



CENTER FOR FOOD SYSTEMS AND
COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

The Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation Launch

The Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation kicks off with an event featuring speakers from across the food system



On September 16, 2019, the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation hosted its launch event on the Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg, VA. The Center was established by a group of partners across Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, and the Commonwealth to explore partnership, solidarity, and possibility for social equity and sustainability in our food and farming systems. With explicit outreach and Extension goals, the Center also aligns its efforts to address engaged teaching and research aims.

The launch event for the Center consisted of several parts. First, Dr. Kim Niewolny, director of the Center, spoke about the Center’s background and aims. Next, Dr. Jewel Bronaugh, VDACS Commissioner, gave some welcoming remarks and set the stage before turning over to the guest

panel. The panel included Jenny Schwanke, coordinator of the Hale Community Garden; Carmen Young, a graduate student in the department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education; and Eric Bendfeldt, VA Cooperative Extension specialist in community viability. They each discussed questions relating to food systems and transforming the community. The panel also discussed what they would like to see from university partnership, and what they think of the new Center and its capacity to help address food issues in the community.

The launch event concluded with featured keynote speaker, Dr. Alice Julier, Associate Professor of Food Studies at Chatham University. Dr. Julier spoke about the Center for Regional Agriculture, Food, and Transformation (CRAFT); a program she directs at Chatham University in Pennsylvania. The program seeks to educate the community about farming now and in the past, map regional food capacity, hold community workshops to teach culinary and other food production skills, as well as provide resources to help food entrepreneurs thrive through the [Food and Agricultural Innovation Lab](#).

Beginning in fall 2019, the Center will start facilitating community dialogue in the form of Story Circles, which will provide an open space for community-university discussion around healthy food access, farm system viability, ecological sustainability, community engagement, and social equity in our food and farming systems.

In the future, the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation also aims to partner with community and university organizations to develop new and foster existing food system facilitation praxis, research opportunities, co-learning initiatives, guest speakers, and social equity training.

To learn more about the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, or for more information about the September 16th launch event, visit foodsystems.centers.vt.edu, email Allyssa Mark at allys91@vt.edu or Kim Niewolny at niewolny@vt.edu

To learn more about the CRAFT project, visit craft.chatham.edu