



**Meeting Minutes**  
**Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board**

**March 11, 2015 – 7:00 p.m.**

**Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board:**

**:Present:**

Jeffrey Powers, Don Gardner, Ken Palmer, Ken Newman, Matt Baumgardner, W.P. Johnson, Pete Fellers, Keith Tuck, Spencer Tinsley

**:Absent:** Chuck Grove, Pam Willoughby, Ronnie Gross

**Staff Present:** Scott Baker, Traci Blido, Jerry Craig, Jessica Hupp

**Staff Absent:** Mark Reeter

**Guests:** Brent Wills

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**(1) Approval of Agenda**

Jeff Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the March 11, 2015 agenda.

Mr. Johnson stated he would like to add Land use taxation discussion to the agenda under **(9) Other Business.**

A motion and a second were made to approve the March 11, 2015 agenda, as amended.

**Adopted Unanimously.**

**(2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – February 4, 2015**

Mr. Powers asked for a review of the February 4, 2015 meeting minutes.

A motion and a second were made to approve the meeting minutes of February 4, 2015, as presented.

**Adopted unanimously.**

**(3) County Administrator's Report**

No report was given as Mr. Reeter was not present for the March 11, 2015 Ag Board meeting.

#### **(4) Economic Development Director's Report**

Mrs. Blido reported that she attended the Governor's Conference on Ag Trade, and was able to hear from several international ambassadors and negotiators from countries like Cuba, Canada, Indonesia, and others. Mrs. Blido stated they discussed the urgency of feeding the two billion people we will need to in the next decade, and how we can create a better global supply, which will create many opportunities for Virginia. Governor McAuliffe stated he wanted to be the top state for agriculture by the end of his term. Currently, Georgia is ranked number one in ag production, and Virginia has just surpassed North Carolina as the number two exporter of ag products on the east coast. Governor McAuliffe also discussed the how the poultry ban was lifted in China.

Mrs. Blido reported that in 2014, the ag and forestry industry exported \$3.35 billion, increasing exports 14% from last year. The top countries exported to include China, Canada, Switzerland, Mexico, and Russia and top products being exported included soy beans, soy bean meal, and oil.

Dr. Gardner asked if anyone had discussed the money we lost when western ports had to be shut down, to which Mrs. Blido stated they mostly highlighted what the ports gained.

Mrs. Blido reported economic development has been very busy. The One Program has a tour coming up next week at Sentry and Harris. Our office has been showing off a lot of properties, including Trident Seafood who will be extending another month until final shut down on April 1, 2015. Dr. Gardner asked if Trident's equipment was being taken out of the facility. Mrs. Blido stated some equipment was staying and some would be leaving, but that she's had other food industry businesses looking at the facility.

#### **(5) Cooperative Extension Report**

Mr. Baker reported they have begun heavy planning for this year's livestock show. So far, 17 young people plan to show livestock from our county, but this number could flex a little bit. Due to several school cancellations, they have decided to give students more time to submit applications. Mr. Baker stated 17 was a good number of participants, regardless. The Livestock Show will take place the first Saturday in May at the Lynchburg Livestock Market if anyone would like to go and show your support.

Mr. Baker reported the next ag production meeting is planned for April 21, focusing on the topic of herd and cattle health. Dr. Wittier, a large animal veterinarian from Virginia Tech, will be coming to talk to the group. This meeting will take place in the evening from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Mr. Baker stated that the Region 2000 Strategic Plan committee continues to meet and is discussing priorities for the next project. He will keep the board updated.

#### **(6) Tourism Director's Report**

Mr. Craig reported he has asked Mr. Palmer to put together a meeting for the Equine spoke of the agritourism wheel. Mr. Palmer has formed a group which includes BEA, horse trainers and boarders, and several types of trail ride farms. Mr. Craig stated he would like this meeting to be a two-way conversation to discuss the future of agritourism.

Mr. Craig stated he met with Jeff and Scott to come up with list of agritourism subsectors which he distributed to the board. Mr. Craig stated not all of the subcategories were listed but will be listed eventually and that any input was welcome. Mr. Craig reported he has already been in conversation with many of the groups included in forestry.

Dr. Gardner asked where a commercial ag producer would fall into these categories, to which Mr. Craig replied there is room for a lot of crossover, but it could fall under farm experiences. Dr. Gardner asked if agritourism tours would have to happen on a regular basis. Mr. Craig stated it would be strictly up to the operator of the farm, but realistically once or twice a year.

Mr. Craig stated he just returned from the Agritourism Conference in Staunton which was primarily for businesses and economic developers but he learned a lot from the experience. He stated the average Virginia farm is 183 acres. Mr. Craig stated the two best sessions dealt with conservation and zoning and how they related to agritourism. Mr. Craig stated we are lucky to be in Bedford County, because other counties have stringent requirements that will not allow its farmers to sell produce pre-season that is not produced on their farm.

#### **(7) Bedford County Farm Bureau Young Farmers Report**

Mr. Johnson reported EMS Weekend had 26 participants total and received great feedback from those involved. An emergency demonstration took 5 minutes to get 12 people removed from the scene incident, which was very impressive. Mr. Johnson reported the Young Farmers went to Nashville and learned a lot about teamwork and building on each individual's strengths. Finally, they toured four farms in Highland County this past weekend including a turkey laying operation, a maple syrup operation, a meat processing plant, and a pick-your-own vegetable operation.

#### **(8) Committee Reports**

##### **a. Education & Events**

##### **(1) Ag Complex**

Mr. Palmer reported he talked to Curry a few times since the last meeting and he also talked at the BEA board meeting to present to them what Curry and he had discussed for an ag complex. They were very excited and willing to take on a draft horse exhibit with different breeds and a demonstration on draft horse farming.

