

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 second edition of the 2026 Vegetable Crops Hotline newsletter! 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 [Petrus langenhoven](mailto:Petrus.langenhoven) 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. If food safety compliance is on your plate, the Safe Produce Indiana team is offering a hands-on Cleaning and Sanitation Workshop on March 25 at Tuttle Orchards in Greenfield, free of charge. Similarly, another PSA training is planned for April 8 in Columbus, IN.

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. If you are interested in using horses on your farm, the April 11 workshop may be of interest to you.

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.

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

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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](#) 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.

Best regards,

Petrus Langenhoven, Editor
Clinical Assistant Professor and Vegetable Extension Specialist
Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture
Purdue University

Cleaning and Sanitation Workshop - March 25

([Doriane-hans Sossou, dsossou@purdue.edu](mailto: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.

Tri-State High Tunnel School Webinar Series

([Wenjing Guan, guan40@purdue.edu](mailto:Wenjing.Guan@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
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Upcoming Produce Food Safety Programming Offered by Safe Produce Indiana

(Tari Gary, tgary@purdue.edu)

Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training

The Safe Produce Indiana team will host two Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Grower Trainings in April and May. An in-person training will be held on [Wednesday, April 8](#), at the Elkhart County Extension Office in Columbus, IN. A [remote training](#) will be held on Thursday, May 7. The cost of attendance is \$20 for Indiana residents and \$175 for out-of-state residents, which includes a certificate of course completion, 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.'

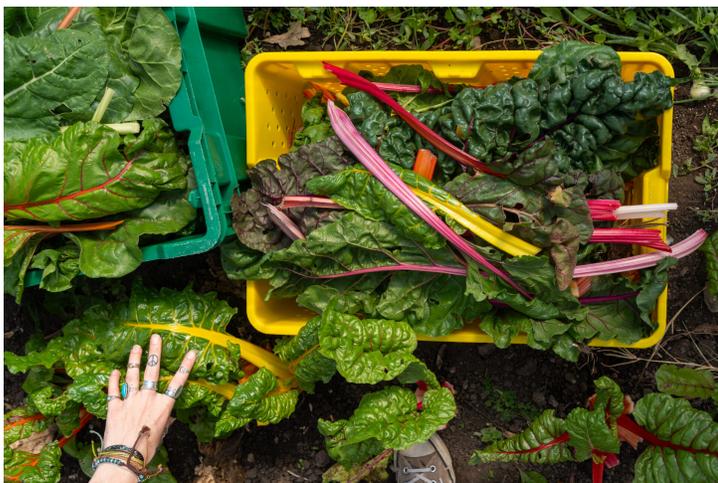


Figure 1: Leafy greens in harvest bins at the Purdue Student Farm (Photo by: Purdue College of Agriculture).

The trainers will spend approximately seven hours of instruction time covering 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 Columbus Training](#)
- [Registration link for Remote Training](#)

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



Indiana Horticulture and Small Farm Conference

(Amy Thompson, athompson@purdue.edu)



Extension professionals from the Horticulture and Landscape Architecture Department and the Diversified Farming and Food Systems Team hosted the first-ever combined Indiana Horticulture and Small Farm Conference at the Hendricks County Fairgrounds and Conference Complex, March 3-5, 2026.

With a total of 64 educational sessions, 22 research posters, and several demonstrations to choose from over the course of 3 days, our nearly-200 daily participants had no shortage of opportunities to learn and network. We're grateful to the many [speakers](#), [sponsors](#), and programming partners who made this event possible in 2026! Additionally, we are proud to have worked with

a caterer who sourced so much of the conference food from Indiana producers. We're especially grateful to producers who took time out of their schedules to join us at the conference, and we hope you will plan to join us again in the future. Plans for 2027 are still to be determined, but we will be sure to share updates as

specifics are finalized.

If you have specific suggestions for topics or speakers you'd like to see in 2027, please share your thoughts through [this survey](#). We want this to be a meaningful and helpful conference to Indiana producers and would very much appreciate your input.

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