Greetings from the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition Program

The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program (VBFRC) had a very productive 2016, and we are looking forward to what 2017 will bring. This marks the beginning of our 3rd year of USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) grant project. This funding has helped us provide numerous farmer trainings, resources, and networking opportunities across Virginia. We are also excited to publish new online resources and webinars this coming year. This newsletter highlights celebrated work from this past year, in addition to several new opportunities to tap into for 2017! — Kim Niewolny, Director of the VBFRC

Whole Farm Planning Courses and Workshops in 2017

Several of our Coalition partners will be offering whole farm planning courses and workshops this year. These events take place in a number of locations and provide participants with classroom instruction, farmer-to-farmer networking, and resources from our VBFRC Whole Farm Planning curriculum and Coalition service provider network. Below is a list of upcoming workshops and completed events to attend next year. For more details, please visit the Whole Farm Planning page of our website.

Certified Farm Seekers Program
VA Farm Bureau Young Farmers and the VA Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services — networking and resource intensive self-study available throughout 2017

VSU Whole Farm Planning for Beginners Series
Virginia State University, Small Farm Outreach Program — full day workshops across Virginia during winter 2017

2017 Small Farm Incubator Program
Virginia Tech’s Catawba Sustainability Center — applications currently being accepted, orientation in early April

Whole Farm Planning in Southwest Virginia
Appalachian Sustainable Development and VCE — topical workshops ongoing

Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program
VCE and Fauquier Education Farm — multiple-week course during Feb-Mar 2017

Establishing Viable Farms and Communities Across Virginia

VBFRC Coalition Meeting at the Frontier Culture Museum
On January 18th, the VBFRC held a gathering at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton, VA. Nearly 50 coalition partners, service providers, and producers attended to network; discuss the Coalition’s ongoing and completed work, such as our mini-grant projects; and discuss the direction that we would like to see the Coalition work take in the future. Thank you to everyone who was able to join us for a friendly and productive meeting!

VBFRC Launches Mini-Grant Projects for 2017

In December 2016, we disseminated $20,000 of mini-grant funds to Coalition partner organizations for six 2017 programming opportunities aimed at supporting the next generation of farmers and ranchers in Virginia. These projects will be implemented across the Commonwealth in 2017. Topics addressed include: youth education; women in agriculture; building farm skills and experience; training resources for low-literacy farmers; farmland access; and micro-dairy farming. To learn more about these projects, visit our Website. Projects funded by the 2016-2017 VBFRC mini-grants include:

Creating Innovative Conduits of Opportunity: Connecting beginning rural farmers and urban-dwelling potential farmers to expanded opportunities in networking for fresh fruit education and outreach partnerships—Agriberry Farm and Community Food Collaborative

Piloting Women in Ag Groups with Farm Tours and Learning Sessions—Appalachian Sustainable Development and Virginia Cooperative Extension (Lee Office)

An Introduction to Getting Your Hands Dirty—Fauquier Education Farm and Virginia Cooperative Extension (Fauquier Office)

Financial Education for New Roots Microproducers—International Rescue Committee

Facilitating Farmland Access through Farmer-Landowner “Speed-Dating”—Piedmont Environmental Council

Opportunities in Micro-Dairy Farming—Virginia Cooperative Extension (Rockbridge County)
**Beginning Farmer Webinar Series**

Our beginning farmer webinar series kicked off this season with Appalachian Sustainable Development’s Whole Farm Business Plan Challenge in September. This challenge was an opportunity for farmers in southwest Virginia to win award money for writing a business plan, though the webinars were open to all viewers. Visit the [Webinar](#) page on our website to view these and other webinars. The topics covered by this webinar series included:

- **An Introduction to the Whole Farm Business Plan Challenge**—Tamara McNaughton, Appalachian Sustainable Development
- **Financial Needs Assessment**—Amy Gail Fannon, Virginia Cooperative Extension
- **Bookkeeping and Software Selection**—Audrey Powers, BB&T
- **Forms of Incorporation**—Andrew Branan, The Branan Law Firm, PLLC
- **Insurance Considerations for Farmers**—Scott DeNoon, Virginia Farm Bureau
- **Recordkeeping and Taxes for Farmers**—John Howe, Virginia Cooperative Extension

**Virginia Farm Mentoring Network:** The Virginia farm mentoring network has continued in the New River Valley, Loudoun County, and far southwest regions of Virginia. This year, we have also welcomed two new members to our mentoring team: Sarah Sharpe, VCE Agent, Greene County; and Charley Maxwell, VCE Agent, Chesterfield County.

One of our mentoring opportunities is that run by Tamara McNaughton and Amy Fannon in SW Virginia. The SW Virginia Farmer Network Roundtable completed its first year in Nov. 2016 and will continue in 2017. In 2016, 20 farmers visited each others farms once per month. Each visit highlighted a different crop or aspect of farming and the farmer(s) implementing that strategy or producing that product. A great camaraderie developed over the year, building mutual respect and relationships that continue to flourish. Many of the 2016 farmers have signed up to continue with the Roundtable for 2017, along with seven new participants representing four farms.

**Events to Attend in 2017:** Visit the [Events](#) page on our website to find a number of workshops, conferences, farm tours, and more! Below is an abbreviated list of opportunities sponsored by Coalition members and other provider networks that you may consider attending:

- January — August: New and Beginning Farmer Workshop Series (Louisa, VA)
- February 9: MidAtlantic Women in Agriculture Conference (Dover, DE)
- February — April: Farm Management Institute (Warrenton, VA; Roanoke, VA; Weston, WV)
- April 18-20: Virginia Agritourism Conference (Richmond, VA)
- May — September: Fauquier Education Farm Workshop Series (Warrenton, VA)
- June 27-29: North American Agroforestry Conference (Blacksburg, VA)
- Recurring: USDA NRCS Webinars
- Other events to attend: Virginia Farm to Table Conference, Farmer Veteran Coalition Stakeholder Conference, Virginia Association for Biological Farming Conference

To learn more or to share your events, please visit the [Events](#) page on our website, our Facebook page, or join our Listserv.

**Join the conversation online! Social media from the VBFRCP!**

- VBFRCP website: [vabeginningfarmer.org](http://vabeginningfarmer.org)
- Read our Blog: [news.cals.vt.edu/vabeginningfarmer/](http://news.cals.vt.edu/vabeginningfarmer/)
- Like VBFRCP on Facebook: [facebook.com/VABeginningFarmer/](http://facebook.com/VABeginningFarmer/)
- VBFRCP YouTube Channel: [youtube.com/user/VABeginningFarmers](http://youtube.com/user/VABeginningFarmers)
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