



REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PLAN
STEERING COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes – October 21, 2013

Attendees:

Michelle Edwards	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Jenny Biche'	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Frank Bossio	Culpeper County Administrator
Don Looch	Piedmont Environmental Council
Maggi MacQuilliam	Piedmont Environmental Council
Deirdre Clark	John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District
Greg Wichelns	Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District
Carl Sachs	Culpeper County Economic Development
David Holtzman	Piedmont Environmental Council
Sue Ellen Johnson	Piedmont Environmental Council
Kenner Love	VA Cooperative Extension

Welcome & Introductions

Attendees were welcomed and introductions were made. Copies of the Agenda were distributed.

RRRC Updates

• ***Day to Serve:***

The event will be held at Fauquier Education Farm on October 25, 2013 (rain date Nov. 1st) from 1:00-4:00pm. Volunteers are invited to join RRRC staff in harvesting vegetables and learning about the sustainable agriculture techniques implemented at the farm. Press releases have been distributed to local newspapers to advertise the event. A private school in Fauquier County has volunteered to have their students participate. For more information, contact Michelle Edwards. (see attached flier)

• ***Regional Agro-Artisan Trail:***

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) has awarded RRRC a \$33,000 Agriculture and Forestry Industry Development (AFID) Planning Grant to implement multiple strategies designed to support, expand and sustain agricultural and forestry based

businesses in PD9. The project will be developed and implemented over the next two years, with regular updates being provided to the Agricultural Working Group for their feedback and review. For more information, contact Jenny Biche. (see attachment)

Regional Food System Grant Overview

Culpeper County was awarded a \$20,000 grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to complete their Regional Food System proposal, contingent on completing initial planning activities (see attachment). The project is to include an economic analysis of the regional food system, supplemented by local producer surveys, and development of a regional food system strategic plan. DHCD is providing \$3,000 towards the following initial activities, which must be completed by November 22, 2013:

- Two initial public meetings
- Two initial management team meetings
- Contact similar regional efforts
- Draft Request for Proposals for economic analysis

Michelle Edwards discussed the grant award with Chris Thompson at DHCD, who stated that it would be possible to negotiate the amount awarded and scope of work after the initial planning activities are completed. The amount requested from DHCD was \$40,000. If the funds remain at \$20,000, the food system strategic plan will likely need to be eliminated from the project proposal, reapplying for additional funds to develop the strategic plan at a later date.

During the last meeting of the RRRRC Agricultural Working group, members agreed that the economic analysis would focus on agricultural products including commodities and wineries, but not horses or non-edible plants. The group also agreed that the study area for the economic analysis would include Loudoun, Stafford, Spotsylvania, Rappahannock, Fauquier, Culpeper, Orange, Madison, Greene, Louisa and Albemarle counties. The study area may need to be scaled back depending on the final grant award amount. The public meetings will be geared towards residents of the planning district only, as will the surveys and strategic planning process.

Discussion of Public Meeting Scheduling & Content

As part of the planning grant requirements, the steering committee must schedule two public meetings, at different localities, to provide citizens with an overview of the proposed project, and gather public input. At these meetings, energized neighborhood leaders called “sparkplugs” must be indentified and included as members of the management team. The Steering Committee discussed this requirement at length, trying to find a balance between completing the tasks in the short period of time allotted, and developing a meaningful, transparent public meeting that would encourage wide participation.

Mr. Bossio inquired as to what the end result of the proposal would be; to which Michelle Edwards replied would be a report that listed strategies and goals for sustainable agriculture in the region—policies needed, examples of infrastructure needed (such as a central kitchen), projects to develop (i.e. Carver School) etc.

Ms. Johnson stated that there were two basic groups that could be involved, those interested in Farm Systems and those interested in Food Systems. She inquired as to whether this proposal would focus on a particular group? Michelle Edwards indicated that while they would focus on those who make up the Food System, if individuals from the Farm System were interested, they would not be excluded.

The Steering Committee decided the message to the public about the project should be that we are looking for their input on three main items to support and sustain agriculture in the region:

- What opportunities are there for public investment
- What opportunities are there for private investment
- What opportunities are there for policy changes

Mr. Bossio commented that it is important to identify how farmers can make their farms profitable, not just preserved through purchase of development rights; but viable if agriculture is going to be sustainable in the region.

The Steering Committee discussed possible venues, dates, times, and strategies to encourage attendance and participation. It was decided that the public meetings will be held:

November 13, 2013 at 6pm at the Visitors Center in Warrenton and on
November 14, 2013 at 6pm at the Culpeper County Board Room.

The public meetings will be interactive, with an emphasis on identifying questions and needs around public investment, private opportunities and policy. Examples of other regional food system efforts will be highlighted. Michelle Edwards will develop a flyer that can be distributed throughout the region to encourage attendance and participation at the public meetings. Brad Jarvis, Cooperative Extension Agent, will be asked to present an overview of the region's agriculture at the public meetings.

Next Regional Food System Plan Steering Committee Meeting:

The next Regional Food System Plan Steering Committee meeting will be held on November 18, 2013 at 1:30pm at the Regional Commission. The focus will be on the draft RFP to hire a consultant to complete the food system economic analysis.

Ms. Johnson requested that broader participation be requested on the Steering Committee. Mr. Sachs requested Minutes be taken at each Steering Committee meeting to help keep members apprised of the project's development and progress. Ms. Edwards stated she will be presenting an overview of the project at the RRRC Board meeting on October 23, 2013 and will request that Board Members encourage their staff to participate in future meetings. Ms. Edwards requested that committee members review the example food system studies handed out to be discussed at the next meeting (see attached).