



Dear ##[Name | First]##,

Fall has finally settled in, the leaves are in full color, and colder temperatures are upon us. It is officially the season of warm soups, roasted root vegetables, and hearty dishes.

There is still a bounty of foods coming from Kentucky farmers and several farmers markets that go into November or year-round! Check out the [OAK Find-a-Farm Directory](#) for local, organic products near you.

In this month's issue, we are highlighting inspiring farmers from Hallow Springs Farm, a fall squash soup, and helpful tips to build up the soil in your garden!

Happy xxxx,
The OAK Team

Farm Feature...

Building Up the Soil at Hallow Springs Farm



Steep hills, rocky soils, and obvious grit and determination from co-farmers Holly and James Robinson define [Hallow Springs Farm](#) in Rockcastle County. Developing a family farm while raising five kids, working off-farm jobs, restoring a century-old house, and reclaiming the land from the effects of 40 years of soil-depleting farming practices would cause some folks to shy away from the task.

When the couple purchased the land from James' family in 2015, they knew they had an uphill climb to rebuild the health of the land from decades of overlogging and overgrazing. These practices contributed to erosion and loss of topsoil fertility throughout the 70+ acres of woodlands and pasture. In fact, three to four times per year, the bottom of the land's "bowl," which is surrounded by steep hills and where the house is located, became a lake from runoff and various slopes ran like rivers. Holly and James have been dedicated to learning the land and working with the resources they have to address these challenges. The couple started to allow vegetation to grow up, much to the distaste of some who thought they were "letting the place go," but the Robinsons knew they were acting with intention. Encouraging growth, laying fallen timbers to act as anchors to catch and build up the soil and locating the natural terraces of the land to start garden beds have allowed the steep farm hills to produce and to heal. "We're hoping that, with our help," Holly shared, "the land will repair itself somewhat."

Rotational grazing of their cattle has offered multiple benefits over the years. Noticing that hay productivity was diminishing and requiring greater inputs due to the poor soil fertility, the Robinsons worked to develop multiple pasture paddocks for rotation, allowing the land to rest and recover as the cattle were moved around the farm. By rotating the herd, the forage plants maintain strong roots systems and the added manure and hoof action stimulate increased microbial diversity and fungal development within the soil. The resting pastures regenerate through photosynthesis and undisturbed growth before returning to grazing. While the cattle are adding to the fertility of the land through the intentional rotations, the Robinsons are also finding that they don't need to feed as much hay to their cattle due to the improved forage productivity and health on the land. A small herd of goats also provides the family farm with multiple benefits. Raised primarily for family consumption of meat and milk, the goats allow Holly to create goat milk's soap as a value-added product for the market. The goats also offer an easy way to clean up underbrush, especially in the difficult-to-manage steep and rocky areas of the farm.



The Robinsons focus their efforts on farmers market sales of their produce and value-added products for farm income. Utilizing the terraces along the hillsides and the bottomland with the least risk of flooding, Holly and James have developed multiple garden beds for diversified vegetable production, including the newest addition under a 30' x 96' high tunnel. This covered protection has allowed the farmers to add weeks of produce to the start of their market season and has increased the volume of healthy vegetables they grow from "small piles to boxes!" Using drip irrigation fed from a roof runoff structure and natural mulch from hay bales, their first season with the tunnel has been a learning curve with much success. While they learned the hard way that spring brassicas need immediate row cover protection from cabbage moths and flea beetles, they also celebrated their best beets yet and customers have raved about the vibrant and delicious swiss chard!

Thank you to Holly and James for sharing their farming success stories and setbacks with the OAK community. Learn more from Hallow Springs Farm from the [OAK Field Day Summary](#) from this past July. Read more about their farm here and find them at the Rockcastle County Farmers Market [here](#).



It was a delight to join Farmer Ryan Burnette from [Hickory Grove Farm](#) and Chef Tanya at [The Food Connection](#) for our Cook with a Farmer Class this October! Participants made a delicious fall squash soup with roasted butternut and acorn squash from Hickory Grove Farm. This soup is a nice mash-up of veggie chili and winter squash soup. It gets a heartiness from the potatoes and extra protein and fiber from the black beans. The ingredients are versatile and can be easily swapped for things you have on hand and extra toppings are encouraged.

[View Recipe Handout](#)

In the Garden...

Improving Soil Health in the Off-Season

This time of year, the garden is winding down after a busy summer. While your mind may be wandering to mugs of tea and good books by the fire, it is also a great time to give back to the soil and start thinking about what you can do for your fertility management through the colder months.

