



PRESS RELEASE

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Regional Commission Awarded USDA Grant to Promote Locally Grown Food

The U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded approximately \$250,000 to the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission to promote the region's locally grown food and agri-tourism. One of fifty organizations across the nation to receive the Farmers Market Promotion Program Grant this year, the planning district commission will partner with Culpeper Renaissance, Madison Farmers Market and Piedmont Environmental Council to implement the three-year grant project. The Rappahannock-Rapidan Food Council and Regional Tourism Committee will oversee implementation. Additional input will be collected from farmers, consumers and other stakeholders across the region.

The majority of the funds will be spent developing and conducting a local foods marketing campaign, including a regional brand, eye-catching imagery and cohesive messaging that will resonate with local consumers' values. Funds will also support targeted marketing efforts at the Madison and Culpeper Farmers Markets, and continued publication of Piedmont Environmental Council's Buy Fresh-Buy Local guide.

The second aspect of the project specifically targets agri-tourism promotion through further development of the Tween Rivers Trail. Many of the trail sites are small business owners with little to no marketing budget or experience. Expansion of this regional agri-artisan trail combined with quarterly training and networking workshops focused on marketing will help address these issues.

The third aspect promotes direct-to-consumer local food markets within the region by building sourcing channels. In 2014, Piedmont Environmental Council launched the online tool, Farmer-Chef Express to facilitate connections between buyers and sellers, including institutional buyers. Grant funds will be used to hold two farmer-buyer "speed-dating" events, and a regional food expo.

This project is part of the planning district commission's on-going efforts to foster the region's agricultural economy. Highlights include adoption of a Regional Farm and Food Plan, establishment of the Rappahannock-Rapidan Food Council, creation of the Tween Rivers Trail, and coordination of a feasibility study for the Carver-Piedmont Agricultural Institute.

For additional information on this project, please contact Michelle Edwards at medwards@rrregion.org or (540) 829-7450.

A full list of grants awarded through the 2016 Farmers Market Promotion Program is available on [USDA's website](#).

About the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission

The Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission serves the counties of Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock, and the towns of Culpeper, Gordonsville, Madison, Orange, Remington, The Plains, Washington, and Warrenton. The 21-member RRRC board includes elected and appointed officials appointed by each member jurisdiction. Localities with greater than 3,500 residents appoint two members to the regional commission, while localities with fewer than 3,500 residents appoint one member to the regional commission.

The Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission facilitates a collaborative approach to regional cooperation, and serves as a convening forum for the interaction of appointed and elected local government officials, regional stakeholders and citizen members. The Regional Commission coordinates a broad range of regional planning activities – including multi-modal and human services transportation, environmental planning, homelessness and affordable housing coordination, regional tourism, agricultural, and economic development activities. The Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission is located in Culpeper, VA, and can be found online at <http://www.rrregion.org/>.