

Fall 2020 Newsletter



APPALACHIAN BEGINNING
FOREST FARMER COALITION

Dear Coalition members

It has certainly been quite a year, but one thing remains clear - our relationship with forests and the products and services they provide is only growing stronger. The wisdom of woodlands guides our unwavering belief that it is better to be a partner of these ecosystems rather than attempt to corral and command them. This is our promise to keep, and we remain committed because it is our values that carry us through thick and thin.

Our perseverance is what kept the coalition moving through down times in funding and unexpected Federal administrative delays, and now we are staying the course once more in the face of programmatic challenges due to the pandemic. Our focus on responsibly-sourced, high-quality, and value-added non-timber forest products, and our promotion of forest farming as a critical piece of holistic forest management is more important than ever. It is time to rally, engage in new dialogue about future supply and demand, and work to expand our support for forest farmers, ethical harvesters, and other supply chain stakeholders.

This newsletter looks back at some of the innovative ways we have adapted to recent hurdles. It also provides a snapshot of the ways in which we are moving forward. Enjoy!

As always, we are grateful for the dialogue on our [Facebook group](#) and for the community fostered by our coalition members. Please share our newsletter far and wide with those who will value it. We look forward to what is coming next, and hope you do too.

Stay well

The ABFFC Team

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My Journey Toward Forest Farming

Every summer as a child, Ruby Daniels left the Maryland suburbs and went to visit her grandmother in the mountains. Those early years of her life - playing in the lush forest undergrowth, visiting the graveyard where her ancestors were buried, and learning the healing art of folk medicine alongside her grandmother and great aunt left a lasting impression on Ruby and played a part in shaping her future. "I felt a kindred connection with the mountains," recalled Ruby as she reminisced over her childhood summers in Raleigh County, West Virginia.

That kindred connection along with her grandmother's "two green thumbs" gave Ruby a formative education in herbalism and planted a desire to protect and steward the plants that she learned to cherish. Back home in Maryland, she attended the Maryland School of Massage where she discovered the holistic practice of Ayurvedic medicine along with acupuncture. She went on to earn a Master of Science in Therapeutic Herbalism at the Maryland University of Integrative Health. Learning about the therapeutic uses of plants in a university setting built upon her existing foundation of folk medicine, but it wasn't until Ruby studied under [Paul Strauss, forest steward and owner of Equinox Botanicals](#), that her life took a turn toward forest farming. Wandering through acres of ramps and trillium while hearing Paul talk about the land's past and his own journey to stewardship brought Ruby full circle back to the land itself - and eventually back to West Virginia.



She started working at Sprouting Farms in Talcott, WV. "I wanted to build up my farming skills, and then other things opened up from there because of my herbalism background," she said. "Since coal is dying and there's no way to revive it, I think forest farming is a way to rebuild the economy in West Virginia." Since then, Ruby has joined [Yew Mountain Center](#), a 500 acre nature preserve dedicated to be a place for learning, research, ecological stewardship, and growth of economic opportunities within the region. Ruby leads plant walks, speaks at conferences and does site visits to help land owners interested in learning more about forest farming. "There are so many herbs in the forest that have healing qualities," she said. "Maybe the heavy hitters like goldenseal, ginseng and black cohosh won't work for everyone, but herbalists still want many other herbs. I think it's important to look at your property and be realistic about what you can grow."

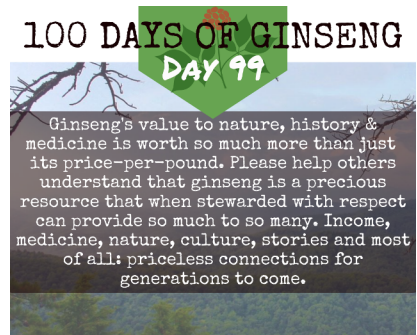
Between site visits, teaching at Yew Mountain Center, and running her own business called [Creasy Jane](#), an "Afrolachian Herbal Remedy Store", Ruby is busy doing the things she loves most. She's handing down her knowledge just as the wise women of Raleigh County, West Virginia passed their knowledge on to her as a young girl. So the circle continues with hopes to bring people closer to the earth that sustains us all.