Check out these three approaches to caring for your garden this fall, and give yourself a leg up next spring!

Cover Crops

Cover cropping is the practice of sowing specific plants for their nutritional value to the soil rather than for human consumption. While it is now too late in the season for many cover crop plantings here in Kentucky, there are some such as hairy vetch (*Vicia villosa*), rye (*Secale cereale*), and wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) that can be sown in the fall and overwintered for terminated in spring. When planting, keep in mind your termination technique to avoid turning a late fall cover crop into a spring weed. Check out this short [video](#) from Maggie Dungan at [Salad Days Farm](#) and other [cover cropping videos](#) on OAK's Youtube Channel to learn more.



Mulching & Compost

Keeping your ground covered over the winter is an effective strategy to increase soil organic matter and prevent erosion. There are many mulching options, but compost is one of the most popular. You can purchase organic compost locally from a trusted provider. Make sure to do your homework when sourcing compost to ensure you're not bringing in pesticides, weed seeds, or non-organic substances. Some popular Kentucky compost sources are Thoroughbred Compost in Lexington and Charlie's Compost located in Calhoun which can be found on [OAK's Find-a-farm Directory](#). (Fun Fact: OAK members, get a one-time discount on Thoroughbred Compost. Not a member yet? Learn more [here!](#))

You can also make your own compost. While the composting process is slower due to cold winter temperatures, it is possible with proper management techniques such as insulating your pile, turning frequently and finding the right balance between carbonaceous and nitrogenous inputs to compost year-round. Falling leaves are an easy-to-find composting material this time of year!



Soil Testing

A big part of keeping an ecological garden is knowing what you're working with. This can be done by taking a soil sample from your garden and sending it away for lab analysis. Soil testing can tell you so much about what your soil might need over the coming season for the best yields and environmental impact. Ask your [county's extension office](#) for more information about how to take your sample and where to send it.

Fall Garden Resources:

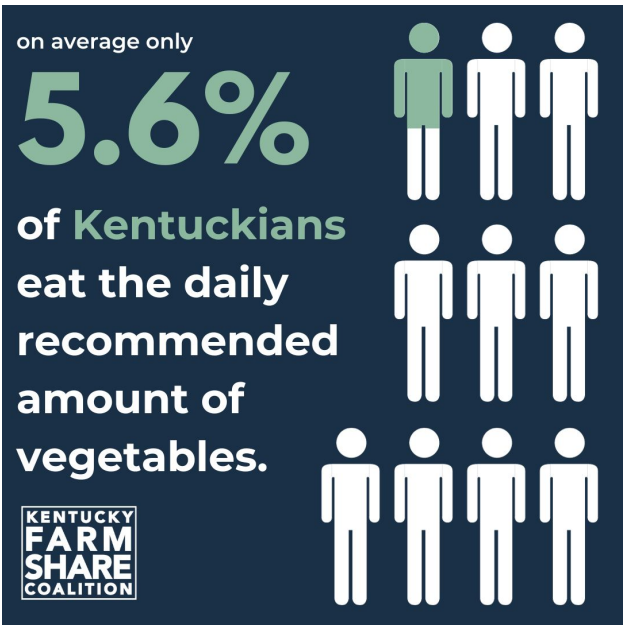
- [Winter Cover Crops for Kentucky Gardens and Fields](#)
- [UK College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment Soil Lab](#)
- [How to Improve Your Soil Over Winter](#)
- [Winter Composting](#)



Upcoming Events & Resources

Save the Date: The Good Giving Challenge is Nov 28th - Dec 1st!

Mark your calendars, the #goodgivingchallenge, organized by the Bluegrass Community Foundation, is starting on November 28th! OAK will be sharing opportunities to support our mission of advancing organic, regenerative farming in Kentucky and growing the regional supply of local, organic foods. Stay tuned for more details.



Are you looking for ways to help your workplace access more fresh veggies?

Only 5.6% of Kentucky adults meet the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's daily vegetable intake recommendation (2-3 servings per day), and most struggle with diet-related illnesses. When workplaces offer a CSA program focused on weekly vegetable boxes from Kentucky farmers, they make it more convenient and affordable to access fresh, healthy foods. Contact Kentucky Farm Share Coalition to learn more about offering this wellness program at your organization at kyfarmshare@oak-ky.org.

Learn More

Donate to OAK. Your tax-deductible gift helps germinate, cultivate, and activate Kentucky's resilient food and farming network.

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Join us! The organic farming network in Kentucky is growing. Together we are creating a more regenerative, organic food system.

[Become an OAK Member](#)

Stay in touch:

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