

The

Tide

Extension News from the Middle Peninsula

Edition 5
April 2026



Fifth-graders participate in Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE)

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Welcome

Meet our new Middlesex/Essex Summer Intern, McKenziey Kirby!



VCE Essex and Middlesex have a new summer intern. We will welcome McKenziey Kirby to our offices on May 19th. McKenziey will be graduating from Virginia Tech in May with a degree in Animal and Poultry Sciences. She also currently serves in the U.S. Army Reserve Veterinary Corps. McKenziey is from a fourth-generation farm in Hanover County.

Welcome, McKenziey!

Wheat Grazing Research

Turner Minx, ANR Agent King William/King and Queen, and Hunter Richardson had the opportunity to showcase their wheat grazing research plot to a group of leaders in Virginia agriculture. This research was celebrated as an innovative effort to combine livestock and grain production on the same acreage in an effort to increase farm sustainability and soil health. Cool stuff, huh?

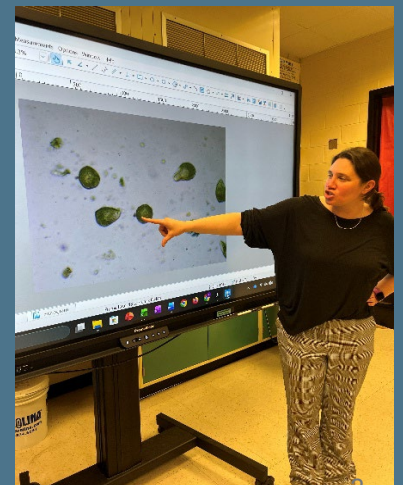
From the left we have:

Scott Hammond (NRCS District Conservationist)
Stephanie Cornell (chairperson of Virginia Cooperative Extension State Advisory Council)
Vivian Seay (County Administrator/County Attorney, King and Queen County)
Dr. Edwin Martinez Martinez (NRCS, State Conservationist)
Hunter Richardson (landowner, farmer)
Ben Wiant (farm employee and mechanical wizard)
Stacy Richardson (Realtor and Agricultural Advocate)
J.B. Daniel (NRCS, Forage and Grassland Agronomist)
Turner Minx (Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent)
Morris White (Virginia Cooperative Extension, District Director)
Taylor Adam (American Farmland Trust)
Jacob Gilley (JG Land & Livestock)



VCE and Oyster Seed Holdings partner to host oyster spawning program for schools

VCE Middlesex and VCE Henrico partnered with Oyster Seed Holdings from Gwynn's Island, VA to provide students in Richmond with an opportunity to learn about oyster reproduction. Students spawned oyster broodstock under a microscope and in real-time saw reproduction happen. Students also learned about oyster hatchery operations, algae production, and oyster farming while highlighting potential careers in the aquaculture industry. If you are interested in learning more about this potential curriculum in your school, please reach out to Frank Long, flong269@vt.edu, for more information.



Farmers and Fishermens Co-Op (FFC) and the Lower MP Integrated Food System

Mathews, Middlesex, and Gloucester Counties' small local producers and watermen have joined to gather to form a grower-run cooperative with the intention of using group purchasing power, local market development and opportunities, advertising initiatives, and shared resources to grow themselves on a local level to expand their businesses. The Farmers and Fishermens Co-Op invite any potential members to reach out to learn more about how their group can assist local producers in reaching their full potential, while operating with regenerative farming practices.

While the FFC producers reached out to VCE for assistance with education initiatives, food safety assistance, and providing other continuing education opportunities, Mathews private groups and individuals reached out to Mathews and Middlesex VCE ANR Agent to assist with implementing and assisting a Community Kitchen project. The Community Kitchen is still in the development phase but hopes to offer a commercially licensed food preparation alternative for local businesses, food banks/pantries, and other community organizations, while establishing home economic programming for youth and adults alike.

If you have an interest in joining the Co-Op or assisting with the development of any aspect of this locally Food Integrated System, please reach out to Frank Long, flong269@vt.edu, for any updates questions, or volunteer opportunities.



Hands-On Watershed Lessons Bring Science to Life for Gloucester Fifth Graders



Gloucester fifth graders from the five elementary schools spent the week of April 13-17 turning Beaverdam Park into their outdoor classroom during a Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE) led by 4-H in partnership with Community Engagement, Master Naturalists, Master Gardener Tree Stewards, and Clean Communities/Bee City. Students learned about the importance of protecting pollinators. They explored the life cycle and critical role of oysters in the Chesapeake Bay, while also learning about the life cycle of frogs and fiddler crabs. A guided watershed walk allowed students to see firsthand evidence of how water moves across both natural and human-made surfaces.

The hands-on science continued as students worked with Tree Stewards to conduct a tree inventory, identifying species and discussing how trees support healthy watersheds. At the water's edge, Master Naturalists introduced students to the world of macroinvertebrates by sharing specimens they had collected earlier that morning. Students examined dragonfly nymphs, crayfish, snails, and other tiny organisms under magnifiers, learning how the presence or absence of certain species can reveal the overall health of a stream. Back at school, students completed a MWEE exit ticket, which showcased learning outcomes. Nearly all could name their home watershed and several they could take to protect the local ecosystem; All could identify a Dogwood tree and tell why it is important to protect pollinators. The MWEE blended environmental science with real data collection, giving students a deeper understanding of their local ecosystem and the role they play in protecting it.



