

# VIRGINIA Beginning Farmer & Rancher COALITION PROJECT



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## **Welcome to the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition Project: A Spring Update**

Since 2010, the VA BFRC Project has taken on a three-tier approach where project activity occurs at local, regional, and state levels to meet the needs of Virginia's aspiring and establishing farmers. With the Coalition at the heart of the project, innovative farm businesses and organizations are coming together across the Commonwealth to support beginning farmers through classroom, online, and hands-on learning opportunities. The project uniquely includes a mentoring component through which beginning farmers can gain access to the knowledge of Virginia's experienced farmers.

As of Spring 2012, the Coalition includes: AgrAbility Virginia, Agricultural Development Department, Fauquier County, Appalachian Sustainable Development, Attimo Winery, Bracketts Farm, Farm Service Agency (USDA), Fauquier Education Farm, Grayson LandCare, Hethwood Market, Laurel Farm, Local Food Hub, Mountain View Farm and Vineyard, Natural Resource Conversion Service (USDA), Rural Development (USDA), SustainFloyd, Virginia Association for Biological Farming, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Farm Bureau Young Farmers Program, Virginia Farm Credit, Virginia State University, Virginia Team Ag Ed, Virginia Tech, VT Earthworks, and Young Farmers of Virginia.

## **From the Director: Steering Committee Supporting Beginning Farmers & Ranchers in Virginia**

Spring 2012 brings new opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers to participate in classroom and field face programs. Our online learning options are in the works! These and other opportunities would not be possible without the VA BFRCP steering committee. Made up of farmers and service providers, this group is responsible for guiding project activity on the ground: Alvin Blaha (Laurel Farm), Donna Westfall-Rudd (Virginia Tech), Fidelis Okpebholo (Virginia State University), Kim Niewolny (Virginia Tech), Megan Seibel (Mountain View Farm & Vineyard), and Scott Sink (Hethwood Market), Sheri Dorn (Virginia Cooperative Extension). We thank them for their insight!

—Kim Niewolny, VA BFRCP Project Director

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



### **Whole Farm Planning Programs Available for Farmers**

Whole farm planning is distinct from other farm planning approaches because it ties all the planning you do together for the whole farm. This holistic approach is based on the long-term vision you and your family has for itself and the farm—now and in the future to maintain and improve profitability while enhancing sustainability.

The new curriculum for Virginia beginning farmers and ranchers is focused on whole farm planning; it comprises five modules: 1) Introduction to Whole-Farm Planning, 2) Land Acquisition and Tenure, 3) Marketing, 4) Sustainable Farming Practices, and 5) Holistic Business Management. Keep an eye out for soon to be expanded farmer profiles and case studies.

The implementation of 7 Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition teams will be executing Whole Farm Planning programs for beginning farmers/ranchers starting Spring & Summer of 2012.

These teams include: Virginia Farm Bureau Young Farmers with Ron Saacke, Attimo Winery with Rik and Melissa Obiso, SustainFloyd with Michael Burton, Fauquier County Agricultural Development with Ray Pickering and Jim Hilleary, Appalachian Sustainable Development with Tom Peterson, Grayson LandCare with Danny Boyer, and the Virginia Association for Biological Farming with Kathy O'Hara. Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services are collaborating teams members. **To learn more, visit [www.vabeginningfarmer.org](http://www.vabeginningfarmer.org)**

## **Planning for the Future: More Coalition Building, Whole Farm Planning Programs, & Mentoring**

Our long term goal is to improve opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers to establish and sustain viable agricultural operations in Virginia through the development and enhancement of educational programs and social networks. The Coalition aims to continue working toward these aims through: 1-) *Capacity Building in Local Communities*, Supporting *Whole Farm Planning via Virginia Cooperative Extension*, and regional *Farmer-Farmer Mentoring in Local Communities*.

### **What are the needs? A Look at the 2011 Beginning Farmer Survey**

According to the USDA, beginning farmers and ranchers nation-wide face unique challenges to develop and sustain new farming operations. Gaining access to land, capital, markets, and educational opportunities are the leading barriers for successful farm start-up.

In spring 2011, the Coalition designed and implemented an online survey to identify Virginia beginning farmer and rancher demographic characteristics, program area needs, and program delivery preferences. The survey was developed by drawing upon community-based participatory research principles where the Coalition directly participated in the survey design and implementation. Survey results guided the development of the Virginia Whole Farm Planning Curriculum, which is currently being implemented across Virginia.



Over 200 farmer and service provider participants completed the instrument. Respondents prioritized one-day workshops, farmer-mentoring, & online learning opportunities as primary delivery methods. Respondents also indicated priority programming areas, for example: financial risk management for small farms; gaining access to affordable financing; insurance issues and regulations. Regional focus groups and case studies are being conducted to continue to learn more about educational needs and delivery preferences. **For full survey report, visit [www.vabeginningfarmer.org](http://www.vabeginningfarmer.org).**

### **Virginia's Farm Mentor Network**

A Farm Mentor Network facilitates the exchange of knowledge & skills of experienced farmers & rancher with the next generation of agriculture. As a statewide effort, we have been working to establish the Farm Mentor Network.

Kelli Scott (Floyd County) has been working as Farm Mentor Coordinator in southwest Virginia since last June. In January, 2012 we welcomed CJ Isbell as Farm Mentor Coordinator, Central Virginia. CJ is a beginning farmer living in Hanover County. We are also working with Jim Hilleary from the Fauquier Education Farm in Warrenton, VA. Jim is working as the curriculum coordinator implementing Virginia's Whole Farm Planning program. He also assists in connecting beginning farmer students (participants) enrolled in the program at the education farm with the mentor network.



Kelli, CJ, and Jim work as a team to facilitate and channel the skill, knowledge, and experience of the established farmer to share it with the beginning farmer community. How can this be accomplished?

- Meetings, Socials, Events
- Farm Tours/Farm Demos/Farm Workdays
- Internships/Apprenticeships/Work Experience

*Contact Kelli, CJ, or Jim if you are interested in learning more!*

**EVENT REVIEW:** The project hosted the first Beginning Farmer Social on Tuesday, April 17, 2012, just outside of Radford, VA. Great success, 40 folks in attendance! Dr. Allen Straw of VCE was our guest speaker. The location and local pulled pork BBQ was provided by Scott Sink from Hethwood Market in Blacksburg, VA. **See the website for full details & future events.**

The Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition is a collaborative effort represented by beginning farmer stakeholders across Virginia. The project 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](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu) or 540-231-5784, for more information.