



## **Agriculture Economic Development Advisory Board 2007 Report**

The Agriculture Economic Development Advisory Board, (Ag Board) held its first ever meeting in March 2007. At that meeting, key areas concerning Bedford County's agriculture economy and viability were identified. At the board's second meeting, the 12 members elected officers and then divided into three core committees. They are the Marketing & Production Committee, Land Protection & Conservation Committee and Education & Events Committee. The following is a summary of the work of the Ag Board during its inaugural year.

### **Marketing and Production Committee**

#### *County Agriculture Web Page*

The Ag Board developed the first ever Bedford County Agriculture Web Page, [www.co.bedford.va.us/AG](http://www.co.bedford.va.us/AG). The web page promotes the county's agriculture products and businesses, and informs the public of agriculture and forestry's importance to the county's economy and agriculture related issues facing the county. At this time there are almost 100 agriculture producers and agri-businesses listed on the web page. In the future we hope this will be the place for individuals to go to find Bedford agriculture products, important information and dates of events pertaining to the agriculture community.

#### *Biosolids Recommendation*

The committee did significant research on the issue of land application of Biosolids in 2007. Our group toured the Bedford City water treatment plant and learned about the science behind how solids are removed and treated to make them safe for use as fertilizer. We also saw how the City of Bedford is taking the Class B Biosolids, which is used throughout the county for commercial agricultural use, and is composting it with wood chips and leaves collected from street waste to make a Class A product that is safe for use in vegetable gardens and flower beds at homes.

After researching all the available information on the subject, the committee submitted a resolution recommending the Bedford BOS adopt a VACO ordinance to oversee and monitor the application process and continue to allow the use of Biosolids in Bedford County. Since the practice has had a safe history of use for 25 years, and has made a tremendous savings to farmers by reducing their rapidly escalating fertilizer cost, the Ag Board passed the resolution with unanimous consent.

### *Beef Producers Support*

With Bedford County ranking # 2 in the state for number of beef cattle, the committee looked for ways to bolster that segment. In cooperation with the Young Farmers group of the Bedford Farm Bureau, information was disseminated recommending proven methodologies to enable Bedford's beef producers to capture value added premiums for beef calves.

This same Bedford group teamed up with representatives from the counties of Appomattox, Buckingham, Campbell and Cumberland to apply for a grant from the Virginia Tobacco Commission. Just recently, the commission approved funding for "The Central Virginia Value Added Beef Initiative Expansion Project". The grant provides \$115,000 for Bedford's beef cattle producers. It will allow these producers to receive matching funds of up to \$3,000 each to improve cattle working facilities, or purchase superior breeding stock that meet the qualifications of the Virginia Quality Assured Beef Program. This grant will be distributed over the next year to producers that meet the requirements of the grant stipulations. These improvements will be a positive influence on Bedford's beef cattle producers for years to come.

### *Hay Transportation Assistance*

Due to this past years severe drought conditions in our county and surrounding counties, many area livestock producers have been forced to purchase large quantities of hay from other areas. Hay source locations include North Carolina, Ohio, Vermont, Kansas and even Canada. After discussing North Carolina's Gold Leaf Foundation hay transportation aid for their states livestock producers, the Ag Board voted to have the chairman write Governor Tim Kaine to ask for similar help for our area's producers. The Board of Supervisors also sent a letter of support.

### *High Speed Internet*

The Internet is a key component in today's agriculture world. Therefore the committee recommended, and the Ag Board voted to encourage the county's Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors to make high-speed Internet available to the rural parts of the county a high priority.

## **Land Protection and Conservation Committee**

### *BCLP Meetings*

Members of the Land Protection and Conservation Committee attended several informational meetings held by the Bedford Citizens for Land Preservation. Dan Layman, Chairman of this committee was one of the featured speakers and offered first-hand experience and explained the advantages of conservation easements to potential easement donors.

### *Purchase of Development Rights of County Land*

To better understand Purchase and Transfer of Development Rights (PDR), 7 members of the Ag Board, the Planning Commission and private citizens attended a special meeting at CVCC in Bedford on PDR programs. Mr. Kevin Schmidt, Coordinator, Office of Farmland Preservation, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services of Richmond made a presentation on the pros and cons of an active PDR program. He reported at that time 15 counties had PDR programs. The Ag Board is actively searching for more information and ways to fund such a project in Bedford County in the future.

## **Education and Events Committee**

### *Warm Season Grass Seminar*

The committee and Ag Board partnered with Virginia Tech and a specialist from Ohio to bring a seminar to Bedford farmers and other landowners on the benefits of planting Warm Season Grasses (WSG). Also known as Native Warm Season Grasses, they were naturally found in most of America in colonial days prior to the introduction of fescue and other invasive grasses. WSG was the preferred food of native wildlife species, such as deer, elk, and bison due to its high protein content. It also serves as cover for birds and small mammals and helped to eliminate erosion.

