

Summary & Resources - Sylvatica Forest Farm August 2026 OAK Farmer Field Day



Agroforestry, Regenerative Organics and Community Food Resilience

Event Summary

Finding a balance between an ecologically sustainable, community-based lifestyle and high-value, profitable enterprises is a challenge faced by many organically-minded farmers. Joana Amorim and Michael Beck have developed a farm model that works for them at [Sylvatica Forest Farm](#). On a mid-summer field day, Joana and Michael shared their journey from homesteading their 62-acre hillside property in Rockcastle County to a multi-enterprise hub for forest farming, herbalism and land stewardship. Touring the “MushRoom” indoor cultivation operation, herbal apothecary and value-added workshop, orchards and high tunnels, alleycropping design on berms and swales, silvopasture areas and mushroom log stacks provided a whole-farm perspective of Sylvatica’s landscape design and production.

Indoor Mushroom Production

“We didn’t start out with a plan to be a mushroom farm,” Michael explained while sharing Sylvatica Forest Farm’s origin story, “but this has become the financial battery, which allows us both of us to be full-time on the farm and live our dream.” Producing 30-80 pounds per week of multiple gourmet mushroom varieties, the “MushRoom” is designed around a sophisticated environmental control and automation system that they continually monitor (even remotely!) to track humidity, temperature and CO2 as they learn the craft. Using a Kentucky-built bagging machine, they fill bags with a substrate mix of wood and grain, pasteurize and inoculate it with mushroom spores and leave it to incubate for several weeks, yielding roughly a pound of mushrooms per bag (depending on variety).

In its third year of operation, the “MushRoom” is part of Sylvatica’s newest farm infrastructure, which also houses an apothecary/workshop, cold-storage unit and storage/pack-shed. The building and its systems are powered via rooftop solar panels (with battery backup) and constructed and equipped with support from multiple USDA small-farm and business development grants (that are no longer available).

Herbal Apothecary and Value-Added Production

As a certified herbalist with generational knowledge and formal training, Joana uses a portion of the farm's new building to craft hydrosols, extracts, powders, salts and more from the farm's herbs and mushrooms. With a home-based processor license (renewed annually), she creates items for online sales, farmers markets and subscription sales via an herbal community supported agriculture (CSA) program. The CSA provides subscribers with boxes of seasonal products grown and created at Sylvatica and Among the Oaks Herb Farm. The partner farms offer workshops for CSA subscribers, and Sylvatica also opens workshops to the public, encouraging the community to expand their use and knowledge of growing and crafting their own plant medicine.

While the home-based processor permit allows Joana to make direct-to-consumer sales, her goal of expanding into retail stores requires a facility upgrade and registration as a commercial kitchen, as well as additional training, registration and requirements to meet state and federal manufacturing regulations. Sylvatica will also have to meet labeling and marketing requirements that adhere to US Food and Drug Administration regulations.

Orchards and Alleycropping

At the center of Michael and Joana's farm are several acres of orchards and plantings designed to use the slope of the land for water and soil nutrient management. In their seventh year of growth, the mixed alleys of fruit and nut trees, berry brambles and perennial and annual herbs and flowers provide food, medicine, habitat, beauty and shade for Sylvatica. Some alleys are designed as raised beds, or peninsulas, which receive deep hardwood mulch every year, while other rows on a steeper slope have a berm and swale permaculture design to help direct water flow. The orchard trees will grow to shade out the berries, allowing the orchard alleys to become silvopasture and provide shade for a recently acquired small herd of Shetland sheep and a Dexter milk cow.

Community Food Resilience

Farming on a hillside and experiencing heavy rainfalls that overflow their creek's banks, Michael and Joana are using their permaculture design skills and learning as they go. A French drain - added to keep water out of low-lying crops and a pair of high tunnels - was not sufficient in recent storms and damaged a pump and generator as it flooded the crops. But fortunately, they're not alone in their efforts: some of these vegetable crops are planted for a "Food Fellowship," a community of local residents and neighbors each growing to support the whole group, sharing the labor and harvest. Each of the households grows one staple crop: garlic, squash, potatoes or sweet potatoes, and they rotate crops each year. With no strict time or labor tracking, the fellowship is built on trust and community, and the group gathers monthly in the winter for planning and connection.

Farming the Forest

From 2015, when Joana and Michael first broke ground and cleared the land for lumber to build their home, they were creating the vision of the life they were building together. Core to this lifestyle are the abundance of forest plants and fungi that fill the Appalachian hardwood forest. From that first clearing, they worked with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for support in thinning the forest, using the cut beech trees to form around 800 log stacks that they've used for nine years of shiitake mushroom production, and they're still producing! They've located and tended wild crops like chanterelles, goldenseal, bloodroot, ramps and other non-timber forest products (NTFPs) to add to their diet and their products. Rooted in learning and respecting the land and working with its natural

systems, Sylvatica Forest Farm offers a model for living in balance with sustainable farming practices and a successful farming business.

Gratitude

OAK is grateful to Joana and Michael for their time and effort for this Farmer 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 out for more details in early fall 2026.**
- [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

- [How to Choose a Certifier in Kentucky](#) - Many organic certifiers operate in the state of 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 certification 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.

Agroforestry and Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) Resources

- Sylvatica Forest Farm Field Day [Participant Packet](#) including Wildcrafting, Ginseng Life Cycle, Wild Crop Organic Certification, Mushroom Organic Certification
- [2026 Gather to Grow Forest Farming Conference](#) - **October 23-25th in Blacksburg, Virginia.**
- Rural Action [Sustainable Forestry](#) resources
 - [Forest Farmers Handbook](#)
 - [Non-Timber Forest Products \(NTFPs\)](#) resources

Value-added Product and Food Safety Resources

- KDA's [Kentucky Farmers' Market Manual and Resource Guide](#)
- Kentucky [Homebased Processing and Microprocessing | UK Family & Consumer Sciences Extension](#)
- [Commercial Food and Cosmetic Manufacturing in Kentucky: A Starter Guide](#)

- [Kentucky Department of Agriculture | Produce Safety](#)
 - [Produce Farm Inventory Survey](#) required from all Kentucky produce farms
 - [Determination](#) of a farm's status for Exemption/Coverage under the Food Safety Modernization Act's Produce Safety Rule
 - No-cost On-Farm Readiness Reviews (OFRR) upon request; educational farm visits to provide food safety education and resources - call (502) 573-0282
- University of Kentucky
 - Food Safety Plan/GAP Certification technical assistance for KY farmers: [Cultivate Kentucky | The Food Connection](#)
 - [Produce Food Safety Resources](#) from the Center for Crop Diversification

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:
 - [Organic Agriculture | Center for Crop Diversification](#)
 - [Crop Rotation on Organic Farms | SARE](#)
 - [High Tunnel Production Resources](#) - University of Kentucky Extension

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*
- [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](#)
 - [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

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
 - [“A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers”](#)