



**RAPPAHANNOCK-RAPIDAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL**

**Meeting Minutes – January 23, 2020**

**Members Present:**

Linda Blair	Orange County Representative
Amanda Butler	Education Sector Technical Advisory Member
Kirsten Dueck	Chair and Health Sector Technical Advisory Member
Michelle Edwards	RRRC Liaison Member
Rebecca Gartner	Culpeper County Representative
Kenner Love	Rappahannock County Representative

**Members Absent:**

Clyde Firman	Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member
Brad Jarvis	Madison County Representative
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County Representative
Michael Sands	Production Sector Technical Advisory Member
Tom Weaver	Processing and Distribution Technical Advisory Member
Vacant	Farmland Preservation & Conservation Tech. Advisory Member

**Guests:**

Kaley Denner	Germanna Community College
Will Gray	Virginia Food System Council
Don Haight Jr.	Minority and Veteran Farmers of the Piedmont
Molly Harris	Virginia Food System Council
Eugene Triplett	Minority and Veteran Farmers of the Piedmont
Roger Williams	George Washington Carver Agricultural Research Center

**Welcome and Introductions**

Chairperson Kirsten Dueck called the meeting to order and introductions were made. Michelle Edwards noted that a quorum was present.

**Virginia Food System Council**

*Will Gray and Molly Harris, Virginia Food System Council (VFSC)*

Will Gray and Molly Harris delivered a presentation on the VFSC, of which they are members. (see attached). The Council's first meeting was held in 2009 with twenty-four appointed

members. Its first major initiative was the designation of Virginia Farm to School Week, followed by development of the Virginia Farm to Table Plan, launching the annual Virginia Farm to Table Conference and the \$10/week local food pledge campaign.

The Council's 2020 Priorities are:

1. Technical Assistance Networking (e.g. overhauling the VFSC website and listserv, and programmatic developments)
2. Equitable Access to Locally-Grown Food (e.g, highlight replicable models, network and advocate for access)
3. Developing Growers and Value Chains (e.g. Memorandum of Understanding with Virginia Tech to convene education resources, lift up good examples, and make connections)
4. VFSC Governance & Leadership Practices (Hiring an Executive Director and staff, and development of governance principals)

Ms. Edwards asked how VFSC defines advocacy as mentioned during the presentation of this year's priorities. Mr. Gray replied that advocacy currently includes education on policy and peer to peer engagement. They are working on ways to be able adopt a position, but do not currently. VFSC does not engage in lobbying activities, though individual members may do so through their own organizations.

Kenner Love asked what policies VFSC has influenced in the past, to which Ms. Harris answered the Virginia Farm to School Week designation. Linda Blair noted that Farm to School Week has made a big impact on her school district and others, and was the impetus for many farm to school programs.

Ms. Edwards recommended VFSC make improving the food system's infrastructure and distribution network a priority and use Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's current effort as a model. Much of the region's core obstacles center around inadequacies in infrastructure and distribution. Many of the obstacles would be better solved at the state level, such as revisions to state grant programs to incentivize food system infrastructure by entities that include government and non-profit organizations; and working with the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to decrease participation thresholds that provide a strong disincentive for small school districts to purchase food from local vendors.

She also recommended including opportunities for stakeholder feedback, such as facilitated discussions as the Virginia Farm to Table Conference and listening sessions around the state. The conference is wonderful for gaining information and networking, but does not provide an opportunity for dialogue between VFSC and stakeholders. Ms. Harris asked if sessions similar to the recent DC Food Funders conference would work, to which Ms. Edwards responded possibly, if the sessions were varied enough to cover the areas of input stakeholders might provide.

Ms. Dueck stated that the region is in a doughnut hole where everyone outside of the region thinks we are part of someone else's region (i.e. Northern Virginia, Charlottesville area, etc.), and some other organization else is taking care of it. Rebecca Gartner added that the region is also in a doughnut hole of funding, not getting tobacco money, or funds directed to Appalachia

or metropolitan areas. Ms. Gartner noted the great difficulty she has had seeking funds for construction of the Food Enterprise Center at the Carver Center, especially since the project is a non-profit and local government partnership. She suggested that the Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Grant program needs to be overhauled, as well as new collaborative funding sources developed. Ms. Edwards concurred.

Kenner Love noted that cultural foods seem to be missing from VFSC's mission and plans. He discussed their importance to communities and recommended speaking to Virginia Humanities.

Amanda Butler asked which director is the closest in proximity to our region, if our members or stakeholders would like to reach out. Mr. Gray stated that he can be a contact, or Eric Bendfeldt with Virginia Cooperative Extension in Harrisonburg. He stated that he would like to discuss the region's obstacles with Ms. Edwards in greater detail and will coordinate with her. She agreed.

