

The Stalk



Accomack & Northampton County Cooperative Extension
Eastern Shore Agricultural Research & Extension Center



Weighing the Risks: Tuber Soft Rot Challenges in Early Potato Planting

By Dr. Douglas S. Higgins, Plant Pathologist, Virginia Tech Eastern Shore AREC

Pursuing an early market window can be lucrative, but it's crucial to understand the risks of pushing the potato planting window earlier than usual.

As the saying goes, "planting good potato seed in wet soil — whether hot or cold — favors bacterial soft rot". This happens for two key reasons: (1) soft rot bacteria thrive in oxygen-poor environments created by thin films of water around the tuber and (2) saturated soils cause tuber lenticels to enlarge, providing entry points for these bacteria.

Beyond wet conditions, early planting increases the risk of tuber soft rot for other reasons. In cold conditions, potato plants take longer to emerge, leaving seed pieces vulnerable for extended periods. The longer the seed remains in the soil before sprouting, the greater the chance it encounters conditions favorable for bacterial soft rot. Also, seed potatoes are often cut before planting, creating wounds that need to heal (suberize). In cold, damp conditions, this healing process slows down, making seed pieces more susceptible to bacterial infection.



Tuber Soft Rot
photo: N. Rosenzweig

There are no effective chemical control products to mitigate tuber soft rot. All growers should inspect seed carefully for soft symptoms before accepting shipments. Thoroughly clean and sanitize seed cutting equipment; repeat efforts between seed lots. Plant fully healed (suberized) seed. To heal, hold cut seed for a few days at 50-55°F but make sure that there is good air flow in the pile and humidity remains high (85-95 %).

Potato Enlarged Lenticles. photo: D. Higgins



This Issue:

**2025 Ag Conference
Wrap-up**

Page 1

**Updates from
ESAREC Director**

Pages 2-4

The Agent's Corner

Pages 5-7

Announcements

Page 8

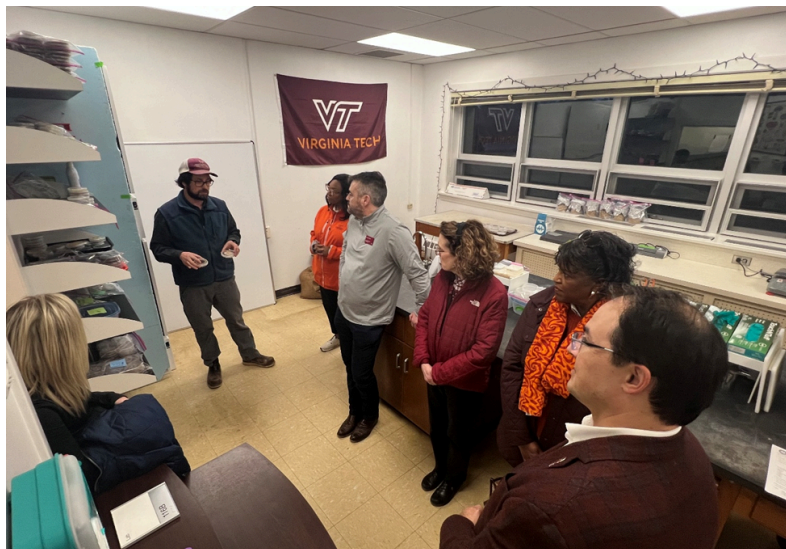
Contact Us

Page 9

Virginia Tech Visitors Toured Eastern Shore Agriculture

Dr. Mark Reiter, ESAREC Director & Soils & Nutrient Management Extension Specialist

On Wednesday, January 29, 2025, we were honored to showcase our Eastern Shore Ag Conference and Trade Show and a tour of Eastern Shore agriculture with colleagues from main campus in Blacksburg. Visitors represented upper administration within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) and Virginia Tech proper. Visitors included Amy Sebring, Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer; Dwyn Taylor, Vice President for Campus Planning, Infrastructure, and Facilities; Heidi Myers, Executive Director of Real Estate; Dan Cleveland, Associate Vice President of Advancement; Stephanie Overton, Senior Director of Communications; Patricia Wooten, CALs Director of Human Resources; Mario Ferruzzi, Dean, CALs; and Mary Burrows, Associate Dean for Research, Director of Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station.



