

AFID Planning Grant Summary

Building Agricultural and Forestry-based Businesses in the Foothills

\$33,000 in funding was received from The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Agricultural and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Planning Grant to implement multiple strategies designed to support, expand and sustain agricultural and forestry based businesses in PD9. \$33,000 in matching cash and in-kind donations were required, for a total project cost of \$66,000; the project will be developed over the next two years.

The outcomes of the grant will include:

A regional agro-artisan trail comprised of farms, wineries, farmers markets, pick your own farms, orchards, artisans (products that are made from regionally grown/produced such as items made from alpaca wool, restaurants and stores that sell local products like Croftburn Farm, Moo-Thru, etc.) and tradesmen (blacksmiths, bee keepers, etc.). Information on the agro-artisan trail will be accessible by websites, a mobile site, brochures, maps, markers, advertisements, etc.

A Regional Agro-Artisan Trail Brand. Each vendor on the agro-artisan trail will be identified/branded by a marker that they will display at their location. Each vendor will include information about the agro-artisan trail at their location and through their media (website, social media, etc.) to encourage visitation of other participants and sites along the agro-artisan trail. Branding will help the region develop an identity for their regionally grown/produced ag items and establish a "sense of place" that will help make the region unique, providing a "face" to the region's agriculture.

Increased awareness and use of Regionally Grown/Produced Agricultural items. Marketing of the agro-artisan trail through regional and county tourism websites, mobile site, social media, newspapers, brochures, etc. Each of the five counties will contribute cash as matching funds that will be used in part towards marketing. Those funds will be leveraged through additional marketing and promotion of the agro-artisan trail by those vendor participants who make up the trail. Participants will provide links to the agro-artisan trail on their website, house brochures at their location, and help build awareness to both tourists and artisans who may want to become members of the agro-artisan trail. Buy in from the community will help sustain the project into the future. Examples may include membership dues, discount packages for marketing, etc.

A Regional Agro-Artisan Directory will be developed and maintained. The directory will be made available to Tourism staff, event planners, chambers of commerce, schools, non-profit organizations and others who would have opportunities available or may need ag-based businesses or artists. The directory will help increase awareness and encourage the use of regionally grown/produced agricultural items.

A Recording of oral history records of the regions agriculture will be developed and made available to the community. Preserving the region's heritage and understanding its history will help establish the region's identity and bring about an awareness to value and preserve agriculture in the region.

The development and implementation of **an annual regional agro-artisan event** will be completed to bring awareness to the rich agriculture in the region, increase tourism and contribute to the economy, and educate community leaders, residents and tourists about the benefits and importance of agriculture.

Completion of **Regional Green Infrastructure maps and data** with agricultural and water quality layers that will be made available to local government, non-profit organizations, and others to be used as a planning tool and educational purposes. Fact Sheets will be developed for each data layer for education and outreach. This information will help to ensure that the region's prime agricultural lands and water quality will be preserved. Project information will be available through the RRRC's Green Infrastructure webpage (www.rrregion.org/greeninfrastructure.html).

Combined, these outcomes will build a foundation of collaboration between knowledgeable, vested stakeholders that will improve and elevate agricultural and forestry based industries role in regional planning and economic development for years to come.