



CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS

EXPLORING THE BLACK BELT FOOD CORRIDOR

Please visit the CISC website for more information about all of our programs.

In this issue...

- USDA Expands Livestock Forage Disaster Program
- Backyard Blueberries Workshop in Tyler July 23rd
- Container Gardening Workshop in Livingston July 24th
- 2026 HFFI FARE Fund: Applications Now Open - Due July 31
- Tuskegee University Leads Regional Agroforestry Funding Effort
- USDA Announces \$310 Million for Conservation Partnerships
- Help a Tuskegee University Student!
- Herdbuilder Replacement Female Sale August 28th
- Dallas County Hay Quality Contest
- Free Food Safety Technical Assistance for Produce Growers
- Alabama State Association of Cooperatives Events
- Cottage Foods Training in the Black Belt
- ASAN Mini-grant
- USDA Food Systems Grants

What would you like to see more of in the Black Belt Food Corridor Newsletter?

Did someone forward you this newsletter? Click here to join our listserv!

USDA Expands Livestock Forage Disaster Program

USDA has expanded the Livestock Forage Disaster Program, allowing livestock producers to qualify for assistance after four consecutive weeks of severe drought. Forty-three Alabama counties currently qualify for 2026 assistance, including several Black Belt Food Corridor counties. Producers should contact their local FSA office to confirm eligibility and apply.

[Find your FSA Office](#)

Backyard Blueberries Workshop

Join Alabama Extension Thursday, July 23, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Southern Sportsman Lodge in Tyler for hands-on instruction on planting, growing, harvesting, and preserving blueberries. The \$25 registration fee includes lunch and a jar of homemade blueberry jam. Registration is required, and space is limited.

[Register for the Blueberry Workshop](#)

Container Gardening Workshop

The Sumter County Extension Office will host a Container Gardening Workshop, on Friday, July 24th facilitated by Extension Agent Wade Hummer.

Participants will learn how to design, plant, and maintain a container garden. Plant and container selection, plant care, benefits of container gardening, and the principles of garden design will be covered. At the end of the session, participants will have the knowledge to create attractive container gardens that thrive in small spaces. To register, call 205-652-9501

2026 HFFI FARE Fund: Applications Now Open for

Grants & Technical Assistance - July 31

HFFI is administered by Reinvestment Fund on behalf of USDA Rural Development. The purpose of HFFI is to improve access to healthy foods in underserved areas, support food supply chain resiliency, create and preserve quality jobs, and revitalize low-income communities by providing financial and technical assistance, either directly or through other partners and intermediaries, to eligible fresh, healthy food retailers and post-harvest retail supply chain enterprises to overcome the higher costs and initial barriers to entry in underserved areas.

For the [2026 HFFI FARE Fund Grant and Technical Assistance RFA](#), at least \$5.25 million is available for planning and implementation Grants and at least \$1 million is available for Technical Assistance, distributed through a single round of funding. Grant awards are available up to \$250,000 per project and Technical Assistance up to \$75,000 per project. Interested applicants must submit a Funding Inquiry by July 31st.

More information, including eligibility requirements and instructions on how to apply, is available in the Request for Applications at <https://www.investinginfood.com/fare-fund-2026>.

Tuskegee University Leads Regional Agroforestry Funding Effort

Tuskegee University is the Southeast regional lead for The Nature Conservancy's Expanding Agroforestry Project, which helps farmers incorporate trees and shrubs into their operations through alley cropping, silvopasture, and windbreaks. Producers may receive technical assistance and incentive payments to improve farm profitability, soil and water health, livestock comfort, and long-term resilience. Applications are open through August 11, 2026. [Learn more and apply.](#)

USDA Announces \$310 Million for Conservation Partnerships

USDA is accepting proposals through August 24, 2026, for up to \$310 million through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Eligible organizations can partner with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners on projects addressing soil health, water quality, wildlife habitat, precision agriculture, and the long-term viability of working lands. Funding is available through RCPP Classic and Alternative Funding Arrangements. [Learn more.](#)

Help a Tuskegee University Student!

Would you be willing to help a Tuskegee University student with their research by completing a brief survey about food safety knowledge and meat-handling practices?

[Take the Survey](#)

Herdbuilder Replacement Female Sale August 28th in Uniontown

The 2026 Herdbuilder Replacement Female Sale is Friday, August 28 at 11 a.m. The sale will be at the Alabama Livestock Auction located at 700 Highway 80 East, Uniontown, AL 36786. This sale is known for the quality and reputation of both the cattle and the consignors to the sale. More info at: <https://albcia.com/herdbuilder-sale>

Dallas County Hay Quality Contest

Do you think you make some of the best hay in the Dallas County area? Or are you simply curious about the nutritional quality of the hay you're feeding and selling? The 2026 Dallas County Hay Quality Contest is the perfect opportunity to learn more about your forage while competing for cash prizes! For more information, contact the Dallas County Extension Office at 334-875-3200.



Grow Your Farm. Strengthen Your Business.

Protect Your Farm Business. Make Food Safety a Priority.



FREE Food Safety Technical Assistance for Fresh Produce Growers

Roots & Rain, in partnership with Tuskegee University, provides one-on-one technical assistance to help fresh produce growers strengthen food safety practices, protect their farm business, and prepare for new market opportunities.

HOW WE CAN HELP



Customized Food Safety Plans



Farm Food Safety Risk Assessments



Easy-to-Use Recordkeeping Templates



Water Testing Guidance



One-on-One Technical Assistance



Market Readiness Support

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?

- ✓ Fresh Produce Growers
- ✓ Beginning Farmers
- ✓ Small & Mid-Sized Farms
- ✓ Growers Expanding into New Markets
- ✓ Farms Looking to Strengthen Food Safety Practices



WHY IT MATTERS

Food safety is more than a requirement—it's a smart business investment. Strong food safety practices help protect your customers, strengthen your operation, and position your farm for future growth and new market opportunities.



Ready to Grow?

Contact Roots & Rain to learn how this no-cost technical assistance can support your farm.



ROOTS & RAIN
Keeping Your Farm Business in Mind.



Keisha@rootsrain.org



www.rootsrain.org

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Alabama State Association of Cooperatives Events

Events from the Alabama State Association of Cooperatives and the Rural Training and Research Center are now listed on a handy website. Check out the list!

[ASAC Events](#)

Cottage Foods Training

Want to turn your favorite recipes into additional farm profit? Alabama Extension holds Cottage Foods Certification Courses all over the state. Come learn which products are legal to sell and how to obtain a permit.

- Live Online 7/28/26 and 8/27/2026
- Greensboro 8/6/2026
- Union Springs 9/14/2026
- Eufaula 10/5/2026

[Sign up for Cottage Foods Training](#)

ASAN Mini-grant - Untie the Knot Fund

Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN) allots a portion of its yearly budget to directly support member farmers in tough moments. The hope is that these mini-grants can provide a leg-up in hard times and help "untie" a farm problem that might be an obstacle to tackling bigger problems on your farm.

[More about the ASAN Mini-Grant](#)

Looking for funding for a food or farm project?

Check out this factsheet from USDA listing all of their grant programs supporting food system components!

USDA Food System Programs



**College of
Agriculture,
Environment
and Nutrition
Sciences**



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