Dr. Doug Higgins, Plant Pathologist, showcasing his applied research and diagnostics lab at the Eastern Shore AREC.



Kelly Lattimore (left), clam and oyster hatchery operator with H.M. Terry, Co., discussing nutrition for newly hatched oysters and clams.

Attendees visited the Eastern Shore Agricultural Conference and Trade Show, toured Sewanescott Clams and Oyster Hatchery, Mt. Nebo Farms, Sturgis Farms, and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's Eastern Shore Lab. They visited varying farming systems ranging from aquaculture, grain, and oilseed to specialty crops such as potato, snap bean, and tomato. As we work towards our capital improvement remodel and build of the Eastern Shore AREC, we welcome chances to showcase why we are located where we are and to demonstrate the applied research and extension outreach activities conducted for Eastern Shore production and beyond.



Virginia Tech Visitors Toured Eastern Shore Agriculture



Farmer Lynn Gayle, blue hat in the center, discussing Mt. Nebo Farms' operations. From left to right the group included Dwyn Taylor, Mary Burrows, Patricia Wooten, Lynn Gayle, Stephanie Overton, Dan Cleveland, Amy Sebring, and CALS Dean Mario Ferruzzi.



Mrs. Theresa Pittman (left), Accomack County Ag and Natural Resources Extension Agent, discussing potato production and packing with VDACS Commissioner Joe Guthrie (foreground) and tour group.

Specialist Updates

Status of Chlorpyrifos in Vegetable and Row Crops For 2025

Dr. Kemper L. Sutton, Entomologist, Virginia Tech Eastern Shore AREC

Chlorpyrifos (Lorsban) has historically been a key insecticide for vegetable and row crop producers. Initially banned by the EPA in 2022, its use was reinstated by the eight-circuit court of appeals in 2024. In December 2024, the EPA proposed rules to revoke chlorpyrifos tolerances on all commodities except for 11 crops: alfalfa, apple, asparagus, tart cherry, citrus, cotton, peach, soybean, strawberry, sugar beet, and wheat, which have further restrictions at the state level.

Can we apply chlorpyrifos in 2025? June 30, 2025, is the deadline for using existing stocks of chlorpyrifos before the new regulations are imposed. Meaning chlorpyrifos can be used according to its original label on all commodities until June 30th, 2025.



Eastern Shore AREC Weed Science Department Earns High Accolades at the Southern Weed Science Society Meeting



Vijay Singh (Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist) received Outstanding Young Weed Scientist Award from Southern Weed Science Society. Dr. Singh received this award for his novel research in weed management and his outstanding contribution to weed science community.



Fatemeh Esmailbeiki (PhD Student in weed science program) received 2nd prize in poster contest at Southern Weed Science Society annual meeting. She presented her research on drift potential of unmanned aerial systems and how machine learning models can precisely predict it.



THE AGENT'S CORNER

Theresa Pittman - Accomack County ANR Agent

Hélène Doughty - Northampton County ANR Agent



VCE/ESAREC Collaborative Efforts for the Stalk earned first place in the poster competition

2025 VCE Winter Conference

Accomack and Northampton County ANR and 4-H agents had a productive time at the 2025 VCE Winter Conference in Blacksburg, VA from February 3rd to 6th. They presented in educational sessions, competed for awards in poster sessions, networked with specialists and other agents, received updates on field-specific topics, and attended various informational sessions.

Some of the sessions they attended included grant writing, how artificial intelligence can be used in agriculture, farm to table workshops and white-tail deer updates by the DWR. Additionally, ANR agents met with the Agribusiness Management and Economics program team to discuss initiatives by VCE aimed at educating agents on profitability and sustainability.

Be on the lookout for some new programming efforts from agents as they share their new knowledge with the community.

Agents' Calendar:

"Working for the Wellbeing of Our Communities!"

