

Summary & Resources - Hill and Hollow Farm September 2026 OAK Farmer Field Day



The Long Game: 25 Years of Organic CSA

Event Summary

"We want everything we do on the farm to be either fun or profitable. Sometimes, we find things that are both." Robin Verson offered recent Field Day participants this guiding principle that she and her family have used to create [Hill and Hollow Farm](#). After three decades of values-driven priority-setting and hard work, the result is a successful, diversified family farm centered on community, organic practices and shared learning. Field Day participants heard the family's story of longevity as a certified organic farm serving Community Supported Agriculture shares to Nashville customers. With "human-powered" production methods and help from farm apprentices, Robin and her three children grow two acres of mixed vegetables, herbs and cut flowers, raise a flock of 35 Jacob wool sheep and host on-farm educational events and agritourism opportunities.

The Farm as a Whole Organism

Hill and Hollow Farm was certified organic through the Kentucky Department of Agriculture in 1998, even before the USDA created the National Organic Program (NOP) and the now-familiar USDA Organic seal in 2002. Robin is proud that she's maintained the certification and the recognition, recordkeeping, restrictions, and yes, even the regulations that come with that commitment. She acknowledges, however, that this certification does not look at "the whole organism of the farm" and is grateful for her farm's current participation in OAK's Soil Health Project, which allows her to explore Hill and Hollow Farm more holistically.

Through the project, Robin has used OAK's FARM Tool, which measures social, economic and environmental indicators across [12 categories](#) to assess the state of on-farm sustainability. Based on these categories, Robin can see her farm's status in relation to peer farms around the state and create a resilience plan that matches her family's goals and priorities. Joined by Annie Woods and Jackson Rolett, from OAK's Soil Health Team, Robin shared what Hill and Hollow has learned from the project and what they plan to focus on for farm sustainability. These plans include cover cropping to help build soil health through increased active carbon and aggregate stability, development of a

grazing plan for improved diversification with their livestock and solar power implementation for on-farm renewable energy.

Diversity and Support for Farm Longevity

As a CSA farm growing dozens of different crops throughout the year, Hill and Hollow may seem diversified simply in their crop production, but reliable diversification allows farms to carry a sustainable profit throughout the year. As CSA subscriptions are paid in the first part of the calendar year, these may be spent down by fall, setting the farm family up for a lean winter. For this reason, Robin has taken sage advice for a truly sustainable farm, developing “the capacity to make a sale every day of the year.” From shiitake mushrooms and cut flowers to plant-dyed wool products and on-farm events, Hill and Hollow has diversified for year-round and year-after-year profitability.

After a barn fire in 2016, the farm went without large infrastructure until 2022, when Robin’s oldest son and his construction team built a new barn from locally-harvested wood. This barn now stores farm equipment and also houses indigo dyeing workshops, square dances and live music events. A separate outdoor kitchen and off-grid cabin, remnants from the earliest years of Hill and Hollow Farm, now host dozens of elementary schoolchildren who visit annually to learn the crafts, skills and farm life at Hill and Hollow. The family is currently building a larger event barn with plans to expand their agritourism hosting and event capacity. As their website reads, “We love to host!”

While most of the farm’s infrastructure and diversification has been home-grown and a labor of love, Hill and Hollow has taken advantage of multiple grants and cost-share opportunities to support the farm’s growth. Hill and Hollow has utilized the KSU Small-Scale Farm grant’s assistance to purchase a maple syrup evaporator and build a root cellar, the County Agricultural Incentives Program (CAIP)’s help with fencing needs for rotational grazing and a KY Proud Promotional Grant to support a new website and marketing materials. With technical and cost-share assistance from the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Hill and Hollow installed two high tunnels to extend their vegetable production season. Working with the Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD) for business planning and grant writing support, Robin secured a Value-Added Producer Grant to improve the packing and marketing of the farm’s fiber products.

Gratitude

OAK is grateful to Robin Verson, Madeline Bela and William Bela of [Hill and Hollow Farm](#) for their time and efforts for this Field Day, to the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service* for providing essential participant support and to all the farmers and ag professionals who took time out of their busy schedules to share in the learning and conversation.

