



## INNOVATIONS IN AG: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

150 Slayton Ave. | Danville, VA 24540 | July 19, 2023



# THANK YOU TO OUR SPEAKERS



**Sajeewa Amaradasa**

Research Scientist  
IALR

Dr. Amaradasa joined IALR in 2018 as a plant pathologist. His research is focused on investigating beneficial plant bacterial endophytes to control economically important diseases of crops. Utilizing beneficial endophytes could lead to more sustainable agricultural systems with reduced use of pesticides and other inputs. Amaradasa earned his Ph.D. in phytopathology from Virginia Tech and has published his research work in several peer-reviewed journals.



**Brooke Bissinger**

Marketing Product Manager  
AgBiome

Brooke has worked in the crop protection industry for over a decade and is passionate about delivering high-quality products to growers. She is the marketing product manager for AgBiome's Theia® Fungicide, which launched in September of 2022. Brooke holds a BA in Environmental Studies from Warren Wilson College, and MS and PhD degrees in Entomology from North Carolina State University.



**Michele Bridges**

Project Manager  
VDACAS

Michele is a Project Manager in the Office of Agriculture and Forestry Development at the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). She administers the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund Facility Grant program, serving as a business resource to new and expanding ag- and forestry-based businesses who are adding value to Virginia-grown products. She has nearly ten years of experience in economic development and more than fifteen years of experience in marketing, customer service and supply chain management in the private industry.



**Joseph Frank**

Head of Platform Technology  
AgroSpheres

Joseph is the Head of Platform at AgroSpheres. Joseph is a founding member of AgroSpheres, which began as a student-led research project at the University of Virginia. Joseph primarily focuses on characterizing and optimizing AgroSpheres' platform technology, the AgriCell, from manufacturing and product performance perspectives. Joseph was born and raised in New Jersey and graduated from the University of Virginia in 2017 with a degree in biomedical engineering.



**Nick Genty**

CEO  
AgEYE Technologies

Since 2018, AgEYE Technologies has been pioneering the use of computer machine vision, deep learning neural networks and IoT-connected devices to create the next generation of autonomous indoor farms. Comprised of a talented team of agriculturists and technologists who have a shared passion for digital horticulture, artificial intelligence and creating a sustainable food supply for the growing global population. The company's mission is to develop technology that helps indoor farms become sustainable and scalable through significant reductions in operational costs.



**Laura Gunter**

President  
North Carolina Bio

Laura leads the North Carolina Biosciences Organization as its president and directs the work of the life science advocacy association in conjunction with its Executive Committee and Board of Directors. NCBIO promotes policy initiatives that encourage the growth and success of life science companies doing business in the state by advocating for the industry before the NC General Assembly and the NC Congressional delegation. She works closely with state and federal partners on the advocacy and policy front.



**Carl Gupton**

President  
Greenswell Growers

Carl comes to Greenswell Growers with a deep background in bringing bold projects to life. He holds an M.B.A. from Virginia Commonwealth University – School of Business and a B.A. in business and economics from Randolph-Macon College. He previously served as vice president/general manager at Pohlrig Packaging, in addition to roles as vice president of sales and sales manager. He also served as vice president at Commonwealth Packaging Corp. Carl ensures that our large-scale indoor growing facility is as sustainable as it is productive at all times.



**Jess Hawthorne**

Director  
CSC Leasing

Jess works with early stage and emerging growth organizations in agtech and biotech to design tailored, flexible financing strategies. By introducing CSC's non-dilutive equipment leasing solutions, he helps companies procure technology and other mission-critical equipment without the burden of owning expensive and depreciating assets. As a result, Jess's clients are better positioned to scale their business, meet milestones quicker, and address planned and unplanned financial obligations. Having financed a wide array of equipment, he understands the capital requirements necessary to achieve research and development goals.



## David Hubert

Disease Screening Team Lead  
Indigo Ag, Inc.

David leads the team responsible for discovering and characterizing new biological fungicides at Indigo Ag Inc., based at their Research Triangle Park facility. David earned a B.S. degree from Indiana University and a Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, both in Biology. Prior to joining Indigo in April 2019, David spent 10 years at BASF in various roles including leading a trait discovery team, responsible for performing greenhouse and field trials.



## John Jackson, Sr.

CEO  
Phlora

John is CEO of Phlora, a Vertical Indoor Precision Propagation technology company providing access to enriched young plants, empowering farms instead of replacing them. Originating from a USDA funded industry-academic partnership with Grafted Growers, the University of Arizona, and North Carolina State University, Continuing his grandfather's legacy of fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to family as a sharecropper in rural Oklahoma, he continues to drive innovation through the connection of science and industry for the betterment of the global community.



## Karen LeVert

Venture Partner  
Pappas Capital

Karen is a Venture Partner with Pappas Capital and is leading the expansion of the firm's Specialized Fund Management business with a focus on identifying attractive agricultural technology investment opportunities. Karen's business experience encompasses both corporate and entrepreneurial worlds with over twenty-five years of successful leadership experience in executive management, start-ups, and technology commercialization.



## Matthew Lohr

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry  
Commonwealth of Virginia

Matthew serves as the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry for the Commonwealth of Virginia. He was raised on a Century family farm in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley and has spent his entire life working for the betterment of agriculture. Before serving as the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, he served as Chief of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and previously served in the Virginia House of Delegates, as Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, as Director of the Farm Credit Knowledge Center and as a middle school agriscience teacher.



## Scott Lowman

Vice President of Applied Research  
IALR

Dr. Lowman is Vice President of Applied Research at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR) in Danville, Virginia. He and his team are focused on developing and integrating advances in biology and technology to improve plant productivity. As a biologist focused on plant-microbe interactions, he seeks to identify promising microbial biostimulant and biocontrol agents that increase plant growth and health while safeguarding the environment.



