Over the past year, the Virginia Soil Health Coalition went through a foundational phase of development and growth that included formalizing the structure of the Coalition, increasing the number and diversity of partners involved, developing a Steering Committee, launching a soil health awareness initiative, and forming a farmer mentoring network, among other activities. Over the year, the Coalition has placed a heavy emphasis on outreach and education, greatly expanding the network of partners involved in the work and increasing coordination, collaboration, and communication among partners. In 2022, we plan to undergo an in-depth, facilitated strategic planning process to think through further needs and opportunities to advance soil health across Virginia.

Progress has included:

I. **Coalition Building and Collaboration**
   b. Formalized structure of Coalition as a broad network with a Steering Committee to provide guidance and leadership.
   c. Organized Steering Committee that meets monthly to provide strategic guidance and direction for the Coalition.
   d. Increased number of partners from 12 to 27 in first year.
   e. Established quarterly meeting structure of Virginia Soil Health Coalition with three meetings in 2021 and average attendance of 90 participants.
   f. Monthly Virginia soil health newsletter.

II. **Soil Health Implementation through Education, Demonstration and Peer-to-Peer Mentoring**
   a. Expanded the network of farmer-to-farmer mentoring across Virginia, led by Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, The Virginia No-Till Alliance, Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Virginia NRCS.
   b. Hired Mentor Coordinator, Becky Szarzynski, to use her experience leading the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council’s mentoring program to help advance the mentoring efforts of other partner organizations.
   c. Ongoing training and educational events led by diverse partners including the Virginia Association of Biological Farmers, Common Grain Alliance, Virginia No Till Alliance, Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, and Virginia NRCS among others.

III. **Leveraging Market Opportunities and Economic Drivers**
   a. Launched the 4 The Soil Awareness Initiative which seeks to amplify and complement on-going soil health messaging and educational priorities of the Virginia Soil Health Coalition and its partners. In 2021, a 4 The Soil Ambassador Toolkit was developed to share with partners for social marketing and additional outreach through Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and Virginia USDA-NRCS. The 4 The Soil website has had 4,185 unique visitors, 7,601 page views, and 178 pledges.
b. Launch of “4 The Soil: A Conversation” podcast, co-hosted with Jeff Ishee of On The Farm Radio. So far there have been twelve episodes and nearly 1,000 downloads.

c. Weekly 4 The Soil workgroup meetings engaging diverse partners.

d. Regarding the financial aspects of soil health, Dr. Kurt Stephenson and colleagues with support of the Agua Fund authored three publications on soil carbon credit status in Virginia, the complex relationship of soil health, nutrient management and water quality, and a financial analysis of soil health practices for Virginia cash grain production.

IV. Other activities

a. Expansion of partnership between Virginia NRCS and Virginia Tech- the Soil Health & Integrated Conservation Agronomist (ICA) or “Soil Health Plus” Outreach Project that leverages NFWF funds to hire a full-time Partnership Soil Health & Integrated Conservation Agronomist, Lydia Fitzgerald.

b. Burgeoning partnership with Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to explore opportunities to incorporate soil health language and practices into their programs. The Coalition, with the leadership of Robert Shoemaker, facilitated development of a matrix on soil health co-benefits of VACS practices and formation development of subcommittee of partners to inform the integration of soil health into the VACS program (series of four meetings and ongoing outreach over year to seek input on potential crop/grazing bundles).

c. Virginia Tech hired a new grad student to complete on-farm field measurements, create educational materials, update nitrogen recommendations for healthy soils, and organize field days.

d. Coalition partners received funding through the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Program to develop and implement comprehensive peer-to-peer soil health training for conservation professionals and mentor farmers. The project will begin July 2022.