

VIRGINIA Beginning Farmer & Rancher COALITION PROGRAM



www.vabeginningfarmer.org Summer 2012, Page 1

Welcome to the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition Program: A Summer Update

Summer months have been an exciting time for the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition. Several new programs and services have been launched to help beginning farmers and ranchers successfully begin and stay in operation. These opportunities include a variety of face-to-face workshops, hands-on training events, farm tours, online education, and social networking.

In June, we held our Spring 2012 Coalition meeting at the Virginia Farm Bureau building. This was our largest meeting to date with over 45 participants from around the Commonwealth coming together to build capacity as agricultural service providers and farmers. These quarterly Coalition meetings are essential to the ongoing planning and implementation of our programming aims. One of our meeting highlights was showcasing the Coalition's Whole Farm Planning Teams. Seven teams are currently providing whole farm planning programs statewide as a collaborative effort with Cooperative Extension and other Coalition service providers. See below for a brief overview of one of the programs: *The Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program*, which is co-lead by the Fauquier County Agricultural Development Office, Fauquier Education Farm, and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

The Coalition is also pleased to announce two new members of the steering committee. We welcome William Crutchfield (Virginia State University) and Jim Schroering (Virginia Cooperative Extension, Hanover County). We are eager for William and Jim to provide their insight and experience to the Coalition's steering committee.

In this edition, we highlight our whole farm planning curriculum and programs, newly launched social media opportunities, farm mentoring updates, and results from our beginning farmer needs assessment. Thank you for your continued support of Virginia's beginning farmers and ranchers! — *Kim Niewolny, Program Director*

Connecting through Social Media:

The VBFRC Facebook page has been a huge success. Now the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition is developing a YouTube channel. Videos on this new YouTube channel helps support our whole farm curriculum with highlights of Virginia farmers in action. This footage from the field is intended to be a real look into the experiences of Virginia beginning farmers and ranchers. Links to the new YouTube channel and current videos can be found on page two.

Virginia Whole Farm Planning: An Educational Program for Farm Start-up and Development



Whole Farm Planning Curriculum Updates

Over the course of the summer we have continued to expand and redesign the Sustainable Farming Practices and Holistic Business Management modules to include additional resources and necessary content. In addition to the formal curriculum work, we are looking forward to having new resource and content ideas generated from the seven program planning groups. The feedback and suggestions from these programs will be critical to the curriculum revisions that will be underway early this fall.

We are truly excited to be at a point where the material is coming together through additional development, revisions, and preparations for peer review and final publication!

In addition to our seven program groups we are also encouraging high school agricultural education teachers to offer workshops for potential and beginning farmers in their local communities. Funding for these additional programs has been made possible through a small grant from the Community Viability Endowed Fund of the Virginia Tech Foundation. Donna Westfall-Rudd will be working with interested teachers to offer workshops late fall and winter.



Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program Highlights:

The Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program (NPBFP) is an experiential course designed to help participants start planning for their new farm enterprise. The Fauquier County Government coordinates the NPBFP in partnership with Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Fauquier Education Farm. The program uses farm tours to introduce participants to local farmers willing to form an agriculture network. It also presents students with whole farm planning materials developed through the Coalition. NPBFP students also complete several online lectures developed by Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and local businesses. NPBFP 2012 is nearing completion; plans are now underway for the next season. Within this first group of participants, we have evaluated new farming outcomes. To learn more, visit: fauquereducationfarm.org.

VIRGINIA Beginning Farmer & Rancher COALITION PROGRAM



www.vabeginningfarmer.org Summer 2012, Page 2

Farmer Input: Results of the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Survey and Focus Groups

In the last edition of the newsletter (spring 2012), results from the spring 2011 phase of data collection were reported. Over the summer, results from the winter 2012 survey were added to the data set and were recently analyzed.

Overall, the survey was completed by 264 respondents including 201 Virginia beginning farmer and ranchers and 63 agricultural service providers. The majority of the top priorities for beginning farmer and rancher success were related to marketing, business planning, and financial management. Respondents reported that they had the least amount of knowledge about issues pertaining to land acquisition and tenure, and self-employment and labor. When asked about preferences for educational program delivery, respondents most preferred one-day workshops, online materials, mentoring programs, and farm tours. Approximately ninety-six percent of survey respondents stated that online resources in the form of self-help guides and social networking for farmers and ranchers in Virginia would be useful. Participants also reported they would personally use these online resources for whole farm planning training and education.



Farm Mentor Network

As a statewide effort, we have been working to establish the Virginia Farm Mentor Network. We are pleased to announce the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Farm Mentor Network **Application for Mentees** is now available. This application is the first step in the process of a beginning farmer/rancher finding a mentor (experienced farmer/rancher) to guide and assist in the first few years of starting a farm. Participation in the Virginia Farm Mentor Network is an informal educational opportunity where a new farmer/rancher can learn from an experienced person that has been working successfully in agriculture for several years. No two experiences will be the same.



The Farm Mentor Network Coordinators, Jim Hilleary (Northern VA), CJ Isbell (Central VA), and Kelli Scott (Southwest VA) have been visiting and collaborating with established and beginning farmers in their regions. The team is working to develop meetings, events, and activities to promote the Farm Mentor Network. To learn more, visit the mentoring page on our website.

Social Media Links for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

- Visit us online at: www.vabeginningfarmer.org
- Virginia Beginning Farmer Connections, A Blog for Beginning Farmers: www.news.cals.vt.edu/vabeginningfarmer/
- Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition is on Facebook! Like us!
- Beginning Farmer & Rancher Listserv: Email Kelli Scott at kescott1@vt.edu to be added to this listserv for farmers.
- Virginia Beginning Farmers & Rancher Coalition Project can now be found on YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/VABeginningFarmers

The Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition is a collaborative effort represented by beginning farmer stakeholders across Virginia. The project that funds the program is housed in Virginia Tech's Department of Agricultural and Extension Education. Project funding is sponsored by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Award # 2010-49400. Contact Kim Niewolny, Project Director, at niewolny@vt.edu or 540-231-5784, for more information.

 **VirginiaTech**
Invent the Future

Virginia Cooperative Extension
A partnership of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University www.ext.vt.edu


VIRGINIA STATE

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; Jewel E. Hairston, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State, Petersburg.