Essex 4-H Livestock Club Members Learn Food Preservation Through Country Ham Projects

Members of the Essex 4-H Livestock Club recently stepped back in time to learn about one aspect of Virginia history by completing Virginia Country Ham projects. The projects were a 9-week process, starting on January 17. Members learned to take their fresh “green” country hams and salt them with a recipe of curing salt, table salt, and sugar to begin the curing process to extract moisture. Each fresh ham was weighed to obtain a beginning weight, then thoroughly covered and packed with the salt mixture and placed in cold storage for the 9-week cure period. They were re-packed with salt periodically as moisture was lost. The club members learned the history behind curing meats for food preservation before the modern luxuries of refrigeration and freezers. They also learned about the south-east Virginia swine and ham markets, and that this process is still in existence today to provide the highly-desired country ham experience on a biscuit or for a holiday gathering with family.

After the curing process was complete, members washed their hams, re-weighted them to see the moisture loss and shrinkage, and coated them with oil and black pepper and placed them in a drying sack to prepare them for the next step in the curing process, hanging them for temperature equalization and further drying. While the club was not able to do the traditional smoking of the country hams to finalize the curing and smoking process, they learned about this step and the importance of maintaining the correct temperature during the process to avoid cooking the ham, while providing the smoked finish for flavor and appearance. In total, club members completed seven country ham projects and were able to take them home.

The group would like to acknowledge Smithfield Foods for donating the green hams for this educational experience, as well as the Tappahannock-Essex Volunteer Fire Department for allowing the group to use their kitchen space to prep the hams and begin the salt curing process. We would also like to acknowledge the following Virginia Cooperative Extension ANR Agents for assisting with this project and providing guidance; Neil Clark, Roy Flanagan, Livvy Preisser, and Robbie Longest. This project also would not have been possible without the support of the club’s adult volunteers, and we thank them for their time and support. Finally, we would like to thank Ramah Farm in Northumberland County for allowing the club to use their cooler and farm to cure the hams and complete the final steps for the process.



Upcoming 4-H Events



Gloucester 4-H Day Camps in the Works for Summer

The **Global 4-H Food Challenge Camp** will take place at the Extension Office, TC Walker Education Center on June 24–25 from 10 AM to 4 PM, offering a hands-on introduction to cooking, teamwork, and global flavors. Over two full days, participants will learn kitchen safety basics, explore nutrition in everyday meals, and practice preparing simple recipes inspired by China and Italy. Campers will work together to measure, chop, mix, and taste while building confidence and learning how food choices support a healthy lifestyle. With a blend of cooking practice, cultural exploration, and friendly challenges, this camp provides a relaxed, supportive space for youth to grow their skills and enjoy the fun of creating something delicious. For ages 9–14.

The **4-H Farm Tour Camp** will take place July 29–30, offering a close-up look at agriculture in Virginia. Each morning, participants will meet at the Extension Office before departing on the Extension Tour Bus (a van with seating for 10 youth) for a day of visiting farms and agribusinesses. On Day 1 we will visit the Randolph Farm at Virginia State University. Day 2 will be spent visiting local farms. With a mix of hands-on experiences, guided tours, and real-world conversations, this camp provides a thoughtful, engaging way for youth to explore where their food comes from and how agriculture shapes everyday life. For ages 9–14.

4-H Camp Craft & Relax will be held at the Extension Office, TC Walker Education Center on August 6–7 from 10 AM to 4 PM, offering a peaceful, mid-summer break for young creators. Participants will explore a variety of traditional 4-H camp crafts, learn a few simple methods to reduce stress, and enjoy a relaxed environment designed for creativity and connection. This camp provides a refreshing pause in the busy summer season and a chance for campers to recharge while creating something uniquely their own. For ages 9–14.

4-H Cloverbud Camp at Whitcomb Lodge, Beaverdam Park is set for August 18–20, 9–noon, and it's a great chance for our youngest 4-H'ers to enjoy a simple, relaxed summer adventure. Campers will spend time exploring park trails, trying hands-on activities, making friends, and enjoying the outdoors in a supportive, low-pressure environment. With a mix of crafts, games, and nature-based fun, this three-day camp offers a welcoming space for curiosity, creativity, and connection. It's a gentle, memorable way to wrap up the summer and introduce Cloverbuds to the spirit of 4-H camp. For ages 5–8, having completed kindergarten.

Registration to open in May is here: <https://tinyurl.com/20264-HDayCamps>



Gloucester's Bay Riders 4-H Club Receives Equine Education Grant



The Virginia Horse Industry Board has granted funding to the Bay Riders 4-H Club for the acquisition of an Ohio State Horse Learning Lab. This interactive educational kit aims to deepen youth understanding of horse science. The grant proposal was crafted by Club President Aubrey Smith, with assistance from 4-H Extension Agent Krista Gustafson, highlighting the club's strong youth leadership.