Today, WSG is being heralded as a drought resistant forage whose benefits include livestock pasturing and hay, wildlife foraging and habitat, with potential uses in bedding, mulch, pellets and biofuel (bio oil, direct firing WSG, co-firing it or using it to produce bio diesel and cellulose ethanol). As biofuel aspects are further developed, WSG may play a vital role in the Bedford economy to generate additional revenue for farmers and other landowners. Shortly after the seminar, the Ohio specialist returned to offer assistance in planting WSG on Bedford County farmland.

### *Educational Grant Application*

The Education and Event Committee, through the tremendous assistance of county government personnel, the staff of CVCC-Bedford Campus, and Region 2000, applied for a \$75,000 grant from the Virginia Tobacco Commission to create a local two year agriculture secondary education program. Members of the Ag Board collected almost 50 letters of support from the community that went along with the grant application.

Through several meetings of consideration the Tobacco Commission granted the request. The money will be used to hire an education specialist for the first year to create the curriculum and other related start-up costs. The curriculum will be taught at CVCC-Bedford Campus. The curriculum will be designed to provide instruction that conforms to the business of 21<sup>st</sup> century farm and natural resource management, so that Bedford County agriculturists may better compete in today's market place. Today there are community college agriculture courses, but no two year agriculture-related curriculum in Virginia's community college system.

As the curriculum proves itself and is supported by area farming and natural resource interested students during the first year of classes, CVCC will take on the program as a full-time curriculum. The program will be designed to comply with Virginia Tech agriculture curriculums so that credits can be transferred if students want to continue on for a four year degree. While Bedford County will be the first to initiate an agriculture curriculum in Virginia's community college system, equally important is the curriculum will be shared with other community colleges in Virginia so that other areas can benefit from Bedford County's efforts.

The Education and Events Committee has met with county government and CVCC staff to formulate the position description of the Project Manager. The position will be advertised throughout Virginia and the position will hopefully be filled by March.

## *Outdoor Gathering Ordinance*

The Ag Board's Education and Event Committee met with a member of the Bedford County Planning Commission and the county Planning Department to discuss how future agriculture related outdoor events could conform to the current outdoor gathering ordinance. Based on the meeting, the Planning Department drafted an ordinance that would be better adapted to agriculture related events such as:

A simple permitting system process and site plan requirement that makes the producer aware of issues that may be needed for a safe and successful event.

Ag-festivals, agri-tourism, and agritainment would be separate from "outdoor gatherings" with the determining factor being that the products originate in Bedford County, but not necessarily on the site of the activity.

No permit fee for activities will be required for the above described gatherings.

## *Horticulture Advisory Committee*

Members of the Education and Events Committee attended the County's Horticulture Education Advisory Committee. They discussed ways to grow and improve the Horticulture program at the Bedford Science & Technology Center and agriculture education throughout the county.

## **General**

### *Guest Speakers during the year included;*

- Robert Lowry - Director, Central Virginia Community College, Bedford Campus
- Clare Robertson - Horticulture Instructor at Bedford Science & Technology Center
- Linda Exley - Director of Bedford Main Street – Farmers Market
- Bedford Young Farmers Representatives - To ask the Ag Board to apply for the Beef Initiative Grant
- Sergei Troubetzkoy - New Bedford City/County Tourism Director
- Joy Powers - Vice-president of the Smith Mountain FFA chapter and President of the new Bedford 4H Livestock Club
- Nicole LaNore - Bedford 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent
- Fred Connor – Principal/CTE Director at Bedford Science & Technology Center

The Ag Board has had several individuals at each of the regular meetings to gain information and show support.

### *AEDAB in the Press*

Positive articles about the Bedford County Agriculture Economic Development Advisory Board appeared in the Roanoke, Lynchburg, and Bedford Newspapers throughout the year.

### *Featured Speaker*

The Chairman of the Ag Board was invited to be the featured speaker at the 2007 Bedford County Farm Bureau annual meeting about the work and goals of the new board..

## *AEDAB Future Plans*

- Continue to improve and keep the **Bedford Agriculture Web Page** up to date and informative.
- Develop a **Bedford Branded Program** to help identify and promote items produced in the county.
- Work to improve and expand the **Bedford Farmer's Market**.
- Work with educators to expand **Agriculture Education** throughout our county's school system, K through 12.
- Work with everyone involved with the **CVCC 2-year Agriculture Program** to make it a success and apply for the Phase II Grant from the Tobacco Commission.
- Work with Bedford Tourism to **promote Ag Tourism** in the county including promoting our large number of vineyards.
- Continue to search for feasible ways to **protect prime agriculture land** in the county.
- Look for ways to **promote Bedford County's Equine industry**. The county ranks # 5 in the state for number of horses.
- **Research the concept of a facility** to hold agriculture and other large events including Horse Shows and a Bedford County Agriculture Fair.
- Continue to **work with individuals, businesses and area groups** such as the Bedford Farm Bureau, Bedford Young Farmers, Bedford Citizens for Land Preservation, CVCC, FFA and 4H to serve our county's agriculture community.
- Monitor the county's need for hiring a dedicated **Agriculture Economic Development Director** in the future.
- Stay active, progressive and informed in all aspects of our county's agriculture economy so that we can **give good sound advice when needed**.

This report was compiled and submitted to the  
Bedford County Board of Supervisors by the  
Agriculture Economic Development Advisory Board  
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