

VEGETABLE CROPS HOTLINE

A newsletter for commercial vegetable growers prepared by the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

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From The Editor's Desk

(Petrus Langenhoven, plangenh@purdue.edu, (765) 496-7955)

Dear Valued Vegetable Crops Hotline Readers,

Welcome to the first edition of the 2026 Vegetable Crops Hotline newsletter! As we begin this new growing season, I'm excited to continue our tradition of providing timely, research-based information to support Indiana's vegetable-growing community. Our mission remains steadfast: to deliver crucial updates on pest management, production practices, food safety, and marketing opportunities that directly impact your farming operations.

In upcoming issues, we'll cover several critical topics, including emerging pest challenges, innovative irrigation management strategies, the latest developments in high-tunnel production, and many more. We'll also feature updates on food safety regulations affecting our vegetable industry.

Growers and Purdue Extension Educators, your input and expertise make this newsletter a truly useful resource. If you have hot topics you'd like us to cover, success stories to share, or questions for our Extension specialists, please email us at plangenh@purdue.edu or reach out to the [specialist](#) directly. We also welcome high-quality photos of pest issues, unusual symptoms, or innovative production practices you've

implemented on your farm.

What's Inside This Issue

This first issue of the 2026 season is packed with practical content and educational opportunities to help you hit the ground running as you plan your growing year.

On the research side, Zeus Mateos and Dr. Ian Kaplan take a close look at a question many watermelon growers have been asking: Do managed bumble bees actually improve seedless watermelon yields enough to justify the investment? Given how dependent seedless varieties are on efficient pollen transfer between pollinizer and seedless plants, and the limitations of honey bees in adverse weather, the answer has real dollars-and-cents implications for anyone renting supplemental pollinators.

The calendar ahead is full of learning opportunities I'd encourage you to mark now. In the coming weeks, the **Vegetable Chat webinar series** continues on February 27 with a session on potato production in the Great Lakes region, featuring Chris Long from Michigan State University — a timely topic as you're making variety and input decisions. If food safety compliance is on your plate, the **Safe Produce Indiana** team is offering hands-on Cleaning and Sanitation Workshops on **February 26 in Vincennes** and **March 25 at Tuttle Orchards in Greenfield**, both free of charge. A **Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training** follows on March 11 in Goshen (with a Spanish-language remote option on March 12) for growers who need PSA certification.

High tunnel operators should take note of the **Tri-State High Tunnel School Webinar Series**, running every Wednesday from February 25 through April 1, co-organized by Extension specialists from Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan, with tracks for beginner through advanced growers. And for those involved in variety development or on-farm trialing, eOrganic is hosting a free webinar on **culinary quality evaluations of vegetable breeding lines** on March 4. Michigan State University is presenting an Irrigation Day Webinar Series on March 5, focused on large-scale field crop management, water policy in the Midwest, and new horticultural irrigation practices. If you are interested in using horses on your farm, the April 11 workshop will be of interest.

Looking ahead to spring, I want to highlight the newly combined **Indiana Horticulture and Small Farm Conference**, taking

place March 3-5 at the Hendricks County 4-H Fairgrounds. This event merges the Indiana Horticulture Conference and Indiana Small Farm Conference under one roof — registration is open now, and I hope many of you will join us.

Finally, save these two summer dates: the annual **Purdue Fruit and Vegetable Field Day on July 16** at the Meigs Horticulture Research Farm, and the **Small Farm Education Field Day on July 23** at the Purdue Student Farm. Both events bring hands-on demonstrations, research updates, and networking right to your backyard.

Subscription Information

Hard Copy Subscribers

A hard copy of the first 2026 issue is sent to all who subscribed to VCH via US-mail in 2025 and all new subscribers for 2026. To continue receiving future copies through US mail, 2025 subscribers must renew their Hotline subscriptions using the form enclosed in your envelope. Don't know which year you subscribed to? Check the envelope you received this newsletter in. The year your subscription is paid through appears in the bottom-right corner of your envelope.

If you need a hard copy subscription form and don't have access to the internet, please contact your nearest [Purdue Extension office](#). Extension Educators, [please download the hard-copy subscription form](#).

