



Greetings Coalition Members and Friends

We hope this newsletter finds all of you doing well and enjoying Summer. Let us begin with a moment of thanks for the resilience of our forests and our coalition. The introduction in the previous Winter newsletter noted "...it is our values that carry us through thick and thin." Safe to wager that all of us would agree the Winter and Spring months since that time have not been easy. But our collective commitment to this work never wavered and good things have happened because of it. We should all be proud.

The coalition is standing stronger than ever. Although we couldn't meet in person and hold events last year, our dedication to forest farming and woodland stewardship in the midst of that limitation inspired a remarkable round of program planning, strategic initiatives, and sustained celebration of community that will payoff as we begin to gather again. A perfect kickoff to this year's events was led by Yew Mountain Center, one of our newest organizational partners. More are on their way as we move into the Fall, so don't hesitate to check out the calendar and come join us!

The coalition also is focusing on the availability of affordable planting stock and seed. This need was clearly documented in 2017 at the Future of Ginseng and Forest Botanicals Symposium hosted by United Plant Savers. More recently, the coalition led a series of strategic meetings to determine how to address this need, and support from the USDA is on its way to help with next steps.

There is of course much more to share and the following pages will bring you up to speed on initiatives and individuals making waves across the region. Happy reading and we look forward to seeing you in the literal sense in the near future!

Sincerely

The ABFFC Team



**APPALACHIAN BEGINNING
FOREST FARMER COALITION**

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West Virginia Forest Farming Initiative

The Appalachian mountains are home to some of the most sought-after forest botanicals, among them - ginseng, goldenseal, bloodroot, black cohosh, and ramps. The demand for these plants has caused substantial pressure on plant populations within the region, leading to concern about long-term sustainability of the plants and communities that have long stewarded them. The West Virginia Forest Farming Initiative was created to address these issues by increasing education and promoting stewardship of these coveted plants.

“Some of these plants take 7 to 12 years to go to seed. The lack of understanding of the lifecycle of these plants has led to overharvesting, the reduction, and even the removal of plant populations,” said Will Lewis, Forest Farming Coordinator at the Yew Mountain Center, which is leading the initiative. According to Lewis, “The West Virginia Forest Farming Initiative aims to educate on these forest botanicals and other non-timber forest products to teach people how to grow these plants responsibly, create secondary incomes, and take the pressure off of wild populations.”



The West Virginia Forest Farming Initiative offers multiple avenues to help support beginning forest farmers. Program mentors provide site visits to assess canopy coverage, slope, and indicator species prior to planting. Mini grants and planting stock are available, as well as in-person trainings at events.

Networking, marketing opportunities, and education are additional benefits to joining the program.

“Our forests have so much capacity and so much potential to grow medicine, to provide income, and to support livelihoods and communities,” said Will. “There are some skill sets that people will need to get this started, but that’s where we come in with the programs we’re offering.” To learn more about the West Virginia Forest Farming Initiative, visit

wvforestfarming.org





The Forest School Introduces the Northeast Forest Farmers Coalition

A new initiative from The Forest School at the Yale School of the Environment will support forest landowners interested in growing commercially valuable native crops in their forest understories.

By Karam Sheban Forest Fellow and Yale Forests Research Manager (and ABFFC member)

Since 2015, the [Appalachian Beginning Forest Farmer Coalition](#) (ABFFC) has been promoting the adoption of forest farming across Appalachia. By hosting in-person workshops, [posting instructional videos](#), and conducting research, the ABFFC has helped thousands of forest landowners start forest farming on their properties. The practice of forest farming is a type of agroforestry, [defined by the USDA](#) as “the intentional integration of trees and shrubs into crop and animal farming systems to create environmental, economic, and social benefits.” These benefits include everything from increased farm income and crop diversity to [large-scale carbon sequestration](#). Planting at-risk native species in your forest understory also takes pressure off of wild plant populations, a concept referred to as [“Conservation through Cultivation.”](#)

Given these benefits, you might wonder why you’ve never heard of agroforestry or forest farming. Well, you’re not alone: just like no one had ever heard of an oat milk latte [until sometime after 2017](#), a major barrier farmers face when it comes to adopting agroforestry on their own farms and forests is a lack of accessible information and assistance. Despite the efforts of the ABFFC, when it comes to forest farming in the Northeast, resources are few and far between, and many would-be forest farmers are falling through the cracks. For Steve Prinn, learning how to forest farm was a self-guided pursuit “I would just Google ‘growing ginseng’ and see what turned up,” Steve said.

An article published this past winter in [The Maine Monitor](#) quoted farmer Max Boudreau of [Winslow Farm](#) in Falmouth, Maine corroborating Steve’s experience in struggling to access resources. In the article, Boudreau said he saw a need for a “northeastern equivalent of the Appalachian Beginning Forest Farmer Coalition” in order to “have more coordination among those already doing agroforestry.”

Well, this is exactly what a new initiative at The Forest School seeks to do.

This year [The Forest School at Yale School of the Environment \(YSE\) was awarded a \\$250,000 grant](#) through the [USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education \(SARE\)](#) program, to conduct forest farming research and provide landowner education around the practice. The project will be led by Karam Sheban, a post-graduate researcher at The Forest School at YSE, along with faculty members Marlyse Duguid and Joseph Orefice, Directors of Research and Forest & Agricultural Operations, respectively, at the Yale Forests. Before attending YSE for his Master of Forestry degree, Sheban worked with the ABFFC to promote forest farming in his home state of Ohio and beyond, and he conducted his master’s research on ginseng cultivation in the Catskill Mountains of New York.

