

MINORITY & VETERAN FARMERS OF THE PIEDMONT

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025



MVFP empowers communities and advances rural resilience through education, advocacy, and engagement that promote rural living, environmental stewardship, and equitable access to local food.

By strengthening local food systems and supporting youth and families, we help cultivate strong, healthy, and future-ready communities.



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MVFP in Brief

The Minority and Veteran Farmers of the Piedmont (MVFP) is a 501(c)(3) grassroots nonprofit based in the rolling foothills of Virginia's Piedmont region. Founded in July 2019, MVFP creates educational and experiential learning opportunities through hands-on instruction. We promote training, coaching, and mentorship for minorities, veterans, farmers, and urban and rural youth to build a more equitable and resilient food system.



FROM THE BOARD

Building Resilient Communities Through Partnership



The board and members of the Minority and Veteran Farmers of the Piedmont (MVFP) know that real change starts with people. By aligning MVFP's grassroots leadership with the convening power of the regional workforce board, Virginia Career Works – Piedmont (VCWP), we're creating a partnership that does more than share staffing and resources – It builds capacity, strengthens leadership, and connects parallel regional ecosystems.

Together, MVFP and VCWP are weaving food equity, workforce and skills innovation, and community resilience into a framework that sustains both people and place. This collaboration positions MVFP's volunteer leaders and youth participants as skills-transfer pipelines, supported by the workforce board's structure and expertise. It expands MVFP's reach beyond what is traditionally thought of agriculture into the realms of education, business, and community development, all keys to being a successful member of the agriculture community, ensuring that talent remains the anchor for a future-ready region.

Why does this matter? Because resilience isn't accidental. It's cultivated through shared vision, strong leadership, and partnerships that amplify impact. By joining forces, MVFP and VCWP are shaping a region where equity and vitality thrive – today and for generations beyond us.

We hope you'll join us in our mission, whether by volunteering, partnering, or simply spreading the word. Together, we can grow a stronger, more resilient Piedmont.

With Appreciation,

Ralph Morton

Ralph Morton, President
Minority & Veteran Farmers of the Piedmont



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ralph Morton - President



Ralph Morton is a third-generation farmer and retired U.S. Army veteran with 21 years of service, including deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Before his military career, Ralph ran a successful beef cattle operation and, after retiring, returned to his roots with a passion for cultivating the land and producing local, sustainable food. A lifelong advocate for agriculture, Ralph grew up active in 4-H and FFA and continues to champion rural traditions and community farming.

Board Members

Rev. Willie Crenshaw



With over 25 years in IT and Cybersecurity, **Rev. Crenshaw** brings deep expertise from both private and federal sectors. He has led major programs for agencies like the Department of Transportation, Department of Education, and the Pentagon, and most recently managed

NASA's cybersecurity initiatives under DHS's Continuous Diagnostics and Mitigation program. A sought-after speaker on cybersecurity, Rev. Crenshaw combines technical leadership with a commitment to innovation and security.

Brian Thompson



Brian Thompson grew up on his grandmother's small farm in Stevensburg, sparking a lifelong passion for agriculture. Active in 4-H and FFA throughout school—serving as FFA president his senior year—he went on to work as a herdsman on two prominent

Culpeper farms. Today, while employed by VDOT, Brian continues to embrace his farming roots by raising hogs and getting back into cattle production.

Brian Morris



A lifelong Greene County resident, **Brian Morris** served over six years in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves before pursuing a career in law enforcement. After graduating from the police academy in 1995, he worked with Albemarle and Greene County Sheriff's Offices, exemplifying servant leadership. Today, Brian combines his public service roots with entrepreneurship—running his own excavating business and raising goats with his wife and daughter.

Rev. Dr. Johnny Hicks



Rev. Dr. Johnny Hicks serves at Shiloh Baptist Church in Bowling Green and is retired from a distinguished career with the Mission and Installation Contracting Command at Fort Belvoir. A visionary leader and founder of Vision Centric, Inc., Johnny also operates a farm in Orange County, blending his passion for nature and agriculture with his commitment to serving people and community.

MVFP board members and staff can be reached by emailing info@mvfpva.org.

COMMUNITY IMPACT: GARDEN PLOTS AT THE CARVER CENTER



Installing a donated trellis.



An example of the cotton harvested at the Carver Center.



Building raised beds as a part of veteran outreach.



Another type of raised bed plantings at the Carver



Plants & beds are maintained.



Checking out the crops.



MVFP volunteers table at a community day.



Youth volunteers at the Carver Center.



Young volunteers sharing knowledge at the Carver Center.



PROGRAMMING

In 2024 & 2025, MVFP's programs focused on **equipping farmers with the tools and knowledge needed to thrive**. From hands-on workshops in soil health and regenerative agriculture to business development training for new farm entrepreneurs, **we reached over 25 engaged farmers across the region**. These initiatives not only strengthened individual farms but also contributed to a more inclusive and resilient agricultural network.

