



AGRICULTURAL WORKING GROUP

Meeting Minutes – January 5, 2015

Attendees:

Jenny Biché	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Deirdre Clark	John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District
Steven Schwartz	Rural Madison
Don Loock	Piedmont Environmental Council
Carl Sachs	Culpeper County
Kayleigh Mize	VA Cooperative Extension – Madison County
Brad Jarvis	VA Cooperative Extension – Madison County
Ed Dunphy	CFC Farm & Home Center
Kate Gibson	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Kit Johnston	Rural Madison
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County
Kenner Love	VA Cooperative Extension – Rappahannock County
Ben Craig	Virginia Food Enterprise Centers
David Holtzman	Piedmont Environmental Council
Patrick Mulhern	Town of Culpeper
Carl Stafford	VA Cooperative Extension – Culpeper County
Ben Cooper	Fauquier County Farm Bureau
Michelle Edwards	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission

Carver School Grant Project – Patrick Mauney, RRRC

Patrick Mauney gave an update on the Building Collaborative Communities grant application to the Department of Housing and Community Development for the George Washington Carver Agriculture Center Feasibility Study. The grant will fund a feasibility study regarding the use of the school building as both a multi-use cannery/food processing facility and an agricultural education, research, and training hub. Carl Stafford added that he is most excited to see what unexpected positive outcomes this project yields.

The official grant announcement will be made by Virginia’s First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe and Secretary of Commerce and Trade Maurice Jones on January 14 at 10:00 a.m. at the Carver-Piedmont Technical Education Center in Culpeper County. Patrick requested workgroup members’ assistance in spreading the word about the event.

Food System Interviews and Public Meetings Update – Michelle Edwards, RRRC

Consultant Ken Meter will conduct in-person stakeholder interviews January 13-16, accompanied by Michelle Edwards, to support the economic analysis. Interviewees were selected based on feedback from the group (see attached spreadsheet). Michelle was happy to report that all stakeholders who were asked agreed to participate.

Ken will present the findings of the interviews and the economic analysis at three public meetings around the region:

- Warrenton on Tuesday, February 3 from 6:00-8:00pm
- Culpeper on February 4 from 9:00-11:00am
- Madison on February 4 from 2:00-4:00pm

A facilitated discussion will follow the presentation. RRRC will advertize the meetings through local newspapers, flyers, and emails, but members are asked to help spread the word through their websites and stakeholder lists. Michelle will email a meeting flyer to members by the end of the week.

Asset Assessment Draft – Michelle Edwards

Michelle Edward handed out copies of the reformatted draft of the Food System Asset Assessment and asked committee members to review and send her any comments (see attached). The draft will be made available at strategic planning meetings for participant input and the final version will be included as an appendix in the Regional Food System Plan.

Producer Focus Group Questions Discussion – Attendees

Focus group meetings will take place in February and March. The grant requires at least six focus group meetings, but the three public meetings mentioned above will count toward the six. In addition to gathering stakeholder information and feedback, the focus group meetings will be an opportunity to inform producers of the study and garner interest in attending the strategic planning meetings.

Michelle handed out a list of potential focus group questions (see attached). The group discussed the first three questions, which are intended to get a general sense of who comprises each focus group. There was concern that it may be confusing to ask whether or not farmers farm organically because many use a blend of practices. Some may also farm organically but not be certified organic. Farmers may be uncomfortable disclosing gross annual sales; it may be better to ask about units of livestock and acres of crops to determine farm size. Annual sales and acreage breakdowns could be expanded to capture more variation, and not labeled as small, medium, and large. One member suggested that questions concerning group demographics be asked via an anonymous brief survey handed out at the meetings.

Other suggestions included the following:

- Include examples of “channels” used to sell products, or rephrase the question.
- Questions could be more general to get broader responses, and then discussion could focus on answers most related to study.

- Could possibly start with a SWOT analysis, or possibly save for strategic planning meetings instead.
- The question regarding coordination and communication with other producers is important and not often asked.
- Coordination and communication with other producers is not a top priority compared to other focus group questions.
- Be sure to ask for any additional comments not brought up via the focus group questions.

Food System Survey Discussion – Attendees

Michelle Edwards distributed three food system surveys as examples (see attached). Members decided that the survey should be distributed to all producers, either by email (SurveyMonkey) where available, by mail (hard copy), or via existing agricultural meetings.

Questions should aim to fill gaps results of the economic analysis, specifically on direct to consumer sales, value-added products, marketing, labor, expansion, and agritourism. The survey should be limited to two pages if possible and most questions should be multiple choice. Some members suggested starting with the 2013 Fauquier County Agricultural Survey and cutting out the questions that are least relevant to the study, while others preferred the survey done in South Carolina.

The following types of questions were discussed:

- Y/N identification questions similar to focus group introductory questions
- Amount of direct sales (multiple choice)
- Marketing methods and why they were chosen
- Distance traveled to markets
- Time spent on business aspects other than growing
- Number of people employed on farm
- Duplication of crops/room for growth
- Interest in expansion
- Plans for continuation of the business
- Strongest sectors, the future of those sectors, and why

Next Meeting

The next Steering Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 22, 2015, at 1:30-3:30pm in the RRRC Conference Room.