



**Meeting Minutes**  
**Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board**  
**March 4, 2020 – 7:00 p.m.**  
**Peaks Conference Room at Falling Creek**  
**1257 County Farm Road, Bedford, VA 24523**

**Present:** Matt Baumgardner, Pete Fellers, Don Gardner, Sam Gardner, Ronnie Gross, Chuck Grove, Ken Newman, Jeff Powers, Joy Powers, Lindsay Tomlinson, Pam Willoughby

**Absent:** Dorothy McIntyre

**Staff Present:** Scott Baker, Traci Blido, Amanda Kaufman

**Staff Absent:** None

**Transcriber:** Julia Peters

**Guests:** Kelley Smith, USDA NRCS Bedford Office

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**(1) APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the March 4, 2020 agenda. There were no objections.

A motion and a second were made to approve the March 4, 2020 agenda, as presented.

**Adopted unanimously**

**(2) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - February 5, 2020**

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the February 5, 2020 meeting minutes. Mrs. Blido noted that under **(7) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMERS REPORT**, the spelling of the name **Traci** should be corrected to read **Tracy** Culbertson.

A motion and a second were made to approve the February 5, 2020 meeting minutes, as amended.

## **Adopted unanimously**

### **(3) SPECIAL PRESENTATION - Kelley Smith, USDA NRCS Bedford Office**

Mr. Baker introduced Kelley Smith, District Conservationist with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). She will talk to us about the types of programs they administer here for the ag producers in Bedford. Ms. Smith distributed a booklet which is a quick guide to the 2018 Farm Bill and the programs for farm production and agriculture that are administered under the USDA. They are comprised of three agencies, the Farm Service Agency, NRCS and the Risk Management Agency (RMA). RMA administers mainly crop insurance. The NRCS and the Farm Service Agency are usually housed together in service centers and administer conservation programs, farm loans and other assistance programs. Her agency, the NRCS, focuses mainly on conservation and resource conservation. Her office serves anyone who owns or operates land privately and wants to conserve, improve, or protect a resource; whether it is soil, water, air, plants, or energy; or have technical and financial assistance available to them to implement conservation practices. She said funds from the 2014 Farm Bill are still being administered through active contracts and current agreements that have not been fulfilled yet. Once the NRCS receives an obligated contract, the farmers have up to eight years to complete the work. She noted that for the 2014 Farm Bill, in Virginia, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) are the main programs for conservation on the ground. In those two programs alone, Virginia received \$115 million, almost 3,000 contracts for EQIP and \$54 million and 387 contracts for CSP. Virginia ranked fifth, excluding Texas and California, as far as dollars received and contracts obligated. In the 2014 Farm Bill, \$2.8 million of the EQIP funds were brought into Bedford County and \$2.4 million of the CSP funds. In Virginia, Bedford ranks fourth in the state for workload. For the 2018 Farm Bill, the main focus is soil health and water quality and quantity nationwide. There were a few improvements made since the 2014 Farm Bill. NRCS are now able to solve proposed or expected resource concerns to help farmers plan better or prevent degradation of resources. They are still focusing on the historically underserved producers, including veterans, the disabled, and minorities. The NRCS invests an average of \$8 million every day in conservation systems that help producers stay profitable and productive. Some of the top practices that NRCS installs out on the landscape are watering facilities for livestock, all types of fencing, cover crops, livestock pipelines, heavy use areas to prevent erosion, and pasture planting. In 2010, they adopted a new standard, the high tunnel system, where crops are grown in the ground in a greenhouse which extends the growing season for vegetable crops in Virginia. These are just a few of the ways that NRCS can assist the farmer. Ms. Kelley can be contacted if anyone has questions or knows of someone who needs her agency's help. The new farmers.gov website is very helpful and user friendly and the link is on the handout sheet. She answered questions from the Ag Board members and Chairman Powers thanked her for sharing her information tonight.

#### **(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT**

Mrs. Blido reported about a couple of events coming up. The Governor's Ag Trade Conference will be held on March 10-11 in Richmond and the Virginia Ag Directors and Officers (VADO) Meeting is set for March 26 in Richmond as well. If anyone is interested in going to either one of these events, please contact Mrs. Blido. The Virginia Food and Beverage Show is scheduled for March 18, she added. A couple businesses will be there for Virginia Grown products and Southern Flavoring usually has a booth. It is a free event at the Convention Center in Richmond. She has been watching some of the bills the General Assembly has been working on. There are 200 bills being hashed out behind closed doors in committees, so bills regarding minimum wage and collective bargaining may be presented and will have an effect on businesses. She visited Teva Pharmaceuticals in Forest today, where 51 people will be laid off on Friday. She shared with the workers what training is available, free education, and all the different resources such as unemployment benefits. Many of them have found new jobs. After this wave of layoffs, there will be 150-200 people left at the facility. She noted that there are 500 unfilled jobs in Bedford, with Custom Truck hiring and Sam Moore as well. Good news will be announced tomorrow about Vista Foods. It will be opening again under a new name and she thanked Ronnie Gross for bringing this new client to her.