February 2025

- Feb 3-6: VCE Winter Conference, Blacksburg, VA
- Feb 7: On-Farm Harmonized GAP Food Safety Plan Consult
- Feb 10: VCE/ESAREC Monthly Meeting; Webinar: Collaboration to Extend Extension's Educational Reach
- Feb 11: VA Potato Board Meeting; Corn earworm advisory panel webinar; GHP/GAP Food Safety Plan Consult
- Feb 12: Plant Eastern Shore Natives Steering Committee Meeting
- Feb 13: Small Farms/Homesteaders Workshop (POSTPONED)
- Feb 18: Small Farm Internship Program Development Meeting
- Feb 19: FDA FSMA's final rule on pre-harvest water webinar
- Feb 19: ESSWCD Board Meeting
- Feb 19-20: VT Giving Day
- Feb 20-21: CEW Stakeholder Advisory Panel Meetings
- Feb 21: ESVA Salty Farms Workshop (VT/VCE/UVA)
- Feb 27: ESVA VCE Food Safety School

Ongoing:

- 2025 Eastern Shore producers' sustainability series
- Small Farm/Food Business education series

Weekly

- WESR VCE AG Radio recordings - daily @8:30am/12:30pm
- WESR Master Gardener Radio recordings - daily @12:20 pm



WHAT'S THAT BUG?

Hélène Doughty, Northampton ANR agent, invites you to test your entomology knowledge.



Take a guess on the pest and email or text your answer to 757-999-0780 / hdoughty@vt.edu

December Answer: Bagworm

- Bagworms (Psychidae) create protective cases from silk and plant debris, and are frequently seen on evergreens like Leyland Cypress. As larvae, they feed on foliage, potentially causing severe defoliation. Their lifecycle encompasses egg, larval, pupal, and adult stages. Females stay within their bags, while males emerge as moths and mate with the stationary females. Overwintering occurs in the egg stage with larvae hatching and forming bags in May. The best management practice is to remove and destroy all bags in the fall.





Reflections on the 2025 Eastern Shore Agricultural Conference and Trade Show: Navigating Economic Challenges with Insightful Discussions



The 2025 Eastern Shore Ag Conference was well-attended with producers and agribusiness professionals interested in keeping their businesses thriving while enduring economic challenges. Multiple breakout sessions covered commodity specific topics while the addition of the “Economic Sustainability” session proved successful in generating insightful production tips and discussions.

The agenda covered a series of crucial updates and discussions aimed at promoting economic sustainability in the agricultural sector. Jenny Templeton and Carmie Ross provided updates on the NRCS and ESSWCD cost-share programs, offering financial assistance to farmers for implementing conservation practices. Dr. Shourish Chakravarty shared his vision for supporting Virginia growers, presenting his research on the profitability of adopting new technologies, crop diversification, and conservation practices. Scott Reiter's session on enterprise budgets provided insights into effective financial management for farms. Mr. Reiter shared the Excel enterprise budget tools to estimate the profitability of common crops based on projected input costs. These tools are incredibly valuable for farmers as they provide a detailed financial analysis of crop production.

Another option for farmers/landowners was discussed by the Eastern Shore Land-Trust and Hali Plourde-Rogers. One of the key highlights was the emphasis on conservation easements, which play a significant role in protecting working farms and forests. These easements not only preserve the land for future generations but also offer economic benefits to landowners through tax incentives and potential income from conservation programs.

Also on the agenda, Luke Southern, from Rural Community Insurance Services, addressed the importance of crop insurance as a vital risk management tool. In the face of unpredictable challenges such as low commodity prices and severe weather, crop insurance provides a safety net for farmers, ensuring they can recover from losses and maintain their operations. Jayson Gill explored specialty crop options, highlighting the potential for diversifying farm income and reducing dependency on traditional crops. Specialty crops can open new markets and opportunities for farmers, contributing to the overall resilience of their operations.