100 DAYS OF GINSENG

A PASSION PROJECT BROUGHT TO YOU BY BAT CAVE BOTANICALS

Born out of a passion for the stewardship of Wild American Ginseng, the initiative titled, "100 Days of Ginseng," combines education with conservation advocacy. As the online ginseng community grows daily, the idea of creating shareable, informative graphics featuring ginseng stewardship on social media seemed like a natural springboard to promoting its conservation. Campaign creator, owner of [Bat Cave Botanicals](#), and ABFFC member Sara Jackson, timed the 100 day campaign to coincide with September 1st, which is the start of ginseng season in most states.

"There are so many pieces to ginseng's history, culture, properties, and biology that it's hard to pick just 100 of them!," said Sara. "Covering a little bit of everything, we hope to reach a diverse audience: consumers, herbalists, gardeners, landowners, growers, dealers, and harvesters in order to raise awareness and promote education and stewardship as well as the many outstanding leaders, communities, and resources available." Sara's [website](#) aims to be a free perennial resource to individuals and online communities that are involved in ginseng's many facets, from backyard gardens to international markets. With this project, Sara hopes to connect communities and ignite the interest of people of all backgrounds to learn more about this important medicinal plant that has a over a thousand-year history of use.



~ PLANT EVERY SEED ~
Please share and help plant the seeds of
ginseng education and stewardship at
100daysofginseng.com



Sara Jackson

For Sara, the forest, the history of ginseng, and the sharing of this cultural heritage with future generations are her favorite aspects of this treasured plant. Her past work with Traditional Chinese Herbalism and dry ginseng roots (ren shen) formed the background of her love for ginseng, but it wasn't until she saw a native ginseng plant growing in the forest that the stars of her past experience aligned with her future: a calling to help conserve this valued medicinal plant. Since then, Sara and her partner Martin have worked with the NC Plant Protection Program, State Park Rangers, and landowners. They have been developing educational resources to promote conservation, good stewardship and ethical harvest of ginseng. More than anything else, Sara wants others to understand that ginseng's value to the natural world and to people far exceeds its price.

And so 100 Days of Ginseng was born, and while it's currently a passion project, Sara hopes to improve the campaign's reach in years to come. Meanwhile, she continues to plant the seeds of wild American ginseng awareness, education, and stewardship in any way she can.

Spotlight on ABFFC Partners

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted everyone's lives. Despite this, the ABFFC has made great strides in expanding its programs and reaching many of its goals. Expectations are high for 2021. Below are a snapshots of what core partner organizations have been up to.

The Organic Growers School (OGS) finalized the structure for launching their Farmer Mentor Services program this winter. Two of these mentoring matches will be reserved for beginning forest farmers to be paired with advanced forest farmer mentors. Active mentorships will begin in January 2021.

Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) expanded the Farmer and Rancher Mentoring (FARM) Program, recruiting three forest farming mentors and pairing them with five forest farming interns. ASD's Agroforestry Program has also been planning for their ABFFC multi-day forest farming training in the Fall of 2021. ASD is partnering with HERBalachia to host a conference in conjunction with the second annual Sassafras Moon Herbal Festival. ASD partnered with the West Virginia Forest Farming Initiative to host two forest farming webinars in July 2020 as a part of Forest Farming Fridays.

Rural Action (RA) has been busy planning for in-person conferences/events that will commence in spring and summer of 2021. RA is involved in two ABFFC events, one as a collaborative partner with the Yew Mountain Center and the West Virginia Forest Farming Initiative scheduled for May 2021, and the second as lead organizer of the Southern Ohio Forest Farming Conference, scheduled for August, 2021. In addition to event planning, RA staff have also been participating in the ABFFC Planting Stock Working Group, connecting with partners to discuss planting stock supply issues and opportunities, and helping to communicate opportunities to landowners within the RA network.

North Carolina State University (NCSU) is actively involved with Woodland Stewards, a subgroup of the WNC Medicinal Herb Growers. Fall 2019 celebrated another year and harvest season together with six active new members and strong base of participants. The group met in October and November for work and educational training on transplanting nursery specimens, propagation, putting beds to rest, winter checklist, mapping/recording, and invasive removal. Spring 2020 events were canceled due to visitation restrictions at the demonstration woods. Virtual programming was offered during summer 2020. Fall 2020 has virtual events planned to include hosting the annual Medicinal Grower and Buyer panel event in October.

United Plant Savers (UpS) is continuing to expand the Forest Grown Verified Program (FGV) and getting planting material out to growers. UpS distributed over 100 pounds of ginseng seed in fall of 2020 and planted over 50 pounds of goldenseal with hopes of propagation for future forest farmers. Four new FGV site assessments occurred this summer.