Digital Subscribers

If you receive the newsletter via email, you do not need to take any action. You will continue to receive the newsletter on the issue date.

New digital subscribers [can now register their email address](#)

In addition, digital subscribers receive emails with information about articles or announcements that need your immediate attention. These articles will be posted under Hot Topics on the VCH webpage and will be included in the next issue. All previous articles published in the VCH newsletter are available on the [Vegetable Crops Hotline website](#).

Website Links in Newsletter Articles

We frequently include links to websites or online publications. If you can't access these resources, don't hesitate to contact your local Purdue Extension office or us to request a hard copy of the information.

Midwest Vegetable Production Guide

The [2026 Midwest Vegetable Production guide](#) is now available for growers, or you can [download and print a guide from your computer](#). The guide is also available for \$20 per copy. Contact your Extension Office or Stephen Meyers (slmeyer@purdue.edu) directly to buy a copy.

Midwest Vegetable Trial Reports

Are you still considering purchasing vegetable seeds? The [Midwest Vegetable Trial Report](#) features many articles to help you make an informed decision. The resource also hosts production-related research results.

As always, don't hesitate to reach out with topics you'd like us to cover. Here's to a productive 2026 season ahead!

Best regards,

Petrus Langenhoven

Clinical Assistant Professor and Vegetable Extension Specialist
Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture
Purdue University

Cleaning and Sanitation Workshop - February 26

(Tari Gary)



Scott Monroe, Food Safety Educator, Purdue Extension, is training growers in the wash pack at the Purdue Student Farm.

Fruit and vegetable growers are invited to join the Safe Produce Indiana team, representatives from the FDA, and produce safety personnel from the Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) for a FREE, hands-on workshop on **February 26, 2026**, from 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM Eastern Time. The training will be at the Purdue Extension Food Safety Training Hub, located in the Vincennes Agricultural Center, 4207 N Purdue Road, Vincennes, IN 47591. Representatives from chemical companies will also be on-site to showcase their newest products for produce growers.

Lunch will be provided and registration is required. To help us plan lunch accurately, please register only if you expect to attend. Registration deadline is February 20.

Workshop Registration

Tentative agenda

8:30 am - Registration, coffee, and muffins

9:00 am - Introduction of new sanitizers, equipment, and procedures - Madison Chemical Company

- 10:00 am – Introduction of new sanitizers, equipment, and procedures – BioSafe Systems, LLC
- 11:00 am – Purdue update on data and research
- 11:30 am – Inspection findings and what we see in the field – FDA and IDOH
- 12:00 pm – Lunch
- 1:00 pm – Best cleaning practices
- 2:00 pm – Sanitizer and detergent efficacy – Madison Chemical Company
- 2:30 pm – Hands-on activity and demo – Madison Chemical Company; BioSafe Systems, LLC
- 3:30 pm – Questions and wrap up

Vegetable Chat: Potato Production in the Great Lakes Region

(Wenjing Guan, guan40@purdue.edu, (812) 886-0198)

Vegetable Chat is a webinar series focusing on vegetable crop production. The series is designed primarily for commercial vegetable growers, though producers of all scales may find the information valuable. Each session will feature an expert presentation and Q&A discussion.

Session #3 will focus on POTATO. We will hear from Chris Long, potato Extension specialist from Michigan State University. The live webinar is scheduled on February 27, 2026, at 10:00 am Eastern Time.

If you are interested in joining the live webinar, please register at the [Zoom link](#). After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with details on how to join the session.

You can access previous Vegetable Chat recordings at the [Vegetable Chat Webinar Series](#).



Potato Production in the Great Lakes Region

Chris Long
 Potato Extension Specialist
 Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences
 Michigan State University

Vegetable Chat Session 3. Potato Production in the Great Lakes Region. Presenter is Chris Long, Potato Extension Specialist, Department of Plant, Soil, and Microbial Sciences, Michigan State University.

Tri-State High Tunnel School Webinar Series

(Wenjing Guan, guan40@purdue.edu, (812) 886-0198)

This Tri-state high tunnel school webinar series is organized by Extension educators and specialists from three states: Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana. Different topics are designed for Beginner, Intermediate, and advanced high-tunnel growers. All sessions will be hosted via Zoom every Wednesday, 12:30-1:30 pm Eastern Time from February 25 to April 1, 2026. The webinars are free and open for registration at the [Zoom link](#).