For additional information concerning the Virginia Food System Council, please contact Will Gray, Secretary, at (434) 987-4980 or [will@backpocketprovisions.com](mailto:will@backpocketprovisions.com); or contact Molly Harris, Vice Chair, at (804) 980-1173 or [Molly.harris@vafb.com](mailto:Molly.harris@vafb.com). The Council can also be found on Facebook or at [www.virginiafoodsystemcouncil.org](http://www.virginiafoodsystemcouncil.org).

### **Regional Farm-to-School Liaison Update**

#### ***Michelle Edwards, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC)***

As discussed during the previous Food Policy Council Meeting, RRRC is working with public school food service directors in the region, No Kid Hungry and the PATH Foundation to hire a Regional Farm to School Liaison, similar to Loudoun County's. All school districts in the region are participating in the process. In order to keep the position regionally focused, the Liaison is proposed to be an RRRC employee, based out of RRRC's office. Funding will be sought for this full-time position from RRRC, No Kid Hungry and the PATH Foundation.

A quarterly regional farm to school meeting was held on January 16<sup>th</sup> to determine the highest priority tasks that school districts would like the Liaison to focus on, and any that they would prefer the Liaison not take on. These items were then incorporated into the position's job description (see attached). Ms. Edwards used an example Farm to School Liaison job description from Stephanie Dove of Loudoun County Schools and a current RRRC job announcement as the starting point. The only task school districts did not want the Liaison to assist with is school gardens.

For the first year, the position's workplan will use the framework of Virginia's Harvest of the Month program. The Liaison will focus on increasing local food procurement and participation in school reimbursable meals, including breakfast. The successful candidate will conduct one tasting in each school district each month, and collect and analyze data to show whether tastings result in increased meal purchases. The Liaison will also conduct an initial survey of teachers to determine potential areas s/he can contribute to the existing curriculum through outreach, train-the-trainer and SOL-based modules. Besides these main priorities, there will also be district specific tasks noted in the job description.

Ms. Edwards will be presenting the proposed job description to RRRC's Commissioners for approval during their February 26 meeting. If it is approved, she will then seek support letters from each school district and apply for funding from No Kid Hungry and PATH Foundation. The group is targeting a June start date.

For additional information or suggestions regarding RRRC's regional farm to school efforts, please contact Ms. Edwards at [medwards@rrregion.org](mailto:medwards@rrregion.org) or (540) 829-7450.

### **Council Vice-chair Elections**

Ms. Edwards stated that Ms. Dueck's term as Council Vice-Chair ended on December 31, 2018, at which time she became the Chair. Therefore, the Council must elect a Vice-Chair to serve a one-year term. The Vice-Chair will automatically become the Chair the following year. The main task of the Chair is to preside over Council meetings, while the Vice-Chair fulfills this duty in the Chair's absence.

Ms. Dueck stated that Amanda Butler has been nominated as Vice Chair and accepted the nomination. No other nominations were made. Ms. Garner made a motion to elect Ms. Butler as Vice-chair and Mr. Love seconded the motion. Ms. Dueck called for a vote, and the Council voted unanimously to elect Ms. Butler as Vice Chair.

### **Member Roundtable**

- **Rebecca Gartner, Culpeper County Cooperative Extension** – She has decided to keep the George Washington Carver Food Enterprise Center under the umbrella of the George Washington Carver Agricultural Research Center instead of becoming an independent non-profit organization. The GWCARC will vote on the issue at its next meeting.
- **Kenner Love, Rappahannock County Cooperative Extension**– Virginia Cooperative Extension will be holding Fruit and Vegetable Grower Meetings, with the fruit growers meeting at Graves Mountain Lodge and vegetable growers in Fauquier County. Contact your local extension agent for more information.
- **Amanda Butler, Rappahannock County Public Schools** –They are beginning to purchase equipment for the school garden and kitchen under the School District's \$25,000 Farm to School Grant from the Virginia Department of Education.
- **Don Haight, Minority and Veteran Farmers of the Piedmont**– The organization is taking soil samples at the Carver Center and deciding what to plan next season. They are also working to increase membership and develop a website.
- **Kaley Denner, Germanna Community College** – The College has extended their food pantry network to the Locust Grove Campus, to address food insecurity among its students. It will function as a "single stop," where they can determine whether a student needs food stamps or is homeless, for example, and then connect them with resources.
- **Linda Blair, Orange County Public Schools** – She will be serving butternut squash in February for the Harvest of the Month program, and recently taught food service managers in the County's ten schools to cook them. Unfortunately, she was unable to procure local squash and would be interested in finding a local source for next year.

### **Future Meeting Scheduling and Agenda Development**

Ms. Edwards stated that Clyde Firman has invited the Food Policy Council to hold its next meeting at Woodberry Forest School and have dinner there. However, Tuesdays are the only available dates, specifically March 24<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup>. After discussion, members chose to hold the next meeting at Woodberry Forest School on March 24<sup>th</sup>. It will be held at 5:30-7:30 pm as usual. Council meeting materials will be available on RRRC's food system webpage at [www.rrregion.org/foodsystem.html](http://www.rrregion.org/foodsystem.html).