

Vermont Agricultural Literacy Week

November 10th-17th, 2018

A collaboration of VT Department of Libraries, VT Agency of Agriculture of Food and Markets & NOFA-VT

“Celebrating Our Ancestral Roots”

Details

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), along with the Vermont Department of Libraries, and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, announce the 8th annual Agricultural Literacy Week this November 10-17, 2018. The week-long celebration occurs across the state to inform and educate people about the economic and cultural importance of farms in Vermont communities. For this year’s Agricultural Literacy Week, we are proud to present “Celebrating Our Ancestral Roots.” This year’s theme focuses on the history, traditional practices and contributions of native and ancestral agriculture in Vermont. As part of this year, four main events at libraries around the state will feature renowned Abenaki storytellers sharing aspects of their agricultural heritage.

Do you want to create an event at your own library? This newsletter provides a template on how to organize an Ag Literacy Week Celebration. If interested in hosting an event and you need assistance, please contact Misse Axelrod dmiss@hotmai.com 802.279.1548.

Featured Events

**Highgate Library and Community Center, Highgate: Saturday, Nov. 10th 9-12:00pm
Potluck at 11:30**

Story Teller: Melody Brook
Details: Stories to illustrate Abenaki change over time and living culture. Potluck lunch & Craft Corner

**Bixby Memorial Library, Vergennes:
Monday, Nov. 12th 6-7:30pm**

Story Teller: Chief Donald Stevens
Details: Three Sisters story and traditional song

**VT Historical Society Museum, Montpelier:
Tuesday, Nov. 13th 6-7:30**

Story Teller: Dr. Fred Wiseman
Details: Slideshow, Three Sisters Story and traditional song

**Brooks Memorial Library, Brattleboro:
Wednesday, Nov. 14th 7-8:30pm**

Story Teller: Roger Longtoe
Details: Three Sisters story and traditional song

Suggested Program Outline for Ag Lit Week Event 2018

1. Choose a date during Ag Literacy Week
2. Find a community farmer or two that you would like to celebrate and who can share stories of their Ag Heritage in Vermont

Suggested Event Outline:

1. Welcome Guests
2. Read the provided Three Sisters Story by Dr. Fred Wiseman
3. Ask guests to close their eyes. Prompt the question: what is your first memory of farming, gardening or food? Who does that memory include, and why?
4. After a few minutes, ask guests to open their eyes. Turn to a neighbor that they do not know and share each other's story.
5. Thank our ancestors for teaching us.
6. *Adult Audience:* Show "Weaving a thread through seven generations" by Melody Brooks <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFSRiQ2h6NY>
- Children's Audience:* Storytime books-grab a few from the bibliography and offer a seed craft. Search Pinterest for PK seeds and you'll find plenty of ideas for activities.
7. Introduce the guest Farmer(s) and welcome them to the floor to share their stories.
8. Q/A and / or open story sharing
9. Close and Thank You's
10. Share a meal

For a suggested reading list, please visit www.abenakiart.org or <http://libraries.vermont.gov/aglit2018> or www.nofavt.org



Three Sisters: An Abenaki Story by Dr. Fred Wiseman

The Abenaki People are the indigenous inhabitants of most of Vermont, except a small portion in the southwestern part of the state. They have lived on their land for more than 10,000 years. When we think of the Ancient Vermonters, we think of them as hunters and perhaps fisher folk, but we now know that for over 1000 years, the Abenakis, living in communities in the Champlain and other river valleys of Vermont, were farmers and gardeners using sophisticated agricultural techniques and growing a number of distinctive crops. This rich culture of the Seeded Earth (Ag practices) had not been studied to any great extent by archaeologists and cultural historians.

This belief changed in 2006-2010, when cultural and historical research on the four Vermont tribes that were petitioning for Vermont State recognition revealed a rich legacy of agricultural earth-working, fertilizing, multi cropping, and even bits of evidence for agricultural ceremonies. In 2012, Steve McComber, a Mohawk ethnobotanist and

traditions-keeper, told Dr. Fred Wiseman about several crops that he knew were not Mohawk, and were almost certainly originated by the Abenakis and their neighbors. A quick search of the internet revealed that McComber's suggestions had a measure of academic support.

Thus the *Seeds of Renewal Project* was initiated to track down these crops, agricultural systems, ceremonies, cuisine and seed saving. By late 2012, fourteen Abenaki crops had been isolated. Studies had been completed on mound gardening, agricultural terracing, and fish fertilizing with "the garden fish," also known as the white sucker. We were learning the sun, rain and green corn dances, and the first movements toward developing a distinctive, historical-based Abenaki cuisine had been taken.

From 2013 to today, the *Seeds of Renewal Project* has expanded to include other regional Indigenous communities such as the Quebec Abenakis, Penobscots and Passamaquoddies of Maine, and the Maliseet and Mi'kmaq communities of the Canadian Maritimes. In 2018 we began working with the Cedarville Band of the Piscataway Indians in Maryland to help them reclaim their lapsed crops and agriculture.

Of course this revolutionary information had to be made public, and so in 2014, *Seeds of Renewal* began a series of seminars offered to Indigenous communities in Maine, Quebec and New York State. Following the seminar, crop seeds appropriate to the region were given to the sponsoring tribe. These seeds have formed the core of many regional food sovereignty programs. *Seeds of Renewal* has also given lectures and seminars to various Euroamerican groups such as NOFA in Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts or the ACORN Conference in New Brunswick.

In 2018, two new initiatives are:

* Publications of the *Seeds of Renewal* research in *Seven Sisters: Ancient Seeds and Food Systems of the Wabanaki People and the Chesapeake Bay Region*, by Earth Haven Learning Centre in Canada

* A new exhibit called "Seeds of Renewal" being developed by the Vermont Historical Society and will be premiering in November, 2018, in concert with Vermont Agricultural Literacy Week.



Thank you to:

VT Department of Libraries

**The Northeast Organic Farming Association
of Vermont**

VT Agency of Agriculture

VT Abenakis

"The magic of Agricultural Literacy Week is that it engenders new connections in the community and inspires exploration of ideas beyond traditional library programming. It's also super fun!" - Joy Worland, Librarian (hosted several Ag Lit Events)

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