A student is pruning and trellising tomatoes in a high tunnel at the Purdue Student Farm (Photo by Chris Adair).

Key Series Highlights:

- **Beginner:** Two sessions discussing the ins and outs of high tunnel production, extending the growing season and how to grow blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries.
- **Intermediate:** Two sessions focusing on growing highly economic vegetable crops, irrigation techniques, and food safety.
- **Advanced:** Two sessions covering pest management, new technology and funding options from USDA NRCS.

For detailed information about the Tri-state High Tunnel School Webinar Series, please check the [announcement](#) from the Ohio State University.

For questions, please contact
 Pressley Buurma
 Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator, Ohio State University
 Extension in Seneca County
buurma.20@osu.edu
 419-447-9722

How to Conduct Culinary Quality Evaluations of Vegetable Breeding Lines

(Petrus Langenhoven, plangenh@purdue.edu, (765) 496-7955)

If you've ever wondered how to systematically evaluate flavor in

vegetable breeding lines, here's an opportunity to learn from the experts.

Join [eOrganic](#) for a webinar on March 4, 2026, on culinary evaluations of vegetable breeding lines, presented by Jordyn Bunting and Lane Selman! The webinar takes place at 11 AM Pacific Time (12 PM Mountain, 1 PM Central, 2 PM Eastern) and is free and open to the public.



Figure 1. Lane Selman of the Culinary Breeding Network.

Join Jordyn Bunting and Lane Selman from Oregon State University to learn practical approaches for conducting flavor evaluations that produce useful data for breeding and selection decisions.

What you'll learn:

- How to define tasting objectives and choose appropriate evaluation formats
- Designing effective evaluation forms and building a shared flavor vocabulary
- Capturing sensory data that translates into actionable recommendations
- Real-world example: evaluating tomato lines from the TOMI ([Tomato Organic Management Improvement](#)) project

This webinar is valuable for plant breeders, variety trial coordinators, Extension professionals, seed and specialty crop

researchers, culinary partners working with breeders, and growers interested in on-farm variety evaluation.

Jordyn Bunting is a food scientist at OSU's Food Innovation Center, while Lane Selman is Professor of Practice and Founder of the Culinary Breeding Network, connecting plant breeders with culinary professionals to develop varieties with exceptional flavor and quality.

[Register now for this event](#)



Figure 2. Jordyn Bunting, food scientist, Oregon State University.

2026 Indiana Horticulture and Small Farm Conference

(Amy Thompson, athompson@purdue.edu)

Registration is now open for the **2026 Indiana Horticulture and Small Farm Conference (IHSFC)**—we hope you will join us!

The IHSFC will take place **March 3-5** at the **Hendricks County 4-H Fairgrounds and Conference Center**. This newly combined conference brings together the Indiana Horticulture Conference and the Indiana Small Farm Conference. Attendees can expect the same high-quality, timely content found at those conferences in past years, along with

opportunities to learn, connect, enjoy local food, and engage with a wide range of agricultural organizations and commercial vendors through an expanded trade expo.



The poster features the Purdue University Extension logo at the top right. The year '2026' is prominently displayed in large black font on a tan background. Below it, the title 'INDIANA HORTICULTURE AND SMALL FARM CONFERENCE' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font on a dark grey background. The dates 'March 3-5' and the location 'Hendricks County Fairgrounds, 1900 E. Main St. - Danville, Indiana' are listed in a smaller white font. At the bottom, a dark grey banner contains the text 'REGISTER TODAY!' and the URL 'HTTPS://PUEXT.IN/IHSFC26' in white.

Program Overview

Day 1 - Tuesday (3/3)

Sessions will cover business practices, resilient agriculture, food safety, fruit, labor, flowers, and vegetables. A Cider Contest will also take place. CCA, CCH, and PARP credits will be available.

Day 2 - Wednesday (3/4)

Topics include livestock, urban agriculture, flower production, business practices, food safety, fruit, and niche opportunities. The keynote presentation will be delivered by **Marty Travis** <https://spence-farm.com/>

Day 3 - Thursday (3/5)

Sessions will focus on business practices, flowers, vegetables, livestock, urban agriculture, and more. A facilitated networking luncheon will be held where you can meet with other farmers to discuss opportunities and challenges you're facing in your operation.