The Yew Mountain Center (YMC) made progress on their site visit outreach this year despite the issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. YMC expanded and strengthened their network of forest farmers and potential forest farmers across the state. YMC was also able to locate sources of goldenseal planting stock through their expanding network of forest farmers. Before COVID 19, YMC presented at the WV small farms conference about forest farming and the Initiative which was well received and helped YMC increase their network and outreach. YMC performed ten site visits throughout the state, found planting stock, made one presentation, and made progress in planning next year's forest farming expo in May, which is in partnership with the ABFFC.

Senator Warner Receives an Update on Forest Farming Efforts



Senator Mark Warner (D-VA) recently visited Appalachian Sustainable Development's (ASD) offices and warehouse in Bristol, Virginia, to meet with staff, stakeholders, and forest farmers. ASD has been working in this area of agroforestry to create opportunities for forest farmers in Central Appalachia for over a decade now. Katie Commender (ASD's Agroforestry Director), John Munsell (VT Professor and Forest Management Extension Specialist), and Ryan Huish (UVA Wise Associate Professor of Biology and Forest Farmer) spoke directly with Senator Warner regarding accomplishments and next steps.

Two years ago, Senator Warner met with the same team and learned about the work of ASD and the ABFFC more broadly in promoting and growing forest farming in Appalachia and beyond. Since then, he has been a great advocate for the work and was excited to get an update on market activities for herbs like Ginseng, Black/Blue Cohosh, and Goldenseal during his visit. Senator Warner noted that he sees an exciting and sustainable future for forest farming in southwest Virginia, and other regions of Appalachia. He also made it clear that he plans to continue supporting ASD's efforts and encouraged the group to grow their model and think big by developing business plans and other strategies that dramatically expand herb hub efforts.

During the meeting, it was discussed that other states in Appalachia look to Virginia as an example of how to grow forest farming and marketing of value-added forest botanicals at a meaningful scale. With Senator Warner's support, ASD is recruiting more forest farmers and creating more markets that value the predictable and sustainable provision of these materials in order to meet the growing demand for non-timber forest products.



Going Digital with Forest Farming Fridays

This past July on every Friday, the West Virginia Forest Farming Initiative released a free webinar aimed at sharing information on forest farming and non-timber forest products. By inviting speakers from all over the region to present on a variety of topics, they bridged the social distancing gap with Zoom and Facebook Live, while sharing knowledge and building connections among like-minded folks.

We heard from experts like Ruby Daniels, an herbalist, agroforestry coordinator and business owner, whose interest in the power of plants was piqued by her elders and further primed at the Maryland University of Integrative Health where she earned a Master's of Science in Therapeutic Herbalism. Ruby shared her knowledge of forest botanical uses - a topic of growing interest in our current times.

We also heard from Tanner Filyaw of Rural Action who presented Forest Farming 101, Will Lewis of the Yew Mountain Forest Center who presented live from their Goldenseal beds, Robin Suggs and Ciera Wilbur of Appalachian Sustainable Development who presented a Forest Farming Case Study, along with many other talented and knowledgeable educators and practitioners.

FOREST FARMING FRIDAYS

Uses of Forest Botanicals
with Ruby Daniels

June 12 2:00pm

Short webinars about forest farming & non-timber forest products.

Ruby Daniels is an herbalist who gained knowledge from her elders in West Virginia and expanded her plant knowledge at Maryland University of Integrative Health where she received a Master's of Science in Therapeutic Herbalism. Ruby focused her study on Afro-lachian foods and herbs, field botany, and phytochemistry. Ruby works as Agroforestry Coordinator at Sprouting Farms, and owns/operates Creasy Jane, an herbal remedy and beauty product business whose mission is to educate the public about power of plants and how to use them to support wellness.

ZOOM + FACEBOOK LIVE info@wvforestfarming.org

FOREST FARMING FRIDAYS

The Appalachian Harvest Herb Hub
with Katie Commender

Friday, July 24 at 2:00 PM

Short webinars about forest farming & non-timber forest products

Katie Commender is the Agroforestry Director at Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) with an M.S. in Forestry from Virginia Tech. In 2017, Katie launched ASD's Appalachian Harvest Herb Hub in Duffield, VA to help forest farmers sustainably grow, process, and market herbs to premium-priced domestic and international markets. Tune in this Friday to learn more about the Herb Hub's services and forest botanical market opportunities!

