



VINE & FIG'S FRESH VEGGIE SERIES COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

August & September Highlights



VEGGIE CONSUMPTION | MIND BODY EXERCISE | CORTISOL LEVEL STUDY WITH EMU PROFESSOR, DR. HONGTAO LI

A special thanks to Dr. Hongtao Li, Eastern Mennonite University's Biology Associate, Professor for her interest in Vine & Fig's Fresh Veggie Series and how vegetable consumption along with Qigong, (pronounced chee-gong) a mind body exercise can lower cortisol levels. Cortisol is a critical hormone secreted by the adrenal gland, and it plays a role in cell metabolism, the cardiovascular system, the sleep-wake cycle, and the body's response to stress. While it's essential for daily energy regulation and survival, a chronic increase in cortisol levels has been linked to inflammation and further physical and mental health issues.



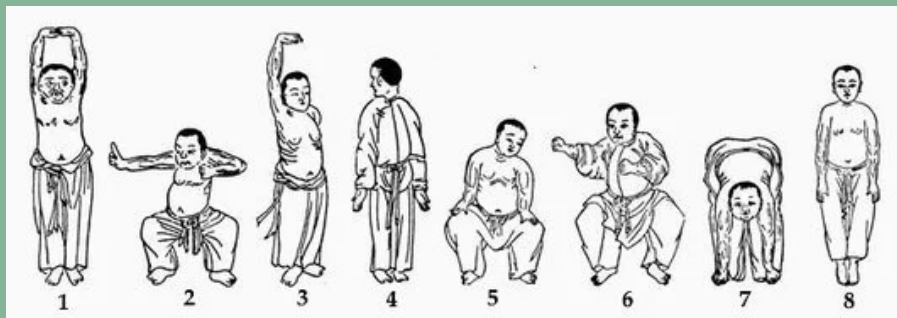
Pictured left to right: Kathy Yoder (Vine & Fig Ex. Director and participant) with Jooyeon Kim (participant), Dr. Hongtao Li (EMU Associate Professor, researcher), Davis Bert (student researcher)

The literature shows evidence that both Mind-Body Qigong and a more plant-based diet rich in polyphenols may help lower stress hormone levels, reduce inflammation, and improve overall health. "The Fresh Veggie Series" produce bags plus Qigong intervention have changed multiple factors in lifestyle medicine theory. Student researchers plan to present this pilot study at the September Suter Science Symposium, among other events. With potential for more collaboration, we will target a larger grant application for larger trials. Publication at different stages will also be an end goal.

Veggies



Qigong



= Lower Cortisol Levels?





Harvests of the Month



**Tomatoes, sweet peppers,
kale and butternut squash!**

August and September bounties brings sun-kissed goodness! Enjoy the rare window when ripe, in-season tomatoes and butternut squash can be enjoyed together in a pasta sauce!

Nutritional Highlight: The Role of Soil Quality and the Gut Microbiome!

By JMU Masters in Nutrition Intern Amanda Sweeten

The importance of high-quality soil health for the production of nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables cannot be understated!

When soil is nurtured through sustainable farming practices, such as composting, crop rotating, no-till planting, and cover cropping, it becomes rich in nutrients, including nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, trace elements such as zinc and magnesium, and soil-based organisms (SBOs). With nutrient-rich and biologically active soil, farms are better equipped to produce large, high-quality, and nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables.



Collecting compost
from the Friendly City
Food Co-op to help
make new soil!



Soil Quality and Prebiotics

What Are Prebiotics?

Prebiotics are compounds in food that the body can't digest, but gut microbes can. They act as fuel for beneficial bacteria living in the GI tract. These helpful bacteria metabolize these prebiotic compounds to produce substances such as short-chain fatty acids, that support immunity and metabolism regulation.



In healthy soil, diverse communities of soil-based organisms, such as bacteria and fungi, break down organic matter into forms plants can absorb. These microbial interactions stimulate plants to produce a wider range of complex carbohydrates, specifically fibers and compounds that act as prebiotics. When crops are grown in more biologically active, nutrient-rich soil, they tend to contain higher levels and a greater diversity of these compounds

Radical Soil Quality!

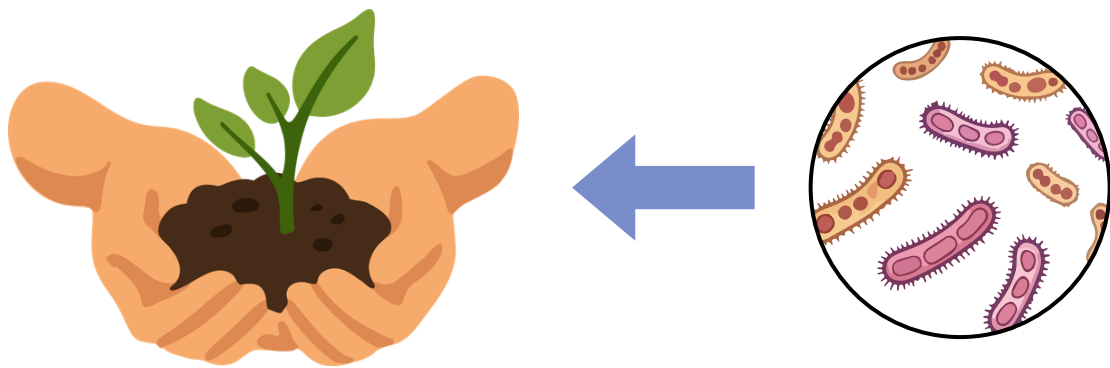
Radical Root Farm, a partner farm of Vine & Fig's, is renowned for its soil, cultivated from years of sustainable and regenerative farming practices. Their soil contains high amounts of organic matter, as high as **10%! For reference, most productive agricultural soils contain **3-6%****



Growing lettuce mix at Radical Roots!