The full [conference schedule](#) is now available.



The graphic features a photograph of Marty Travis, a man with glasses wearing a plaid shirt, smiling. Above the photo is the Purdue University Extension logo. Below the photo, the text reads: 'MARTY TRAVIS', 'Spence Farm and Down at the Farmers', and a paragraph describing his expertise in food aggregation, marketing, and local supply chain logistics. At the bottom, a dark grey banner contains the text 'INDIANA HORTICULTURE AND SMALL FARM CONFERENCE 2026 March 3-5 Hendricks County Fairgrounds - Danville, Indiana' in white.

Trade Expo & Networking

The trade expo will be open all three days. Additional networking opportunities will be available on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons and evenings, including a poster session highlighting research efforts and on-farm innovation.

Registration Details

Register now for the [conference](#)

Registration fees are as follows:

- **3-day registration:** \$240
- **2-day registration:** \$160
- **1-day registration:** \$85

Registration includes lunches, breaks, and Tuesday and Wednesday evening networking socials.

Online registration will remain open through **February 24 at 12:00 PM**. On-site registration will be available during the conference; however, meals and snacks will not be included.

Interested in participating in our trade show or sponsoring the conference? Find more information here <https://indianahortconference.org/> or email ljollybr@purdue.edu

Cleaning and Sanitation Workshop – March 25

(Doriane-hans Sossou, dsossou@purdue.edu)



Food service worker washing lettuce leaves.

Keeping produce safe and meeting buyers' and regulatory expectations starts with strong cleaning and sanitation practices. Farms that implement proper procedures not only protect public health but also improve efficiency and build trust with customers. To help growers and farm workers strengthen these skills, we invite you to join us on **March 25th from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM for a FREE** hands-on Cleaning and Sanitation Workshop at **Tuttle Orchards, Inc., 5717 N 300 W, Greenfield, IN 46140**.

Attendees will learn from Purdue Extension educators about:

- Cleaning and Sanitizing Basics: wash/pack area practices, sanitizer dilution, and using a Dosatron.
- Regulatory Requirements: understanding cleaning and sanitation rules for produce safety.
- SSOPs and Recordkeeping: writing Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures and maintaining records for third-party audit preparation.
- Water Sample Collection: hands-on activity to properly collect and handle a water sample
- ATP Meter Activity: using an ATP meter to test cleaning and sanitation efficacy in real time.

Don't miss this chance to gain practical, farm-ready skills that strengthen food safety programs and prepare for audits. Registration is free!

Use this link to register

Date: March 25, 2026

Time: 1-5 pm

Location: Tuttle Orchards, Inc., 5717 N 300 W, Greenfield, IN 46140.

Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training – March 11

(Petrus Langenhoven, plangenh@purdue.edu, (765) 496-7955)



Figure 1. Two student workers at the Purdue Student Farm washing lettuce using a vegetable washer (Photo by Joshua Clark, Purdue University College of Agriculture).

The Safe Produce Indiana team will host two Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Grower Trainings in March. An in-person training will be held on **Wednesday, March 11**, at the **Elkhart County Extension Office in Goshen, IN**. A **remote, Spanish-language training** will be held on Thursday, March 12. The cost of attendance is \$20 and includes a certificate of course completion, the PSA Grower Training manual, and other training materials.

The Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Grower Training is for fruit and vegetable growers and others interested in learning about produce safety, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), and co-management of natural resources and food safety. The PSA Grower Training Course is one way to satisfy the FSMA Produce Safety Rule requirement outlined in § 112.22(c) that requires 'At least one supervisor or responsible party for your farm must have successfully completed food safety training at least equivalent to that received under a standardized curriculum recognized as adequate by the Food and Drug Administration.'

The trainers will spend approximately seven hours of instruction time covering the content contained in these seven modules:

- Introduction to Produce Safety
- Worker Health, Hygiene, and Training
- Soil Amendments
- Wildlife, Domesticated Animals, and Land Use
- Agricultural Water (Part I: Production Water; Part II: Postharvest Water)
- Postharvest Handling and Sanitation
- How to Develop a Farm Food Safety Plan

Growers can learn more and register at the following links:

- [Registration link for Goshen Training](#)
- [Registration link for Remote Spanish Training](#)

Do Managed Bumble Bees Contribute to Seedless Watermelon Pollination?