Through this new initiative, called the Northeast Forest Farmers Coalition, project leaders will help establish a community of forest farmers across the Northeast. Project partners—including Cornell and Penn State Universities as well as nonprofit and farm partners—will host forest farming research and demonstration sites, ranging across West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, and Vermont.



Ginseng Growers Program Proposed at Kentucky's Association of Conservation Districts Meeting

By Marcus Stidham

I am a native Kentuckian, and have been a wildcrafter and forest farmer since the age of 14. I admire and steward many plants but American ginseng is one that I believe is in need of significant attention in the bluegrass state. In addition to my work with forest plants and other community services (fire fighter and church deacon), I am also a supervisor with our county conservation office in Hazard, Kentucky and recently had the privilege of introducing a proposal for a Ginseng Growers Program at the statewide meeting of conservation districts in early July, 2021. The overall goal is to create a single program that helps better coordinate interests and activities tied to growing, harvesting, and selling Kentucky ginseng.

Before making my presentation, I was able to speak with state representatives and agency personnel, such as fish and wildlife scientists, and biologists and botanists, as well as forest farmers and those involved with growing programs in other states. These conversations helped me better understand questions and concerns, while also providing time to address them and develop consensus. The Association seems to be warming to the idea and I have hopes that the governing body for ginseng, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, will be willing to cooperate. Markets are changing, and proactive and cooperative stewardship is needed now more than ever. The proposed program offers a pathway for doing right by our plants and woodlands, as well as helping forest farmers and their communities realize much-needed additional income.



Marcus Stidham proposes a Ginseng Growers Program at the state meeting of of the Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts in July 2021.

- Marcus Stidham is a longtime wild harvester who started forest farming to help preserve plant populations and provide supplemental income for his family. As a conservation officer, he, along with others, is in a position to help implement the very program he proposed.

In the Garden

with Ruby Daniels



In the heart of Beckley, West Virginia, a flower is blooming amidst the coal mines. Blue cohosh unfurls and Solomon's seal shoots emerge from their single stalk. This is the garden of Ruby Daniels - forest farmer, herbalist, and owner of Creasy Jane - Afolachian Herbal Remedy Store.



We interviewed Ruby for our fall newsletter and wrote about her journey to forest farming, but with the return to a new normal, we decided to pay her a visit and film her doing the things she loves to do most. With a handful of peat moss in one hand and the roots of a peppermint plant in the other, Ruby explained her forest farming philosophy. Steering away from the heavy hitters of the botanical realm such as ginseng and black cohosh due to their vulnerability, Ruby focuses on other, more common plants for her herbal remedies.

She pays attention to what her community needs and tailors her formulas to benefit those around her. By making small batches of value added products, she's able to see what sells best, keeping her business cost effective. "If it's popular, then I'll make it again. Then you know what the niche is," said Ruby. "Everyone sells tomatoes around here. I grow some because I know I can make value added products with them, but I also plant herbs with them. I use those herbs to make value added products that I know I'll make money from." Paying attention to synergistic plant relationships and soil health while keeping a pulse on the community's need for value added products, takes knowledge, foresight, and creativity. Ruby is always thinking outside the box.

A short while later, Ruby whipped up a sugar scrub and organized ingredients to blend a tea, make soap, and create bath bombs for an order that came in. "Perseverance is the most important part of this journey for me," said Ruby. "The most important character quality that I have is that I will keep going." As she finished the sugar scrub and began combining Epsom salt and lavender oil for her bath bombs, her energy and tireless passion for her craft is apparent. To learn more about Ruby's Afolachian herbal remedies, visit her [website](#).



Watch these two videos to see how Ruby operates.

Upcoming Events



SAVE THE DATE

**Forest Farming Intensive
~ Propagation to Processing ~**

Learn how to grow, harvest and process forest farmed food and herbs!

September 17-18, 2021 Duffield, Virginia appalachianforestfarmers.org/va-ffi

September 17 - 18, 2021 | Duffield, VA

Whether you're just getting started with forest farming or looking to ramp up production for market, this intensive has something for everyone. Dig in with intensive learning stations covering:

- site selection
- propagation
- syrup production
- sustainable harvest
- post-harvest handling and processing



SAVE THE DATE

JOIN US IN RUTLAND, OH AUGUST 27-29, 2021

SOUTHERN OHIO FOREST FARMING CONFERENCE

Join us for a comprehensive seed-to-sale overview of forest farming strategies!

August 27-29, 2021 Rutland, Ohio appalachianforestfarmers.org/soffc

August 27 - 29, 2021 | Rutland, OH

The Southern Ohio Forest Farming Conference will provide participants with opportunities to learn about multiple forest farming strategies such as:

- wild simulated ginseng, goldenseal and mushroom cultivation
- post harvest handling for herb producers
- herb walks
- value-added product demonstrations

The conference has a great line-up of highly experienced speakers and teachers that will help participants gain a broader understanding of the many opportunities of forest farming.



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September 25-26, 2021 ~ Asheville, NC

~ GROWING UNDER THE CANOPY ~ Forest Farming Intensive

Join us for two days of in-depth workshops and farm tours that will dive into propagation and production of forest plants, value-added possibilities, agritourism and marketing of woodland cultivars. The intensive will include both hands on workshops and on-farm site visits to offer practical learning opportunities for beginning and advanced forest farmers.



appalachianforestfarmers.org/nc-ffi



Looking Back

Yew Mountain Center's Forest Farming Intensive - May 22, 2021

Check out pictures and podcasts from a fantastic kick-off to the 2021 event season. It was great to be back together at the beautiful Yew Mountain Center in West Virginia!

[Pod Cast Part One!](#)

[Pod Cast Part Two!](#)

Click on purple link to listen to podcasts courtesy of Allegheny Mountain Radio



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