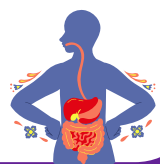
Soil Quality, Soil-Based Organisms, and Probiotics

Soil-based organisms (often abbreviated as SBOs) refer to the vast community of microorganisms that naturally live in soil and play essential roles in maintaining soil health and supporting plant growth. Sustainable farming practices that help revitalize the soil, especially composting, help SBOs repopulate and thrive. Some strains of bacteria living naturally in the soil can be found available as probiotic supplements.



Did You Know?

Probiotics are live microorganisms (usually bacteria and yeasts), mainly found in fermented foods. When consumed in adequate amounts, they can provide health benefits, especially for the digestive system. Trillions of live microorganisms already live in the GI tract of each person and help out by crowding out harmful microbes, improving nutrient absorption, protecting the gut lining, and decreasing inflammation. It is very important to have a thriving and diverse gut microbiome, so it is recommended to have a diet high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. These contain the prebiotic compounds that feed and support these helpful bacteria.



Regenerative Farming Supports the Cycle!

Continuing to feed the soil and its community of billions of soil-based organisms will produce high-quality, large, and nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables that contain plenty of prebiotic compounds to support the microbiome! But the story doesn't end there! After the produce is enjoyed, the organic waste can be collected and transformed into compost! All of those bioactive substances found in the waste can be returned to the soil to grow a new generation!

Compost Life Cycle



Visit our Web Page or Instagram to see:

- our composting efforts
- delicious recipes featuring high fiber foods
- past newsletters
- library of cooking videos
- more nutritional information



<https://vinefigeducation.org>



A Special Thanks to Radical Roots for Providing the Nutrient-Dense Vegetables for the Fresh Veggie Series



Recipe of the Month

Apple, Banana, and Spinach Smoothie!

Ingredients:

- 1 small apple
- 1 banana, room temperature
- 2 cups spinach
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water
- 4 ice cubes
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups frozen pineapple
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon peeled and grated ginger (from fresh ginger root), optional
- 1 to 2 tablespoons chia seeds
- 1 tablespoon fresh squeezed lemon juice



Instructions

1. Chop the apple, leaving the skin on
2. Break the banana into pieces and place them both in the blender
3. Add the spinach and water, and blend until smooth
4. Add the ice, frozen pineapple, ginger, chia seeds, and lemon juice. Blend again until smooth
5. Serve immediately or store in a covered jar in the refrigerator for 2 days, shaking if the smoothie separates

Donation News and How to Donate

Our Mission

The mission of Vine & Fig Educational Outreach Program is to connect food-insecure households with fresh, nutrient-dense, locally grown produce and provide educational materials on how to utilize fresh produce to minimize waste.

Our Vision

We envision a connected community where a web of resources—from food and housing to education and job opportunities—enables everyone to flourish. We support local, regenerative farming to ensure that healthy, nutritious food reaches every table in our community while also keeping our planet healthy.



Why Support Us?

Your investment combats climate change, boosts the local economy, and feeds our community high quality produce.

- **Local Farms:** Produce sourced from sustainable, regenerative growers.
- **Direct Access:** Delivered to clinics, housing programs, and recovery centers.
- **Real Impact:** 77% of participants increased their veggie consumption!

"Your kindness today shapes a better tomorrow."

Community Benefits

When you donate to our educational program your investment ripples across the community:

- Long-term impact on children's nutrition
- Families receive access to broader community resources
- University students receive hands-on experience
- Farmers gain access to more markets

Donate Today!

vinefigeducation.org



\$35

Feeds a family fresh vegetables and learning resources for a week.



\$55

\$55 or more wins you a Vine & Fig T-shirt.



\$140

Feeds a family fresh vegetables and learning resources for a month.



\$250

Funds recipe videos so that families use their vegetables.



\$875

Feeds a family fresh vegetables and learning resources for the season.

How to Donate

BECOME A SUPPORTER

1

Give Online

<https://www.vinefigeducation.org/donate>



2

Donate by Check

Mail to:

Vine & Fig EOP

165 S. Main St. Apt. 204

Harrisonburg, VA 22801



3

Donate Through PVFCU

Park View Federal Credit Union (PVFCU) members can make fee-free donations to New Community Project directly through their online banking. This account-to-account tool skips the processing fees of credit card donations! To give, log in to your Park View online banking, click the "Move Money" button, and select "Donations." Then choose "NCP - Vine & Fig Educational Outreach" from the dropdown menu.