#### **(5) ADMINISTRATION REPORT**

Ms. Kaufman said they have been working on the budget this month with a work session scheduled for the Board of Supervisors (BOS) next Monday. There are two new department directors. Ashley Anderson has been named Finance Director, and Elizabeth Lo will be the IT director and is coming to us from Minnesota. The broadband project is continuing with no further delays reported and completion is expected in mid-August.

#### **(6) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT**

Mr. Baker reported about a meeting he attended in Campbell County where there was discussion about a program called Youth Works. This entity has career navigators that help young people in career readiness. Once they place these youth in a job opportunity, the grant that is funded by the federal government will pay the youth's compensation. A farmer in Campbell County participated in this program and got a worker he could train in crop production. Mrs. Blido said Bedford County has an open position under that program which is housed at Liberty High School. Whoever fills the full-time position will match young people with workforce experience opportunities covered through federal funding under the Workforce Investment Board. She said more information is to come once the position is filled. Farmers can get the help they need and

students get experience in agriculture. Mr. Baker said the Campbell County representative for the Youth Works, Jordan Johnson, is able to facilitate until the Bedford County representative is hired. If anyone would be interested in this program, Mr. Baker can provide the contact information.

Mr. Baker also reported that the Beef Producers had their meeting last week. Scott Greiner from the Animal Science Department at Virginia Tech gave a variety of updates about emerging trends in the cattle industry and also spoke about the new tick in the mid-Atlantic area, the Asian Longhorn Tick. Where it is established in South Asia, Australia, and New Zealand it is a challenge to livestock producers because of what the tick does. It has the ability to transmit a blood parasite, the filaria, and reduces the animal's ability to utilize oxygen. There is no treatment available so the tick could have an impact on the cattle industry. The last distribution map he saw does not show the tick in Bedford County yet, but it has been found up and down the spine of the Blue Ridge. Dr. Gardner said it is similar to anaplasmosis, a blood borne protozoan parasite that makes the body unable to break down red blood cells. There is no vaccine and this particular tick will latch onto one animal and basically drain it dry. Flying tick control is probably the most valuable thing a producer can use. Research is being done but they do not know how it even got here and so far they do not think it transmits anything to humans.

Mr. Baker reminded attendees that at the last meeting we spoke about educating local law enforcement on animal science for identification of livestock at large. He and Chairman Powers met with Sheriff Miller who was very receptive to the idea and said Tuesdays and Wednesdays are good days to do in-person training. We would like to do some on-farm training for the deputies throughout April and go to different farms with different species. Sheriff Miller also discussed the farm equipment safety issues and we hope to incorporate some basic training in that. We would be able to educate many deputies at one time and the sheriff's office will be able to videotape the sessions and then use the tapes for training. The sheriff's office is also developing an online database for farmers to register their locations and types of livestock. It was noted that dispatchers need to be included in the educational sessions since they are the first ones to receive and pass information to the deputies. Discussion followed regarding lack of addresses on farmland without houses; livestock identification information forms or checklists for dispatchers, first responders, and animal control officers; and collaboration with the Farm Bureau staff, farmers, and the new sergeant in Animal Control to generate a kind of directory of farmers. Chairman Powers and Mr. Baker will continue to work on these concerns and if anyone would like to help coordinate or has suggestions, they can notify Chairman Powers.

Mr. Baker mentioned that the 4-H Summer Camp requires several adults to attend the whole week to supervise the 9-13 year old students. Maribeth Martin was short on adult volunteers so she spoke to the sheriff's office and now she has a couple deputies that will teach a class and stay for the entire week. He thought this is a good example of the positive relationship the Sheriff wants to foster between law enforcement and young people.