Free on Zoom and Facebook Live.
info@wvforestfarming.org to register or follow the [link](#) in the comments.

Tuning in from Bristol, VA, was Katie Commender, the Agroforestry Director at Appalachian Sustainable Development. Katie was instrumental in launching the Appalachian Harvest Herb Hub - a program that offers training, site visits, cost share funding, and access to processing, aggregation, and marketing for value-added non-timber forest products.

ASD's mission is to transition Appalachia to a more resilient economy and a healthier population by supporting local agriculture, exploring new economic opportunities and connecting people to healthy food.

Our Website Has a New Look!

The coalition is thrilled to announce that we have a new website! Like the previous site that served us so well, the new site is home to many ever-growing forest farming resources including [videos](#), [community publications](#), and [new initiatives](#). We hope it will continue to be an inviting place for both new and experienced forest farmers, and other stakeholders to branch out and learn and find new inspiration from our community and [partners](#).



The website includes some great new features. There is a new [membership page](#) where you can sign up to become a member for free or learn more about becoming a coalition sponsor. We also have a [community page](#) where you can find our [FB group](#), and browse our [Youtube channel](#) featuring more than 150 forest farming videos! Last but not least, the [resource](#) area is growing to include even more about forest farming, with many new and upcoming resources to help aspiring and beginning forest farmers get started and connected with others in the field.

Because our members are the roots of this coalition, we rely on you to help us grow! We use short demographic surveys to gather information about your needs and interests. We would like to ask current and future members to take a moment to fill out our short [sign-up survey](#) and join our email list so that we can better serve you. You can read more about our [privacy policy](#) here.

We also have two exciting new initiatives, and we want to hear from you! The [AFFC \(American Forest Farming Council\)](#) will be replacing the Appalachian Beginning Forest Farming Coalition in 2023, and we need your input to help us transition into a national level coalition. In addition, we have been developing a [Point-of-Harvest Workforce Development Program](#) described on the next page, which aims to train current and potential stewards and ethical harvesters, and connect them to land and land management resources where they will do the most good, and help to create a new standard in stewardship and sustainable harvest.

Be sure to check out our online [calendar](#), currently up-to-date with forest farming expos, workshops and conferences. Our first event of 2021, hosted by the Yew Mountain center, is scheduled for May 21-23, so mark you calendars and share event details with your neighbors!

If you're not already a member, consider joining to stay informed about what's coming next for the coalition and our partners. We're working hard to bring you events and opportunities, and to grow our network of forest farmers throughout Appalachia. Thank you for being a part of our journey!



Point-of-Harvest (POH) Training Program

The ABFFC is in the process of designing a Point-of-Harvest (PoH) training and market development program for wild harvesters of NTFPs. In the PoH program, wild harvesters are trained on forest farming techniques and become certified stewards of NTFPs at the point of harvest. This is a unique certification system where the person, not the land, is certified. Forest-dependent communities and their cultural traditions, as well as the industry and wild stands stand to benefit from such a program. The goal is to provide an opportunity for wild harvesters to be more competitive in the marketplace both in terms of share and price points, while also increasing the use of environmentally responsible practices that align with forest farming stewardship.

Once a harvester is certified by the PoH program, they are expected to apply techniques that ensure safe harvesting and processing, as well as demonstrate that they are sustaining rather than exploiting the NTFPs they gather. PoH farmers also will help expand and monitor NTFP species in the areas they work, and share findings with the landowners that grant them access. Good standing in the program requires continuing education provided by local instructors who will provide practical training to PoH participants. Training will be a mixture of classroom, field, and virtual instruction, depending on the circumstances.

PoH harvester training fills a void in technical assistance and to make it as easy as possible plans to offer events that are free of charge and recognized by the non-timber forest products industry and large landholders.

Potential training topics include, but are not limited to

- safety
- technology
- harvesting and sustainable propagation
- plant identification, botany, and ecology
- raw material storage and processing
- marketing and bookkeeping
- regulations and applicable laws

The PoH program is a workforce development project and will depend on support from the companies that purchase NTFPs. If you are a harvester or buyer of raw or value-added material, the ABFFC would like to hear from you about how the PoH program should be designed. Please click on the link below to take a very short survey to let the coalition know what you would like to see in such a program.

<https://www.appalachianforestfarmers.org/point-of-harvest>