Trevor Lawson and Eric Seavey outlined the permitting requirements for agricultural water use, a critical aspect of farm management. Understanding and complying with these requirements is essential for sustainable water use, which is increasingly important for the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

Together, these topics were essential for ensuring the long-term economic viability and sustainability of agriculture in the region. The conference underscored the importance of staying informed and adaptable in the ever-changing agricultural landscape, providing valuable insights and practical solutions for farmers and stakeholders.



THE AGENT'S CORNER

Theresa Pittman - Accomack County ANR Agent

Hélène Doughty - Northampton County ANR Agent



FOOD SAFETY SCHOOL



The course is designed to help beginning, small, and growing value-added food businesses learn the basics of food safety



Thurs, Feb 27th, 2025
08.30 am - 4:00 pm



Eastern Shore AREC
33446 Research Dr
Painter, VA



COST: \$25
REGISTER ONLINE VIA QR CODE

Food Safety System
Development

State of VA
Regulations

Growing your
Food Business



Contact the Accomack or Northampton County VCE Office
Accomack: 757- 787-1361 - tpittman@vt.edu
Northampton: 757-678-7946 - hdoughty@vt.edu

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, genetic information, ethnicity or national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or military status, or any other basis protected by law.

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact your local ANR agent at the numbers above to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.
* TDD number is (800) 828-1120.

SIGN UP

Attending the VCE Food Safety School will provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of Virginia's food safety regulations and the compliance requirements for food businesses. The workshop will cover the steps necessary to develop a robust food safety system and best practices for maintaining high food safety standards.

Additionally, attendees will learn strategies for expanding their food business while ensuring food safety and tips for scaling operations without compromising on safety.

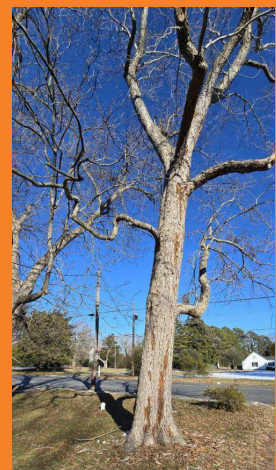
The workshop is scheduled for Thursday, February 27th, 2025, from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM at Eastern Shore AREC, 33446 Research Dr, Painter, VA, with a registration fee of \$25.

Organized by Virginia Cooperative Extension, the program is inclusive and open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or military status. For accommodations and further inquiries, contact the Accomack office at 757-787-1361 (tpittman@vt.edu) or the Northampton office at 757-678-7946 (hdoughty@vt.edu).

AGENT QUESTION OF THE MONTH

"My pecan tree is heavily shedding, is it dying and should I cut it down?"

Bark shedding in pecan trees is a natural process primarily due to growth and expansion. As the tree grows, its trunk and branches expand, causing the rigid bark to peel off, making way for new layers. Weather variations, especially seasonal transitions, can also lead to bark shedding. Rapid temperature changes, sunscald, and frost damage may cause the outer bark to peel away. This process allows for renewal and healing, helping the tree remain healthy and resilient. It is often an indicator of healthy growth. However, if the tree shows signs of stress, such as wilting leaves, reduced growth, or sap bleeding, it could indicate pests or diseases, warranting further investigation. Understanding this process can reassure tree owners and provide insights into maintaining pecan tree health.



ANNOUNCEMENTS



VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
EASTERN SHORE AGRICULTURAL
RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER
VIRGINIA TECH.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

For Northampton 4-H financial simulation booths *Real Money. Real World.* for 9th graders at Northampton High School Friday, March 7, 2025 from 8:00am - 11:30am

TO SIGN UP, PLEASE CONTACT 4-H AGENT ERIN MORGAN AT EMORGAN2@VT.EDU OR 757-678-7946 X2

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



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
EASTERN SHORE AGRICULTURAL
RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER
VIRGINIA TECH.

