



Winter 2026



Virginia  
Cooperative  
Extension

Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

# BATH-HIGHLAND NEWS



## FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE TOPICS

Becky Gartner, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Science—rebes13@vt.edu—540 564 3080



**Make SMART goals for 2026.** Many of us make plans for getting healthy in the new year. Often we are not successful. Studies show that nearly 80% of people who set a New Year’s resolution fail within the first few weeks.

Why is that? We often set goals that are too vague, unachievable or idealistic. Common resolutions include exercising more, eating a better diet, losing weight or saving money. While these might all be good intentions, they don’t give us a clear path to success or even an indicator of how success would look. Creating a “SMART” goal is one tactic we can use to give us a better chance of achieving our goals.

SMART stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic/Relevant and **T**ime-bound.

**Specific.** Describe exactly what you want to do. Eating healthier is a good idea, but not specific. But saying “I want to include more fruit with breakfast” is getting more specific.

**Measurable.** Consider how you can measure your progress and create accountability. This would change our example to “I plan to have one apple or banana with breakfast each morning this week,” which is something you can measure.

**Achievable.** Think about what you will need to achieve the goal. Do you have the resources, or do you know where to find them? Back to our fruit example. Would it be helpful to find healthy recipes for breakfast items that use fruit? Would shopping seasonal produce be more budget-friendly and give you a higher-quality product? Include these details as a part of your final goal.

**Realistic/Relevant.** It is a lot easier to accomplish things we want to do and can do than to accomplish the things that we feel we should do. For any goal, consider how much or how often you can realistically do something and how much you want to complete that task. Instead of starting off by having a piece of fruit with breakfast every day of the week, including fruit with breakfast four days a week might be more realistic.

**Time-bound.** Add a time frame to your goal. Is it for a week, a month or longer? Setting a time frame gives you a marker to work toward; then you can decide to continue your work or switch to a new goal.

If you’ve already set that goal for the new year, be sure to check in with yourself on how it is going and if you need to make modifications to have a better chance of success in the long run. If your goals are money related, use the same steps to set a SMART goal. Remember, we are focused on progress, not perfection.

Source: University of Missouri Extension

### Upcoming Events:

#### ServSafe Manager Classes

**February 2—9 am –5 pm**

Rockingham Extension Office

965 Pleasant Valley Road

Harrisonburg

Cost: \$160

Registration deadline: January 20

**April 28—9 am—5pm**

Rockbridge Extension Office

150 South Main Street

Lexington

**Cost: \$170 price increase**

Registration deadline: April 14

If you are a person with a disability and desire assistance or accommodations to participate in programs listed in this newsletter, please contact the VCE Bath or Highland Unit Office at (540) 839-7261 or (540) 468-2225 during business hours to discuss accommodations. (TDD 800-828-1120)

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.