(Zeus Mateos, zmateosf@purdue.edu) & (Ian Kaplan, ikaplan@purdue.edu)

Seedless watermelons are extremely dependent on pollinators for yield. A pollinator, typically a bee, has to first visit a male flower from a pollinizer plant (pollen donor) and then deposit the pollen on a female flower from the seedless plant. That pollinated female flower will become a seedless watermelon fruit. This pollen-transfer job can be done for free by wild bees, but because watermelon fields can be 100+ acres, growers rent honey bee hives from beekeepers to ensure there are enough pollinators that can visit all the flowers. Honey bees are the most widespread pollinator in the world, but they aren't very efficient and don't forage when it's too cold, too hot, windy, or rainy. That's why some growers supplement their fields with a second managed pollinator, the common eastern bumble bee (Figure 1). Bumble bees are known to be better foragers in adverse weather conditions and growers invest a lot of money in bumble bee hives. However, due to their cost and the fact that bumble bees are a relatively new input to the production system (compared with honey bees that have been used for a long time), growers have wondered whether managed bumble bees are worth the investment.



Figure 1. A commercial watermelon field with managed bumble bee hives and the close-up of a common eastern bumble bee visiting a watermelon flower (Photos by Zeus Mateos).

To investigate the role of managed bumble bees and provide growers with effective pollinator management recommendations, we combined field observations with experiments in six commercial seedless watermelon fields in Southwestern Indiana in summer 2025. All fields were stocked with honey bee hives, but only three of the fields were additionally stocked with bumble bee hives, which we deployed near one of the field edges.

We first conducted field observations (June-August) by counting the number of watermelon flowers visited by bumble bees, honey

bees, and wild bees, and how many flowers they visited per minute. We did these observations i) in the field edge (next to the bumble bee hives when present) and ii) in the field center (>600 ft into the fields). Secondly, we sprayed fluorescent powder into the bumble bee hives to cover the bumble bees with it. These bumble bees would leave powder traces on the watermelon flowers after a visit. We then examined >1,000 flowers in fields with or without managed bumble bee hives and recorded how many of those flowers had fluorescent powder traces. This technique was used to provide direct evidence of flower visits by managed bees, which is especially important since wild bumble bees also forage in these fields, and it can otherwise be hard to differentiate the contribution from managed versus wild bumble bees in fields. Finally, we harvested pollen loads from bumble bees and analyzed the percentage of pollen grains that belonged to watermelon, across 16,500 pollen grains!

Our field observations showed that bumble bees are the most efficient bees, as they visit more flowers per minute (~15 flowers min^{-1}), although wild bees are also better pollinators than honey bees (Figure 2A). Keep in mind that this only tracks the efficiency of individual bees and does not account for numerical differences among groups (i.e., some bees can be highly efficient as individual foragers while not being numerous enough to pollinate the crop). However, despite being the most efficient, bumble bees were not frequently recorded; they were the least observed compared to honey bees or wild bees (Figure 2B). Supplementing fields with bumble bees generally increased their visitation rate to watermelon flowers, although the magnitude of this increase varied across fields (Figure 3). Importantly, the boost in bumble bee numbers from supplementation was only observed locally, close to the hives and was not apparent far from the hives in the center of the field.

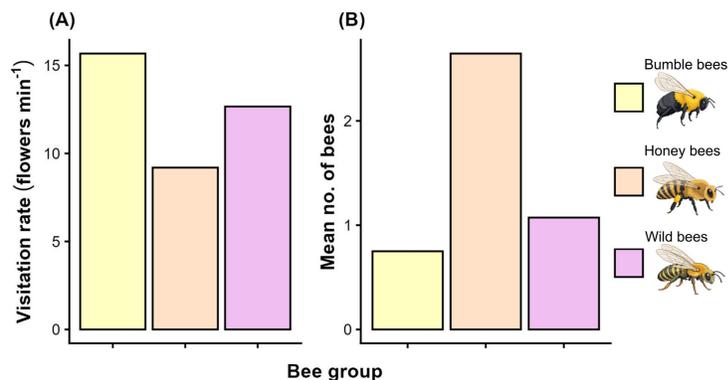


Figure 2. Mean number of A) flowers visited per minute and B) individual bees per 5-min observation according to bee group (bumble bees, honey bees and wild solitary bees) across all fields.