MVFP Program Portfolio

PRODUCER & FARM BUSINESS SUPPORT

QuickBooks Training for Producers: *Financial literacy and recordkeeping skills strengthen farm viability.*

Facilitated Producers' Meeting (Fluvanna County): *Peer networks and sharing resources support local producers.*

CROP & PRODUCTION TRAINING

Herb Production: *Expanding knowledge of specialty crops and market opportunities.*

Sweet Potato Production & Harvest: *Hands-on training in sustainable practices and value-added potential.*

Peanut Potato Production & Harvest: *Applied learning in crop diversification and regional traditions.*

VETERAN & MILITARY ENGAGEMENT

Military Veteran Mentoring for Beginning Farmers: *Support with peer-to-peer coaching and lived experience.*

Veteran-Led Raised Bed Construction: *Opportunities for veterans to lead and teach alongside youth and community members.*

Hosted VALOR Classes: *Advancing leadership development through Virginia Agriculture Leaders Obtaining Results.*

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

How to Develop a Raised Bed: *Training for community members to grow food and strengthen local resilience.*

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

Youth Outreach through the Pennsylvania Farm Show Experience: *Connecting students with agriculture, workforce pathways, and leadership opportunities.*

Youth BQA Certification: *Preparing the next generation with Beef Quality Assurance standards and industry-recognized credentials.*

Raised Bed Construction with Youth & Adults: *Fostering intergenerational learning and community building through hands-on agriculture.*

Vocational Bible School: Youth & Agriculture: *Integrating faith-based learning with agricultural education, cultivating values, skills, and pathways for youth leadership.*

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

THE NEXT GENERATION OF AGRARIAN PROFESSIONALS

Cattle Run Farm, LLC gave **VSU College of Agriculture** students a hands-on “day in the life of a producer” experience in November 2025.



An early start with a walking tour.



Ralph Morton guided the students on their visit.



Students harvested chickens and learned how to cut the meat into sections that one might see at the grocery store.



Above & at left: Students learn how to sterilize piglets.



Bee boxes at Cattle Run Farm



Two photos above: Learning to care for & immunize goats.



OUTREACH

Outreach Program Partners at the Carver Center



MVFP, working in partnership with **Virginia State University Small Farms Outreach Program**, has secured four acres of land dedicated to teaching and experiential learning at the **Carver Food Enterprise Center**, located at the **George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center** in Rapidan, Virginia. Other contributing partners to this outreach are **Virginia Master Gardeners** and **Greene Farmers Market**.

Program Focus

BEGINNING FARMER SUPPORT

Practical training and mentorship for new and aspiring farmers.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Hands-on agricultural education for local residents and homesteaders.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE TRAINING

Workshops and applied learning opportunities that strengthen food system resiliency and workforce pipelines.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Career-connected experiences that inspire the next generation of agricultural leaders.

Impact

This collaboration creates a **living classroom** where **community members, producers, and youth** can gain skills in **sustainable farming, food enterprise, and land stewardship**.

By combining MVFP's grassroots leadership with VSU's extension expertise and the Carver Center's facilities, the Outreach Program builds equity, resilience, and opportunity across Virginia's agricultural ecosystem.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

In November, MVFP hosted a **Youth Harvest** event at the **Carver Center in Culpeper**, engaging nine local children in hands-on agricultural activities. (Photos below.) Participants harvested over **35 pounds of sweet potatoes** – 25 pounds donated to the Carver Food Enterprise – and learned to care for herb gardens, blackberry bushes, and soil preparation. This initiative reflects MVFP's commitment to youth agricultural education, community service, and food security.



Youth Harvest volunteers pose for a photo.



Uncovered sweet potato harvest.



A sweet potato harvested!



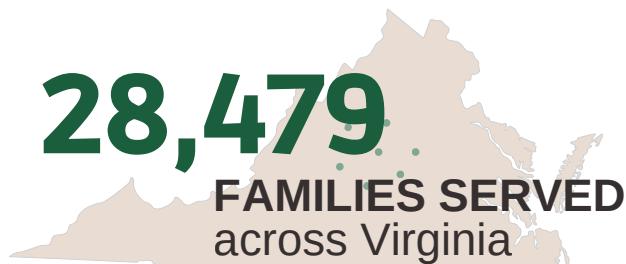
Volunteers work to unearth sweet potatoes from the raised beds.



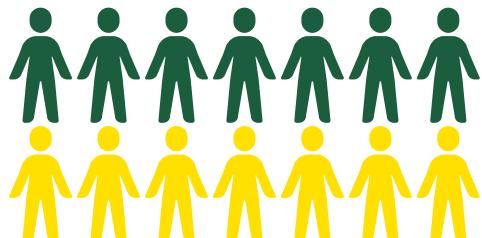
FOOD RESILIENCY

Food resiliency remains a cornerstone of our work: Through partnerships with local food banks and community organizations, we helped ensure that fresh, locally grown produce reached families in need.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN NEED, 2024-2025



The MVFP Food Resiliency Program not only meets the immediate needs for families, but also creates systemic change by empowering producers to diversify crops, expand into new markets, and build sustainable livelihoods.



Partnered with 14 producers, including women, veteran, and minority farmers.

MVFP helped producers diversify markets and discover new niches, building long-term economic mobility and resilience.