## Weston McCorkle

Agricultural Programs Specialist  
North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Weston spent 15 years of his career with NC State University working with Extension, Research, and Environmental Health and Safety. He then went to work with AgCarolina Farm Credit as a loan officer based out of Smithfield, NC. In October, 2020, Weston had the opportunity to join the Agri-Services Branch of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as an Agricultural Programs Specialist.



## Chuansheng Mei

Chief Scientist  
IALR

Dr. Mei is a Chief Scientist in the Plant Endophyte Center at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research in Danville, Virginia and Adjunct Faculty in the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech. Currently, his research focuses on plant and bacterial endophyte interactions and develops low input and sustainable agricultural production systems utilizing beneficial bacterial endophytes for enhancing abiotic and biotic stress tolerance, improving plant performance, particularly in hydroponic systems and increasing nutrient use efficiency.



## Brian Miller

Lead of Microbiology/Fermentation  
Syngenta

Dr Miller has over 30 years' experience in the field of commercial industrial microbiology including microbial fermentation, microbial isolation, microbial analysis, biotechnology of microbes for product production, agricultural product development, collaborations, laboratory design, opportunity evaluation, project planning and management. Most recently at Syngenta for the last 10 years, he has worked to optimize existing biologicals products and in new product discovery and development.



**John Newby**  
CEO  
Virginia Bio

John is the CEO at Virginia Bio, the statewide non-profit trade association for the life science industry. Approximately 300 companies spanning biopharmaceuticals, medical device, med tech, diagnostics, digital health, bioinformatics, agriculture and industrial bio and related fields are based in Virginia, mainly clustered around research universities and medical institutions. Virginia Bio is the sole state affiliate and works closely with key national industry organizations BIO, AdvaMed, MDMA, PhRMA and We Work for Health.



**Mitch Peele**  
Sr. Director of Public Policy  
North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation

Mitch is Sr. Director of Public Policy at the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation. He has broad responsibilities for all commodity, environmental and regulatory programs as well as interactions with other allied organizations. With 35+ years in public policy, he has provided leadership in the areas of agricultural chemicals, biotechnology, energy, animal welfare, water resources and coalition building. He is a founder and leader of the NC Agricultural Alliance, NC Forever, and Feed the Dialogue NC Foundation.



**John Reich**  
Scientific Program Director  
Urban Food Systems  
FFAR PIP

Dr. Reich joined the Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR) in February 2016 as a Scientific Program Director. He currently manages FFAR's Urban Food Systems Challenge Area. Reich came to FFAR because he strongly believes that agricultural advancements are key to maintaining our quality of life and that the right investments at opportune moments provide the necessary tools to overcome future challenges in agriculture. Since coming to FFAR, John continues to build new and impactful partnerships, including creating FFAR's first consortium.



**Ben Rowe**  
National Affairs Coordinator  
Virginia Farm Bureau Federation

Ben serves as National Affairs Coordinator for the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation. In this role, Ben works with Virginia's 13-member Congressional delegation to implement Farm Bureau policy and regulatory priorities at the federal level. Ben is active on a number of nonprofit boards across the state, and serves as Chairman of the Eastern Virginia Agricultural Research and Extension Center Advisory Board.



**Paul Ulanch**  
Focused Initiative Team  
NC Bio Tech

Dr. Ulanch is a member of the Focused Initiative Team at the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, leading efforts to support ag technology stakeholders, enable partnership development, implement solutions that improve the State's life science ecosystem, and foster innovation development in North Carolina. Examples include steward ongoing strategic life science projects among diverse stakeholders, co-administrating the Center's ag tech loan program, leading the NC Ag Tech Investor Forums, mentor ag biotech entrepreneurs, and assist companies seeking to establish operations in North Carolina.



**Mark Williams**  
Professor  
Virginia Tech

Dr. Williams's research is focused on understanding how microbial communities assemble and function in ecosystems, soil, the root-zone, and other numerous habitats found in nature (e.g. honeybee gut). His studies reflect on the mutualistic nature of plant-microbial feedbacks that are a major driver of ecosystems and the global biosphere.



**Kristi Woods**  
Senior Manager of BioAg  
Greenhouse and Application  
Research  
Novozymes

Kristi is a highly experienced professional with a strong background in bio-agriculture and research and development. With a career spanning over two decades, she has held various leadership roles at Novozymes, a leading biotech company. In her current role as the Senior Manager of BioAg Greenhouse and Application Research, Kristi spearheads teams focused on conducting in planta research to gain insights into the potential efficacy of microbes and products derived from microbial sources. She comes with extensive experience in greenhouse studies, regulatory support, and project management.



**John Zabilansky**  
Senior Director for Field  
Engineering  
AeroFarms

Justin Zabilansky is currently Senior Director for Field Engineering for AeroFarms, responsible for the roll-out of new farming technology and farm deployment. He previously had led the design of AeroFarms next-generation proprietary growing systems as well as HVAC and computational air flow models and machine vision applications. Earlier, Justin had done extensive research developing computational models of Influenza A Hemagglutinin evolution based on genetic analysis of potential glycosylation sites.



**Lisa Zannoni**  
Founder  
Zannoni & Associates  
Consulting, LLC

Lisa, an attorney and pharmacist, is a recognized industry leader in the biotechnology and gene editing policy and regulatory areas. She was recently an Executive at Inari Ag, a growth company. As Vice President of Regulatory and Government Relations, she built the foundation for effective regulatory compliance, stewardship, data generation and regulatory submissions for gene edited, GM post-patent and gene edited GM products.