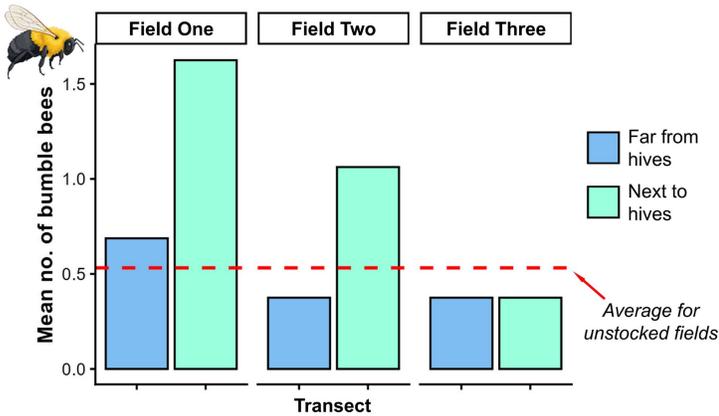


Figure 3. Mean number of bumble bees recorded per 5-min observation in transects far from hives or next to hives in each of the three fields that were stocked with managed bumble bees. The red dashed line indicates the mean number of wild bumble bees recorded across the non-bumble bee-stocked fields.

The experiment with fluorescent powder showed somewhat similar patterns. No traces were found in any of the flowers from fields without managed bumble bees. Whereas in the fields supplied with bumble bees, 2.2% of the flowers around the bumble bee hives had fluorescent powder traces. The pollen composition of bumble bee pollen loads revealed that less than 1% of the pollen collected belonged to watermelon, while the vast majority came from white and red clover. Bumble bees clearly love legumes!

Collectively, our data suggest that supplying watermelon fields with managed bumble bees may not significantly increase the number of bumble bees recorded on watermelon flowers and consequently may not contribute to improving yield profitability. Bumble bees were only recorded visiting flowers close to the hives, likely because those flowers were more accessible, but they didn't travel far into the field, instead preferring other floral resources such as legumes over watermelon. Thus, watermelon growers who wish to continue using bumble bees should consider distributing the hives throughout the field at regular distances, and while clover and other flowering weeds can boost wild bees (including wild bumble bees), clover might also draw managed bumble bees away from watermelon flowers.

In our study, while yields were similar across fields, we couldn't adequately compare these data for several reasons, i.e., lack of evidence for a yield increase with managed bumble bees. First, we used only six fields: three with and three without managed bumble bees. Differences in management practices and watermelon varieties can substantially affect yields. Secondly, we used a lower bumble bee hive rate compared to standard commercial rates (which vary from 0.5 to 1 hive per acre), thus minimizing the potential to detect an effect on yields. Finally, our study was done in a single year, and multiple years are needed to explore different weather conditions. The 2025 season, while wet, wasn't especially cold or hot. Weather can be adverse in future years, and bumble bee presence may help secure yields if honey bees don't visit flowers. Consequently, future studies should account for all these limitations to properly assess the impacts of supplementation on yield.

If hive costs are a concern, we recommend taking advantage of the diversity of free, wild bees inhabiting fields by minimizing and timing insecticide applications to avoid non-target effects and using more pollinator-friendly products. Habitat support, such as flowering cover crops, can also help increase wild bee numbers.

We want to thank the grower collaborators and technicians who helped with the fluorescent assay and pollen analysis.

Workshop: Fundamentals of Farming with Horses April 11

(Petrus Langenhoven, plangenh@purdue.edu, (765) 496-7955)



A person wearing a straw hat drives a horse-drawn farming implement through a grassy field, guiding two brown draft horses harnessed side by side. The scene is set in a rural area with trees, open land, and a small structure visible in the background.