**(7) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMERS REPORT**

Sam Gardner said the Young Farmers are working on getting Deputy Allison Key to come speak at their meeting. Mr. Baumgardner reported that there will be a meeting for Farm Bureau members with the legislators scheduled for March 16 at 6:30 p.m. here at Falling Creek Complex. He said the fencing out of streams and creeks will remain a voluntary program and a nutrient management plan will not be a requirement for farmers. The bills pertaining to these issues that would have made them mandatory did not pass. Wage issues are still on the table and will be affecting everyone. He encouraged anyone who wants to speak to their legislator about any particular subject to attend the meeting on the 16th.

**(8) COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**a. Education & Events**

**1. Upcoming Events**

Ms. Powers stated that nine kids are going to the University of Tennessee to compete this weekend.

**2. County Fair Update**

Ms. Powers reported that the fair is coming along nicely. Sheriff Miller offered the K9 unit do a demonstration at the fair on Education Day. The Mobile Dairy was secured again this year. They are trying to have a strong schedule of agricultural demonstrations and events throughout the fair. They are trying to incorporate new elements of entertainment as well. The fair's dates are October 16-18, 2020 with Education Day on the 16th.

**3. School Ag Programs Update**

Ms. Powers reported that 13 students are selected statewide to attend the prestigious Team Excellence Leadership Institute (TELI). Two of those individuals were from Bedford County, one from Smith Mountain FFA and one from Liberty FFA.

Ms. Powers reported that it is the busiest time of year for both FFA and 4-H. Bedford County students were winners in several contests and competitions around the state throughout the month. She is very pleased with the kids' participation and performance and said they are an impressive group of students. Ms. Powers said the students competed in a Stockman's contest in Front Royal, Youth Swine Day at Virginia Tech, and also completed one of their largest competitions, the Block and Bridle at Virginia Tech. Our teams participated in both the Stockman's contest and livestock judging during the Block and Bridle and groups from both 4-H and FFA did extremely well.

Ms. Tomlinson said the students at Liberty just completed FFA Week and did community service and outreach activities. The officer team put together a mock CDE Day and the middle

school students participated. It was a great activity and we hope to continue to do it in the future. It is exciting to see our youth going to TELI and the students are also getting ready for CVLS and other competitions.

Ms. Powers addressed the Ag Board regarding the middle school teachers not having extended contracts and they don't get paid for the additional time they work due to federally mandated FFA requirements on behalf of their students. She felt that the teachers deserve the Ag Board's support and we need to advocate for them for compensation because they are underpaid. Another issue she raised was that Staunton River High School is going back down to two ag teachers when we had fought so hard for the part-time additional teacher. Discussion followed.

A motion and a second were made to advocate that both high schools each carry a 12-month contracted ag teacher and both middle schools each carry a 210-day contracted ag teacher.

**Adopted unanimously**

Chairman Powers directed the Education Committee to research the issues and reach out to the Director of Vocational Education with their recommendations.

**b. Marketing & Production**

**1. Farmers' Market Update**

Ms. McIntyre reported that the February indoor market in Forest was well received and the pancake breakfast brought in over \$250. The March market will be held on the 14th with over 30 vendors. The Forest Farmers Market regular season will open April 25 and this marks the 10th year for the market. Ms. McIntyre plans to host a farm-to-table event in September. Mrs. Blido said we will do a press release for the event.

Ms. McFaden distributed a flier about the Bedford Farmers Market and noted the market will be open on Fridays from 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. beginning May 1, with the hope of participating in Bedford's Second Friday events, dependent upon the vendors' approval. As of today, she has 17 vendors lined up and is actively looking for more produce vendors. She will be going to the vendor training held in Roanoke on the 14th. She received the SNAP program approval for the Bedford market and is working with Department of Social Services (DSS) to get a free machine. The market will be participating in the kids' program called Power of Produce, or "POP". It offers various activities for the children and she is excited about having kids more involved in the market this year. Mrs. Blido will contact DSS with information on the market dates and SNAP availability so they can spread the word to the Bedford Area Resource Committee (BARC).

**2. Coyote Lottery Update**

Dr. Gardner said there was an uptick in killings, bringing the total to 92. The drawing will take place in the latter part of the week. There is enough sponsorship money to award two prizes this year. Mrs. Blido said she will post a photo and the names of the winners on the website once Dr. Gardner sends the information to her.

**c. Land Protection & Conservation**

Nothing new to report.

**(9) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS**

Chairman Powers noted that the new USDA Deputy Undersecretary for Rural Development is Bette Brand who grew up in Moneta and went to Staunton River High School. She may be able to come speak at one of the Ag Board's future meetings.

Chairman reminded the Ag Board members that the meeting time will change to 7:30 p.m. for meetings from April through October.

**(10) ADJOURNMENT**

8:38 p.m.