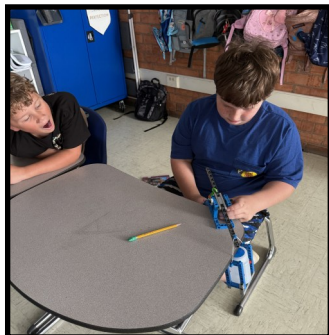
# 4-H HAPPENINGS

Ben Hindman, Extension Agent, 4-H Bath/Highland—benjaminh@vt.edu—540 839 7261



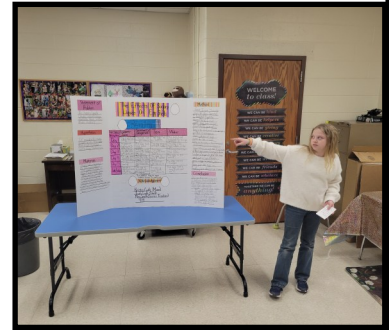
## Recent Highlights

- I recently had the opportunity to attend the 2025 National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals (NAE4-HYDP) Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. This national conference brought together 4-H professionals from across the country to share best practices, explore current youth development research, and learn innovative strategies to strengthen local 4-H programming. Participating in the conference allowed me to network with colleagues, exchange ideas, and bring back new resources that will directly benefit youth, families, and volunteers in Bath and Highland counties. I also presented as part of a team highlighting international opportunities available through Virginia 4-H. During the session, I shared my role and experience with the Virginia 4-H service trip to the Dominican Republic, focusing on how global service-learning experiences help youth build leadership skills, cultural awareness, and a broader understanding of their role as engaged citizens.
- The 4-H In-School Enrichment Program continues to provide engaging, hands-on learning opportunities for students in Bath and Highland counties through a collaborative effort between the Bath and Highland Extension offices and local schools. This year, the program is serving students in grades 3–7 at Millboro and Valley Elementary Schools in Bath County and grades 3–6 in Highland County, with lessons aligned to the Virginia Standards of Learning and a strong emphasis on STEM education. Third graders are learning about simple machines through interactive activities using levers, inclined planes, and wheel-and-axle systems. Fourth and sixth graders are participating in classroom experiments designed to strengthen scientific inquiry skills and better prepare them for upcoming 4-H Science Fairs at each school. Fifth graders are taking part in the Magic of Electricity program, completing hands-on circuitry activities with materials made possible through a sponsorship from BARC. Seventh graders are participating in the Teen Cuisine program, where they prepare recipes in the classroom while learning about nutrition, food safety, and healthy choices. Overall, the program supports academic learning while helping students build curiosity, confidence, and practical life skills.



## Looking Ahead

- Upcoming in February, 4-H will once again help facilitate Science Fairs at Millboro and Valley Elementary Schools in Bath County, involving 4th and 6th grade students, as well as with 6th graders at Highland Middle School. These Science Fairs provide students with valuable opportunities to apply concepts they have explored through 4-H in-school enrichment programs, with a strong focus on the scientific method and the investigative process. Students will design experiments, collect and analyze data, and draw conclusions based on their findings, reinforcing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This marks the fourth year that 4-H has supported science fair programming, which began at Valley Elementary School in 2022 and has since expanded to additional schools. As part of the experience, students will present their projects to a panel of community judges, building confidence, communication skills, and real-world presentation experience. Overall, the 4-H Science Fairs promote curiosity, creativity, and hands-on learning while strengthening connections between schools, Extension, and the local community.
- Bath and Highland 4-H members will have several upcoming opportunities to serve their community during the Highland County Maple Festival, which will be held over two weekends in March. Through a variety of volunteer projects, youth will experience firsthand the importance of service and community involvement—core values of the 4-H program. 4-H members will assist local craft vendors by helping move inventory into designated spaces as they prepare for the festival. Youth will also work alongside the Mill Gap Ruritans to assemble boxes for their popular maple donut sales and support the Stonewall Ruritans by assisting with their pancake meal. These service activities allow youth to contribute in meaningful ways while learning the value of teamwork, responsibility, and giving back. By participating in these volunteer opportunities, 4-H members strengthen connections with local organizations, support a signature community event, and gain a deeper understanding of how their efforts can positively impact their community.



**Contact Ben Hindman if you or someone you know is interested in any 4-H opportunity**

# AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Kari Sponaugle, Extension Agent, ANR Highland/Bath— karis@vt.edu—Cell: 540 679 9664

VCE Highland and Bath wish to share the following winter program opportunities with you:



Virginia Cooperative Extension will be offering the Virginia Master Cattlemen program online in Spring 2026. The program will consist of seven sessions that provide essential information for beef producers in Economics, Genetics, Reproduction, Nutrition, Forages, Herd Health, and Marketing. Participants will receive a certificate as a Virginia Master Cattlemen upon successful completion of all seven sessions of the program. The goal of the program is to build foundational knowledge that can be applied to advanced beef educational programs.

This program will be held on Zoom weekly from 6:30 to 8:30 pm on Thursdays from February 12 to March 26. The dates are as listed:

February 12, February 19, February 26, March 5, March 12, March 19 & March 26

### Seven Educational Modules

- Herd Health Management
- Nutrition
- Reproduction
- Economics
- Genetics
- Marketing
- Forage

Please register for the program online at: <https://tinyurl.com/MasterCattlemens2026> or by scanning the QR code.

