC

April 14  Slade Farm

April 19  Eastern Shore (location TBD)

June 7  Hill Farm

Date TBD  Beef Cattle Tour (location TBD)

Online registration will be available beginning in October, or you may contact Mike Wooden, mwooden@vsu.edu, or call (804) 691-3263.

Farm demonstrations are subject to change based on seasonal conditions. To view the calendar for these and other upcoming events, visit www.ext.vsu.edu
**VSU College of Agriculture's continued leadership in the fields of agriculture, hospitality management, and family and consumer sciences depends on people like you—alumni, parents, and friends—to help meet its priority needs.**

The funds—one for each of the three academic departments in the College of Agriculture—help enhance our students' experience, from meeting their increased financial aid needs to professional development for faculty and investment in new academic programming.

**Please consider giving a gift today.**

**CONSIDERING PLANNED GIVING?**
Along with support of VSU’s College of Agriculture, alumni and friends can demonstrate their loyalty with a Planned Gift. These gifts may name the VSU College of Agriculture as beneficiary of a life insurance policy or in your will. We can also show you how to continue to earn money while your gift to VSU matures!

For more information about planned giving options, please call us at (804) 524-5003.
Interns in VSU's Department of Family and Consumer Sciences Dietetics Program (l. to r.) Zara Awan, Lisa Nguyen, Jody Allen and Erin Ford. The interns worked with Dr. Theresa Nartea, marketing and agribusiness Extension specialist, to show participants at the VSU/USDA Field Day how to set up an attractive farm market display.