EXPANDING REGIONAL REACH

23 FOOD PANTRIES SUPPORTED
across Virginia,
in collaboration with **Lulu's Local Food**
(Richmond, Virginia) & **Cattle Run Farm, LLC** (Ruckersville, Virginia).



By bridging farms and pantries, the program cultivated stronger local food systems, advanced equity for women and minority farmers, and reinforced Virginia's commitment to resilient, future-ready communities, as well as access to fresh, local food.



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS



Celebrating Excellence in Agriculture

In 2024 and 2025, MVFP celebrated the outstanding achievements of our members and partners. Several farmers received state-level honors for innovation in sustainable practices, and **our organization was recognized by the Virginia Department of Agriculture for leadership in advancing equity in farming**. These accolades reflect the dedication and hard work of our community and inspire us to continue pushing boundaries in agricultural excellence.

Virginia Veteran Farmer Award



Ralph Morton, a 21-year Army veteran, was recognized as Virginia honored its first Veteran Farmer Award recipients in October 2025 at the State Fair. This award recognizes military veterans who have transitioned into agriculture and are strengthening local communities. Ralph now operates Cattle Run Farm and mentors youth through MVFP. Three total Virginia veterans were celebrated for their contributions to sustainable farming, conservation practices, and economic resilience. **This inaugural recognition highlights the shared values of service, stewardship, and resilience that veterans bring to Virginia's agricultural future.**

Woman of Excellence



Sarah Morton, MVFP volunteer and executive director of Virginia Career Works - Piedmont, was honored with the prestigious Woman of Excellence Award by the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce. Recognized for her leadership and impact, Morton has driven initiatives that increased local food access by 30%, secured major funding for education and workforce programs, and championed women in agriculture. **Her work exemplifies a commitment to building resilient communities and creating opportunities across the Piedmont region.**



ADVOCACY

Sharing Excellence in Agriculture & Workforce

Advocacy and sharing MVFP's mission and vision are powerful tools for change. **By amplifying community voices and sharing our stories, we attract resources, build partnerships, and inspire action** that strengthens rural economies and creates resilient, future-ready communities.

Listen: 15 Minutes With a Farmer

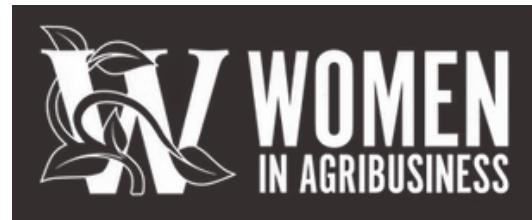


Featured in *Successful Farming's 15 Minutes With a Farmer* podcast, MVFP's **Sarah Morton** shared how her work as a third-generation farmer and workforce leader bridges food security, equity, and community resilience, connecting local producers to families in need while advocating for sustainable agriculture.

LISTEN: <https://MVFP.short.gy/mvfp-ep43>

Female Producer Panel: Shining a Light on Trailblazing Women

At the **2024 Women in Agribusiness Summit**, Sarah Morton inspired attendees as part of the **Female Producer Panel**, sharing her journey as a third-generation farmer at Cattle Run Farms and as a regional workforce leader. **Highlighted for her work advancing equity, food access, and sustainability initiatives**, Morton's message emphasized collaboration and empowerment in agriculture.



Looking Ahead: Nebraska 2026



Sarah Morton has been invited to speak at the **2026 University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Women in Agriculture Conference**, a premier event that brings together leaders and producers to share insights on innovation, equity, and resilience in agriculture. **Her participation underscores her role as a thought leader, bridging workforce development and sustainable farming to empower rural communities and advance food security.**

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

MVFP connected farmers and families to essential community resources, including training programs, technical assistance, and partnerships that support food access, workforce development, and sustainable agriculture.



MISSION PARTNERS

We are proud to have a consortium of individual, government, university, nonprofit and community partnerships in the Commonwealth of Virginia that support MVFP through donations of time, knowledge, and talent.



EDUCATION & OUTREACH

High school students from **United Christian Academy** (Green County, Virginia) visited **Cattle Run Farms** to explore real-world agriculture. They toured facilities housing goats, pigs, rabbits, cattle, and chickens, learned about breeding practices and why farmers avoid winter births, and saw how milk is managed for goat kids and mothers. The group also learned about sustainable farming methods like mortality composting, chicken grazing, and beekeeping, gaining hands-on insight into animal health and farm operations.



Arrival & orientation to the farm.



Students had the opportunity to hold weeks-old goat kids.



Learning about raising goats & kids.



Learning about quarantining animals at the pig barn.



Exploring rabbit care for meat.



Bulls eat sustainably sourced grain.



"Chicken tractors" help make chicken grazing a more controlled operation.



Ralph shows off the raised beds and discusses what is grown each season.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH



Maintaining the greenhouse, aka "hoop house" or high tunnel.



A poultry processing demonstration.



Youth from Culpeper County Parks and Recreation joined MVFP for a day of learning.



Community Day display.



Family fun and learning is made possible by MVFP.



FUNDING PARTNERS

Our work is possible thanks to donors like you and our generous funding partners:



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