Mr. Palmer reported that there is a new horse operation being built on Hayden's Bridge Road that will have 2 outdoor arenas and 2 sets of barns. Richard Toms and his wife are managing the farm for the owner, and Mr. Palmer has invited them to the tourism meeting with Jerry.

Dr. Gardner asked if there was a draft horse group in the county, to which Mr. Palmer stated there was a group and they are a part of BEA. Dr. Gardner asked if they had any pulling contests, and Mr. Palmer stated there is not one here but it's becoming more popular.

## **(2) Upcoming Events**

### **a. Coyote Lottery**

Dr. Gardner reported that as of two days ago 103 coyotes have been checked in. Mr. Baker stated he would pick up the box from Southern States this weekend. Mr. Powers stated they have been seeing more pressure on their land from coyotes and had lost a calf for the first time this past week. Dr. Gardner stated the drawing would take place during or after lunch.

### **b. Ag Conference Expo**

Mr. Hale reported that the ag expo had all its speakers lined up and concrete, and that they had confirmed attendance from Delegate Garrett and Bill Thomasson. Dr. Karen Baum will also be speaking and bringing one of her llamas. Mr. Hale passed around a copy of the working schedule. Mr. Hale stated there would be registration with coffee and donuts, and a system where people can submit questions for the panel.

Mr. Palmer stated the Virginia Horse Council will have people there with a display. Mr. Baker stated they expect 15 different vendors with a good mix of public-private sectors and 40-45 people have already pre-registered for the event. Mr. Hale stated they want to encourage exhibitors to also take part in the legislative panel. Mr. Baker reported they believe there will be 100 or more guests in attendance at this event. Mr. Palmer stated our local contributors have been very generous in donating prizes for the event.

### **b. Marketing & Production**

#### **(1) Farmers Markets**

Mr. Baker reported that the Bedford Farmers Market continues to work with the market managers committee, who intends to hire a part-time market manager and create further cooperation with the market at the Y. They plan to have a soft opening for Easter Saturday, but won't open for the regular season until the end of April.

### **c. Land Protection & Conservation**

Mr. Fellers reported that things have calmed down, and that most land conservation bills have been tamed. Mr. Fellers stated there is a land trust in Charlottesville that is telling farmers what to do with their land requiring these farmers to speak to their delegates every year. Mr. Fellers

agreed with Mr. Craig that we are lucky in Bedford County because we don't have pipelines coming through our land, which is where other counties have been struggling.

Dr. Gardner asked if the funding or legislation that allows for the creation of conservation easements are as friendly as they have been in the past. Mr. Fellers explained that every easement starts off with a compromise, but that each year it gets chipped away at. He stated he wouldn't start a land trust now because there are not as many tax credits. Mr. Fellers stated that the General Assembly created it these trusts and easements, but they continue to be the group that chips away at them every year. These programs are steadily eroding in the state with each passing year, however there is a better climate for them on a federal level.

## **(9) Other Business**

### **A. Land Use taxation discussion**

Mr. Johnson stated that people began asking him questions about the land use system. Mr. Johnson asked the board if we have any assurance or confidence in how well land use is being administered, as it pertains to individual parcels that do or do not meet the requirements.

Mr. Palmer stated to his knowledge it is easy to just submit a form with one-time fee. Mr. Johnson stated he is worried that there are a lot of parcels that are half an acre or  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre in size, and in his memory each parcel had to be at least five acres to qualify for land use.

Mr. Tinsley stated he just put in a one acre tract to land use because it's adjacent to his farm. He stated the regulations may be five acres, but if the parcel is adjacent to a farm in use that rule may not apply even if it has a different tax parcel.

Mr. Craig stated when you receive the assessment, you have to submit a statement there have been no changes to your land. If two tracts exist on either side of the road, if they have it on record they'll see it as all five tracts and not by each individual parcel.

Dr. Gardner stated the farms that he rents are typically 125-250 acres, but may still be listed as four or five different tax parcels because of how the land owner slowly pieced it together. Dr. Gardner stated he believes a more legitimate concern would be how many parcels of all sizes are signed up for land use but are sitting idle because the land owners won't rent them out to anyone for grazing, hay, or cropping. These land owners are holding their land for future investment and getting land use off of it at the same time.

Mr. Powers stated these were legitimate concerns and that Bedford has a lot of land that is sitting idle. At this point, he believes the board should form a subcommittee to report on this at the next meeting.

A motion and a second were made to create a subcommittee on further research of the current land use system and appointed W.P. Johnson as chair of this subcommittee. The board voted unanimously.

**(10) Informational Items**

Mr. Baker reported that the county farm tour's planning committee met a month ago. Shannon Simmons' farm was identified as a possible venue which has a barn available as shelter in the case of bad weather. This event is tentatively scheduled to be held there on the third Saturday in August.

Mrs. Blido reported that one of Bedford's Rotarians, Brookhill Farm, was featured in one of Rotary International's magazines and has even been receiving donation checks from people for her horse farm. Brookhill rescues horses and matches them with young girls that have eating disorders or a number of other disorders. Mr. Baker stated that Brookhill also hosts one of the Bedford Equine events every year.

Joy stated that Dr. Gardner recently won the Paul Landis Veterinarian of the Year Award from the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association last week in Roanoke. Joy also stated she knew of five graduates going to Virginia Tech this fall to study agriculture, and that two of them were among the top 10 students in their class.

**(11) Adjournment**

**8:13 p.m.**