Registration Costs: **\$90.00**

\*Includes certification, farm sign, and educational materials.



All participants will receive a hard copy course notebook. Internet access and email are required for this course. **Registration deadline is February 5, 2026.**

For more information, contact Phil Blevins at Washington County Extension Office  
Phone: (276)676-6309 or by email: pblevins@vt.edu

## Before You Buy The Farm

Land and Livestock Considerations for Prospective and Beginning Farmers & Homesteaders



Thinking about starting a farm or homestead, getting into livestock, or purchasing your own property? Join Virginia Cooperative Extension for a four-session Zoom series exploring the key considerations you should understand before you take the leap into farm ownership.

### Zoom Series Topics

- 1/22 Dream, Plan, Farm**  
Thinking through the future - set goals, budget time and money, and turn "the dream" into a practical plan!
- 1/29 Finding Your Farm Fit**  
Learn what to look for & questions to consider when shopping for properties to plan ahead for equipment and infrastructure needs
- 2/5 The Grass is Always Greener**  
Learn what it takes to renovate and rehabilitate pastures for livestock, stocking rates, and more!
- 2/12 The Livestock Lowdown**  
Dive into livestock management and components of a successful farm, including finding a vet and how to plan feeding your animals year round

### Zoom Series Details

- 📅 **Thursday Evenings**  
Jan 22 and 29  
Feb 5 and 12, 2026
- 🕒 **7:00 - 8:00 PM**

### Register HERE:

<https://tinyurl.com/beforeyoubuythefarm2026>

VIRGINIA Beginning Farmer & Rancher COALITION PROGRAM



### Questions? Please Contact:

- Mackenzie Gunn (Amelia): [mgunn@vt.edu](mailto:mgunn@vt.edu)
- Sarah Sharpe (Greene): [seweaver@vt.edu](mailto:seweaver@vt.edu)
- Meredith Hoggatt (Montgomery): [mhoggatt@vt.edu](mailto:mhoggatt@vt.edu)

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit [www2.ces.vt.edu/accessibility](http://www2.ces.vt.edu/accessibility).

## VANTAGE

### VIRGINIA NO-TILL CONFERENCE

**Wednesday, February 18, 2026**  
8a.m. - 4:30p.m.  
Registration is Free at [www.virginianotill.com](http://www.virginianotill.com) or call 540-245-5750

Location: Rockingham Co. Fairgrounds  
4808 South Valley Pike, Harrisonburg, VA 22801

### Soil Health, Economic Wealth: Advancing Agriculture for the Future

**Come learn from...**

- ✓ Dr. Ray Weil - Internationally recognized soil scientist
- ✓ Jim Hoorman - National No-Till speaker
- ✓ Andy Flinchbaugh - Diversified PA farmer
- ✓ Eric Finkenbinder - Award-winning agricultural meteorologist

**Trade Show  
Lunch Provided  
Ice Cream Social  
CEU Credits**

**NEW Afternoon Breakout Sessions:**

- Cover Crops 101 for Beginners
- Advanced Strategies in Cover Crops
- Grain Marketing
- Diversification & Regen Certification

**No-Till Champion Award Contest**  
Winners will be announced!

## Bath & Highland County

Virginia Cooperative Extension  
Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

Virginia Household Water Quality Program

# WELL WATER TESTING CLINIC

**Rely on a well, spring, or cistern?  
Check your water quality!**

Virginia Cooperative Extension offers low-cost water testing clinics across the state through the Virginia Household Water Quality Program (VAHWQP).