**Funding for the event was made possible through the [USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program \(TOPP\)](#).*

Related Resource Links:

OAK Resources:

- [OAK Farmer Field Days](#) - Hosted on working farms, these events highlight organic crop and livestock systems and best practices in production, marketing, business and resilience on Kentucky farms. The 2026 Field Day calendar offers events through October, on-farm and online!
- [Organic Production Assistance Program](#) - Organic production consultation services provide dedicated technical assistance to Kentucky farmers who are currently using or interested in adopting or expanding organic practices.
- [OAK Transition Program](#) - Organic transition specialists assist farmers interested in transitioning to USDA-certified organic production. Organic specialists are available for one-on-one consultations, providing a personal level of service and technical assistance on-site, at the farmer's convenience.
 - The [Midwest Transition to Organic Partnership Program \(TOPP\)](#) is a coalition of partners across 11 states providing mentorship, technical assistance, and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic producers.
- [On-Farm Conservation](#) - This program provides outreach and education for farm-based conservation on owned or leased land. Eligible participants are Kentucky farmers and landowners with production or subsistence farms, urban or rural growing spaces, community-run projects or privately managed lands. OAK's Conservation Outreach Coordinator, Mad Marchal, is available to connect Kentuckians to local NRCS field staff, to reduce barriers to entry into NRCS programs and to offer logistical support and conservation education. Contact Mad at mad@oak-ky.org or (502) 509-9839 or [schedule a free call](#).
 - [Conservation Funding Opportunity](#): Eligible Kentucky farmers can **apply by September 25, 2026**, for financial and technical assistance with on-farm conservation practices through funding from a new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). [Grow Appalachia](#) and OAK are stewarding this new partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to advance soil health, conservation and weather-resilient practices for Kentucky farmers and landowners. Contact Mad at mad@oak-ky.org for details.
- [Soil Health Project](#) - OAK and partners are working with farmers and buyers in Kentucky to promote the adoption of organic farming practices and to develop markets for commodities grown and raised in ways that improve whole-farm resilience, soil health and ecosystem services. This project is part of the USDA's Advancing Markets for Producers initiative and runs through August 2028.
- [OAK Conference](#) - OAK's annual conference includes a growing audience of hundreds of Kentuckians and neighbors active in the region's food systems: farmers, researchers, nonprofit professionals, federal and state agency partners, technical service providers and conscious consumers working collectively to build a resilient local food system for all. Collaboration among these diverse voices, grounded in the connection to Kentucky farms, soil and communities, provides a rich foundation for learning and growth. Mark your calendar to join us in **Cave City, KY, on January 29-30, 2027, and keep an eye on our October 2026 announcements for registration, scholarships and event details!**
- [Kentucky Farm Share Coalition](#) (KYFSC) creates market opportunities for Kentucky farms growing for community-supported agriculture (CSA), a weekly box subscription of the farm's harvest. KYFSC partners with farms and employers to facilitate workplace CSA programs that incentivize employees to purchase CSA. Learn more today!

- [Join OAK today!](#) The organic and sustainable farming network in Kentucky is growing. Together, we are creating a thriving regional food and farming network. Your support and participation help provide resources to farmers, inspire community members and enhance organics across KY!
- [Sign up for OAK newsletters](#) - For farmers and consumers, OAK offers a variety of regular communications to stay connected to Kentucky food and farming news, research and events.

Midwest Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) Resources

- Hill and Hollow Farm [Field Day Packet](#) including certified organic crop and livestock overview
- [How to Choose a Certifier in Kentucky](#) - Many organic certifiers operate in Kentucky. Each will require record-keeping, farm maps and common requirements of the [USDA's National Organic Program](#), yet they all have different timelines, processes, paperwork requirements and fees.
- [OAK Organic Record-Keeping Template](#) is one of the [OAK Farming Resources](#) developed to help farmers keep the required records for organic certification and production.
- Organic Transition Videos:
 - [Organic Record Keeping - with a Farmer and Inspector](#)
 - [Mock Organic Inspection - Introduction and Preparation](#)
- [Organic Material Review Institute \(OMRI\)](#) supports organic integrity by developing clear information and guidance about materials so that producers know which products are appropriate for organic operations.