Careers at Virginia Tech - Agricultural Technician (Job no. 532150); work type: Staff

The Agricultural Technician supports the Agricultural Farm Manager and the Assistant Farm Manager with daily upkeep of the grounds, buildings, and performs fieldwork at the Virginia Tech Eastern Shore AREC in Painter, VA. A high school diploma or equivalent is required. An agricultural degree (AA, BS, or MS) in agronomy, horticulture, landscape maintenance or some other discipline, or extensive experience in these areas is preferred. The candidate must have knowledge regarding agricultural systems, farm or experiment station experience, or education in agricultural systems. The candidate should have a working knowledge of farming practices, grounds maintenance, and the ability to work outside in varying types of weather. To learn more and apply, please visit: [THIS LINK](#)

Soil Health Survey

Tell us about your soil health practices and you are entered to win great prizes! Take the survey by scanning the QR code or by clicking on this link: bit.ly/soilhealthacres



Acres of Soil Health Implementation

Please complete this survey if new practices are being implemented including cover crops, no-till, or rotational grazing.

Farmers, Specialists, Agencies, and Organizations are all welcome and encouraged to contribute.

There will be a prize drawing once a month.

Estimated time to complete survey: 2 minute



For more information contact Dara Booher at VFGCFarmerMentor@gmail.com

VCE & ESAREC Contact Information

	Faculty/Staff	Title	Email	Work/Cell Phone
Northampton County Cooperative Extension 16392 Courthouse Rd PO Box 457 Eastville, VA 23347	Hélène Doughty	ANR Agent	hdoughty@vt.edu	W 757/678-7946 C 757/999-0780
	Erin Morgan	4-H Agent	emorgan2@vt.edu	757/678-7946
	Amanda Hurley	Administrative & Fiscal Assistant	amandalh@vt.edu	757/678-7946
	Faculty/Staff	Title	Email	Work/Cell Phone
Accomack County Cooperative Extension 23185 Front St. PO Box 60 Accomac, VA 23301	Theresa Pittman	ANR Agent	tpittman@vt.edu	757/787-1361
	Jalen Anderson	4-H Agent	janderson24@vt.edu	757/787-1361
	Rachel Barnes	Administrative & Fiscal Assistant	mrbarnes@vt.edu	757/787-1361
	Faculty/Staff	Title	Email	Work/Cell Phone
Eastern Shore Agricultural Research & Extension Center 33446 Research Dr. Painter, VA 23420 https://www.arec.vaes.vt.edu/arec/eastern-shore.html	Mark Reiter	Director/Professor, Soils & Nutrient Management	mreiter@vt.edu	W 757/807-6576 C 757/693-2556
	Vijay Singh	Assistant Professor, Weed Science	v.singh@vt.edu	W 757/807-6579 C 479/713-0094
	Kemper Sutton	Assistant Professor, Entomology	klsutton@vt.edu	C 252/325-1716
	Doug Higgins	Assistant Professor, Plant Pathology	doughiggins@vt.edu	C 517/803-0636
	Calyn Adams	Research Specialist, Plant Pathology	calynadams@vt.edu	W 757/807-6586
	John Mason	Research Specialist, Soils & Nutrient Management	masonje@vt.edu	W 757/807-6582
	RC Cooley	Research Specialist, Weed Science	robertc42@vt.edu	W 757/807-6586
	Andrew Fletcher	Farm Manager	alf20007@vt.edu	W 757/807-6586
	Mackenzie Shifflet	Assistant Farm Manager	makshifflet19@vt.edu	W 757/807-6586
	Bryan Silveous	Mechanic	bryans24@vt.edu	W 757/807-6586
	Belinda Sterling	Administrative & Office Specialist	belindas@vt.edu	W 757/807-6586
Alana Kirsch	Communications Associate	alanak@vt.edu	W 757/807-6586	



VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
 EASTERN SHORE AGRICULTURAL
 RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER
 VIRGINIA TECH.

Virginia Cooperative Extension brings the resources of Virginia's land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of the commonwealth. VCE provides education through programs in Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H Youth Development and Community Viability.

The Virginia Tech, Eastern Shore AREC is committed to supporting commercial vegetable, grain, oilseed, and fiber production throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. Centrally located on Virginia's Eastern Shore, the center conducts basic and applied research on more than 25 agricultural crops.

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.

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in any activity, please contact Rachel Barnes at 757-787-1361* (*TDD number is (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. to discuss accommodations.