**Testing includes 28 chemical and bacteriological constituents including:**

✓ <b>Heavy Metals &amp; Elements</b>	✓ <b>Water Quality Indicators</b>	✓ <b>Chemicals &amp; Nutrients</b>	✓ <b>Bacteria</b>
• Arsenic	• Hardness	• Fluoride	• Coliform bacteria
• Copper	• pH	• Nitrate	• E. coli bacteria
• Iron	• Total dissolved solids (TDS)	• Sulfate	✓ <b>Plus more!</b>
• Lead			
• Manganese			

**Register & pay online starting 1/26 at:**

**BATH:** <https://tinyurl.com/VAHWQP-BA>

**HIGHLAND:** <https://tinyurl.com/VAHWQP-HI>

**kick off meetings: Feb 17 & 18**  
**kit drop off date, a.m.: Feb 25**

*Pay by check/cash available.*

**Questions contact: Kari Sponaugle, at**  
VCE Highland, 540-839-7261 | [karis@vt.edu](mailto:karis@vt.edu)  
VCE Bath, 540-468-2225

**\$70 per kit**

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit [ext.vt.edu/accessibility](http://ext.vt.edu/accessibility).

**SAVE the DATE – WOMEN IN AG GATHERING - SHENANDOAH VALLEY - April 23-24, 2026.** Topics and speakers include Agritourism, Livestock, Vegetables and more! Registration opens February 1<sup>st</sup>.



# 4-H & ANR PROGRAM EDUCATOR

Jordan Alexander, Bath/Highland—jordan98@vt.edu—540 839 7261

### 4-H Poultry Chain

Do you know a child, **ages 5-18**, interested in growing their own food, building responsibility, and learning record keeping abilities? Sign them up for the Bath-Highland Poultry Chain Project! For a small fee, 4-Her's can receive 10 chicks to raise through the spring and summer mature egg laying hens. Bring at least 5 hens from your flock & an educational poultry poster to show off at the **Bath County Fair** at Millboro Elementary School on **September 19, 2026**. After the awards and ribbons from the 4-H Poultry Show, sell your flock of 5 to the highest bidder! Folks in the community notice their hard work and dedication caring for a flock and are willing to pay top dollar! Sale funds raised help keep program costs cheap, cheap, cheap for youth every year!

**More details coming soon. If you are interested, please call or email by January 26, 2026!**

**Chick Arrival: March at VCE-Bath or VCE-Highland**

### 4-H Cloverbuds

February is American Heart Month, and Heart is the second "H" in 4-H. Along with the important job of pumping blood throughout the body, our heart is often associated with feelings and emotions. February is a great time to think about the second "H" in the 4-H Pledge and explore heart-themed activities with the 4-H Cloverbud after school program! Youth **ages 5-8** will learn about the 4 "H's": Head, Heart, Hands and Health next month through a science experiment, fun exercises, a heart healthy snack and Valentine craft to share with someone special!

**HES: February 5, 3:30-5:30pm**

**VES: February 10, 3:30-5pm**

**MES: February 18, 3:30-5pm**

#### **Bath County Office**

PO Box 357  
Warm Springs, VA 24484  
540-839-7261

#### **Highland County Office**

PO Box 528  
Monterey, VA 24465  
540-468-2225  
Online: [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)

### **Your Area Extension Agents and Staff include:**

Kari Sponaugle, Agriculture & Natural Resources, Bath & Highland County and Unit Coordinator  
Ben Hindman, 4-H Youth Development, Bath & Highland County  
Becky Gartner, Family & Consumer Sciences, Rockingham County  
Rosemary Life, Crops & Soils, Rockingham County  
Jason Cooper, Horticulture, Rockingham County  
Tom Stanley, Farm Business Management, Rockbridge County  
Adam Downing, Forestry, Madison County  
Jordan Alexander, Program Educator 4-H/ANR, Bath & Highland County  
Deseray Chaplin, Administrative Fiscal Assistant, Bath County  
Kathy Beverage, Administrative Fiscal Assistant, Highland County



### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

#### **Bath County Office**

**PO Box 357**

**Warm Springs VA 24484**

### **OFFICIAL BUSINESS**

We are happy to provide this newsletter. However, if you prefer to receive this a different way (email/hard copy) or to be removed from the list, please call 540-468-2225 or 540-839-7261.