The **Sustainable Horticulture Lab** at Purdue University, together with Old Capitol Farm and Burgess Draft Logging and Lumber, brings you a hands-on introductory workshop on the fundamentals of farming with horses – from handling to harnessing to hitching.

Date: April 11, 2026

Time: 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Location: Corydon, IN

Cost: \$15/person

Local lunch provided by Singing Trees' Keep.

This workshop is limited to 10 people. To register, email Moriah Bilenky at mbilenky@purdue.edu.

About the Instructors

Ben Burgess is a Senior Master Biological Woodsman with the Healing Harvest Forest Foundation. Ben gained experience as an instructor at Berea College, where he helped lead the college's horse-powered forestry program. Ben now works and breeds Suffolk Punch horses near his home in Russel Springs, Kentucky. Whether on the farm or in the woods, Ben is a skilled teamster. His humble, down-to-earth communication style makes him a good trainer of horses and teamsters.

Cameron Howard is a Master Biological Woodsman with the

Healing Harvest Forest Foundation. Along with his wife, Molly, he is the host of today's workshop. Cameron has worked his horses in the garden, on the farm, and in the woods since 2012. Cameron holds a B.S. in education and brings his teaching expertise to this event. Cameron enjoys building community, and he finds that the horses do this well.

Moriah Bilenky is a professor and researcher at Purdue University, where she engages with students and growers with an integrated research and teaching program focused on integrated crop-livestock systems for sustainable horticulture. Bilenky is particularly interested in how draft power fits into regenerative agriculture and is actively investigating whether it can enhance soil health, reduce emissions, and improve economics.

This event is made possible by NCSARE ONC24-141



USDA Announces Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers Impacted by Unfair Market Disruptions

The original news release was published by the [USDA](#) on February 13, 2026.

(Washington, D.C., February 13, 2026) – U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is providing \$1 billion in Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) Program assistance for specialty crops and sugar, commodities not covered through the previously announced Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program. These one-time bridge payments will help address market disruptions, elevated input costs, persistent inflation, and market losses from foreign competitors engaging in unfair trade practices that impede exports. Specialty crop producers have until **March 13, 2026**, to report 2025 acres to USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Irrigation Day Webinar Series to be offered on March 5, 2026

(Petrus Langenhoven, plangenh@purdue.edu, (765) 496-7955)

Michigan State University Extension will offer 6 one-hour sessions on a wide variety of irrigation related topics on March 5, as part of the MI Ag Ideas to Grow With webinar series.

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The topics vary with emphasis on large scale field crop management, water policy in the Midwest, and new horticulture irrigation practices. The Irrigation Day sessions are free of charge and can be accessed by anyone through registration on the [MSU Extension website](#) by searching the MI Ag Ideas to Grow With series.

Contact Lyndon Kelley at kelleyl@msu.edu or 269-535-0343 with irrigation related questions. For questions about registration, contact the St Joseph County MSU Extension Office at 269-467-5511.

Schedule

9:00 - 9:50 am:

Considerations and practical tips when starting, operating, and sustaining a Mobile Irrigation Lab program – Kevin Greer, Tehama County RCD Mobile Irrigation Lab

10:00 - 10:50 am:

Why is irrigation important to Indiana and Michigan? – Dr. Molly Sears, MSU AFRE & Lyndon Kelley, Purdue/ MSUE

11:00 - 11:50 am:

Advances in Irrigation Technology – Angie Gradiz, MSUE

What can we learn from Nebraska's irrigation-focused extension and outreach programs in supporting improved water use efficiency on farms and regional water conservation? –Dr. Abia Katimbo, UNL

12:00 - 12:50 pm:

Understanding the competition for water and how it may change water policy – Dr. Keith Cherkauer, Purdue ABE/ Indiana Water Resource Center

Overview of Riparian Rights and the Impact on Regional Water Policy – Laura Campbell, Michigan Farm Bureau

1:00 - 1:50 pm:

Rolling out a new type of irrigation – Brenden Kelley, MSUE & Ben Phillips, MSUE

2:00 - 2:50 pm:

Michigan Large Volume Water Use: Site Specific Review and Water Users Committee – Lena Pappas, EGLE & Todd Feenstra, Midwest Water Stewards

Lyndon Kelley

Water Management and Irrigation Educator – MSU/Purdue Extension

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