Soil Health Resources:

- Soul Fire Farm's [How Alive Is My Soil?](#)
- [Cover Crops for Sustainable Crop Production](#) - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)
- [Managing Cover Crops Profitably](#) and [Building Soils for Better Crops](#) - SARE
- [Cornell Soil Health Manual](#) - Cornell University's College of Ag and Life Sciences
- [Building Soil Health in the South](#) - Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF)

Crop Production Resources:

- [General Production Resources | Center for Crop Diversification](#)
- [Organic Agriculture | Center for Crop Diversification](#)
- [Crop Rotation on Organic Farms | SARE](#)
- [Community Supported Agriculture \(CSA\) Production Manual](#) of the Organic Farming Unit at the University of Kentucky
- [High Tunnel Production Resources](#) - University of Kentucky Extension
- [Crops Under Cover](#) - the most recent research-backed and farmer-advised row cover innovations; University of Kentucky
- Organic Commercial Spray Schedule for Field Production (University of Kentucky series)
 - [Beans](#), [Broccoli](#), [Cauliflower & Other Cole Crops](#), [Cucumber](#), [Melons](#)
 - [Peppers](#), [Pumpkin](#), [Summer Squash & Zucchini](#)
 - [Tomatoes](#), [Winter Squash](#)
- Disease and Insect Control Program for Home-Grown Fruit in Kentucky, including Organic Alternatives [ID-21](#)

- Suppliers:
 - [High Tunnels and Growing Supplies](#) - Grow Appalachia, Berea KY
 - [Walk-Behind Tractors and Hand Tools](#) - Earth Tools, Owenton KY
 - [Farm/Garden Supplies](#) - Martin's Produce, Liberty KY
 - [Farm/Garden Supplies](#) - Shrock's Garden/Farm Supplies, Crab Orchard, KY
 - [Farm/Garden Supplies](#) - Deerfield Supplies, LLC, Elkton, KY
 - [Organic Farm And Garden Supplies](#) - Fresh Start Growers Supply, Louisville, KY

Funding /Technical Assistance Resources and Service Providers

- Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development ([KCARD](#))
 - Free [business planning](#) for Kentucky farms and agribusinesses
 - [Funding assistance and grant information](#) (Kentucky and beyond)
 - Sign up under "GET UPDATES" on [KCARD website](#) to receive e-newsletters
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - Read this first! [A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers](#)
 - USDA [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)-Kentucky](#)
 - [How to Start a Farm: Beginning Farmers and Ranchers](#)
 - Find your county's office in [West Kentucky](#) or [East Kentucky](#)
 - [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)-Kentucky](#)
 - USDA Rural Development
 - [Rural Energy for America Program](#) - *currently offering loans only but good resource for grant funds when available*
 - [Value-Added Producer Grant](#)
- [Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund \(KADF\)](#) - **Apply by October 30 for 2026 programs**
- Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) [Organic Marketing Program](#)
- Grants:
 - [SOAR loan](#) - southern and eastern KY
 - [KSU Small-Scale Farm Grant](#) - **upcoming deadlines: October 1 and December 1**
 - [County Agricultural Incentives Program \(CAIP\)](#) grant: county-specific! Ask your County Cooperative Extension Agent or Conservation District; more information [here](#)
 - [Small Scale On-Farm Water Management](#) - Kentucky Horticulture Council

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USDA-NRCS and Other Conservation Resources

- [USDA National Organic Program](#)
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#)
 - [EQIP Funding for Organic Farmers](#)
 - [EQIP Homepage](#)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - [CSP Homepage](#)
 - ["Is CSP Right For Me?"](#)
- Organic Management Plan (823)
 - [2024 Organic Farmers Association 823 Factsheet](#)
- 'Historically Underserved' Farmers
 - ["Get Started! A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers"](#)