The new learning lab will provide interactive tools to help members prepare for upcoming 4-H horse judging, hippology, and horse bowl contests. This resource not only boosts contest readiness—it also supports the development of critical thinking, communication, and animal science skills that benefit youth long beyond the show ring.

New Location!

Check out our new office space! The King William & King and Queen County Extension office has moved to:

7890 Richmond-Tappahannock Hwy Aylett, VA 23009

We're still unpacking, sorting, and discovering stuff we didn't know we had (isn't moving fun??), but we are here and working hard for our communities.

Some housekeeping notes:

The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM...just like normal. Stop by and see us!

The most direct way to reach us is via email.

For Agriculture and Natural Resources questions, contact Turner Minx at:

turnerminx@vt.edu

For 4-H/Youth Development, contact Christine Roadman at:

christiner@vt.edu

Our phone service hasn't been hooked up yet. For the time being, the Essex County office is taking our calls and forwarding the messages to us. That number is: 804-443-3551



Apply for the Middlesex/Essex Part-Time 4-H Educator Position!

Do you have experience in youth education and programming? Do you enjoy teaching youth? Are you interesting in creating educational opportunities for youth in Essex and Middlesex Counties?

The Essex and Middlesex County Virginia Cooperative Extension Offices are seeking to hire a shared 4-H Educator that will serve both localities. The Educator will contribute to 4-H positive Youth Development educational programming and collaborate with other VCE employees and partners to deliver opportunities such as in-school lessons, camps, and 4-H clubs; as well as volunteer coordination and training, and other services to support the needs of the local youth and the unit offices. Applications to be accepted until position is filled. The position will have flexible scheduling hours with offices in both units.

To apply, contact the Middlesex office at 75 Oakes Landing Road, Saluda, VA 23149 804-758-4120/flong269@vt.edu or the Essex office at 112 Cross Street, Tappahannock, VA 22560 804-443-3551/robbiel7@vt.edu



Virginia Household Water Quality Program

Upcoming Virginia Household Water Quality Programs

Registration is open for Virginia Cooperative Extension's 2026 Well Water Clinic! Registration is at this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/VAHWQP-GL> - scroll down to find your county.

Sample kits cost \$70. There are limited scholarship funds for those unable to afford the testing - contact your local office to see what is available. Samples will test for 28 contaminants, including bacteria, lead, sodium, nitrates, and pH.

Household Water Quality Well Water Clinics for Gloucester-Mathews-Middlesex

Kickoff meetings (where you receive the testing kits, instructions, and some basic education on well water maintenance)

- June 22, 12-1 PM, TC Walker (Cafeteria): 6099 T C Walker Rd, Gloucester, VA 23061
- June 22, 6-7 PM, Cook's Corner Office Complex: 2893 General Puller Hwy, Saluda, VA 23149
- June 23, 10-11 AM, Mathews Extension Office: 10494 Buckley Hall Road, Suite B, Mathews, VA 23109
- June 23, 6-7 PM, TC Walker (Cafeteria): 6099 T C Walker Rd, Gloucester, VA 23061

The sample drop-off day will be the morning of June 24:

- 7-9 AM TC Walker (Cafeteria): 6099 T C Walker Rd, Gloucester, VA 23061
- 8:30-9:30 AM Mathews Extension office: 10494 Buckley Hall Road, Suite B, Mathews, VA 23109
- 8-10 AM Middlesex Extension office: 75 Oakes Landing, Saluda, VA 23149

After samples are analyzed at Virginia Tech, participants will receive their confidential results, an explanation of any risks associated with any parameters that exceeded the indicated levels, and a recorded interpretation meeting by email roughly 5 weeks after the sample collection date. Additionally, we will be hosting one optional in-person interpretation meeting on August 17th, from 12-1 PM, in the TC Walker Cafeteria: 6099 T C Walker Rd, Gloucester, VA 23061

Household Water Quality Well Water Clinics for Essex- King William-King and Queen

Kits will be available to pick up on 6/17, 6/18, 6/22, and 6/23 at the King William/King and Queen office (7890 Richmond-Tappahannock Hwy, Aylett, VA 23009) or the Essex office (112 Cross Street, Tappahannock, VA 22560).

Kits will need to be filled and returned on the morning of 6/24 to either office.

If you have any questions, please contact Turner Minx or Robbie Longest at 804-443-3551.

Upcoming Programming

- 2026 Fredericksburg Area 4-H/FFA Livestock Show and Sale - May 1st -2nd, 2026 at Meadow Event Park (13191 Dawn Blvd, Doswell, VA 23047)
- Eastern VA AREC: Small Grains Field Day - May 21st, 2026 (2229 Menokin Rd, Warsaw, VA 22572) 9 am to 1 pm
- Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck Wheat Tour - May 27th (Dinner) and May 28th (Tours)
- VA Ag Expo - July 30th at Meadow Event Park (13191 Dawn Blvd, Doswell, VA 23047) 7:00am - 2:00pm

Contact Us!

Essex	
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Gloucester	
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Middlesex	
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