



Bedford County Agriculture Development Effort

History

Cooperative Extension facilitated meetings of various agriculture and natural resource related groups - Began meeting in mid-2005

- Farm Bureau
- Bedford Agriculture Council
- Bedford Citizens for Land Preservation
- Cooperative Extension
- USDA Agencies
- Others involved in the agriculture community

Purpose: to discuss areas of common interest. Namely, concerns over future of agriculture – profitability, loss of farm land, etc.

It was determined a combined committee would be more effective and visible. Loosely arranged coalition – “agriculture development committee”

The committee agreed to review and make comment on the draft comprehensive plan which was/is under major revision. Focus on how the plan addresses agriculture issues.

The committee continued meeting through late 2005 – into early 2006 trying to determine their focus.

In March 2006, the director of economic development and a Board of Supervisors member got involved to see what county government could do and what the agriculture community wanted local government to do.

The committee determined that the focus of this effort should be on economic development. It is not enough to just preserve land – farming needs to be profitable to be sustainable.

The committee reached consensus that staff dedicated to this effort was needed. There are other pre-existing government departments that can help (Extension, Economic Development, Tourism) but they have their areas of expertise and responsibility. This effort needs to be consolidated and championed by a single entity. Furthermore, volunteers (those in the agriculture community) were willing to help, but can only do so much.

The committee made plans, through consultation with the County Administrator, to make a presentation to the Board of Supervisors regarding this issue.

This occurred in May 2006 – focused on state of agriculture in Bedford, economic impact, assets and challenges, suggested components of an agriculture development program, and the need for dedicated staff to carry out this plan.

The Board of Supervisors asked the committee to draft a more detailed plan and come back to the Board for consideration.

This was accomplished and brought to the Board of Supervisors in June 2006. They adopted the “*Bedford County Agriculture Development Program*” at this time.

July – November 2006:

As next steps, 2 round table meetings were held for the agri-business community. This was led by the Economic Development department and fashioned after the round table meetings they do for other sectors like manufacturing, retail, etc. The purpose was to explain the efforts underway and further assess their needs and ask for input on how to proceed.

The discussion led to a decision that it would be helpful to have a panel of localities that have programs in place – held Nov. 2, 2006:

- Augusta County
- Halifax County
- Lancaster County, PA

Also at this meeting, a survey was distributed to assist in program direction and to what extent various strategies would be helpful.

In late Nov 2006, County Administration made a proposal to the Board of Supervisors to do the following:

- Adopt resolution re-affirming support of the Land Use Tax program
- Create board-appointed agriculture economic development advisory board
- Consider adding staff to implement the plan based on input from board