



Minutes

Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board
Peaks Conference Room at Falling Creek
1257 County Farm Rd. Bedford, VA 24523
Wednesday, August 5, 2026
7:30 p.m.

Present: Jeff Powers (*District 1; Chairman*), Matt Baumgardner (*District 2*), Don Gardner (*District 3; Vice Chairman*), Ralph White (*District 4*), Ethan Tanner (*District 5*), Melody Divers (*District 6*), Pete Fellers (*District 7*), Dorothy McIntyre (*At-Large*), Ken Newman (*At-Large*), Joshua Leamy (*At-Large*), Chuck Grove (*At-large*), Sam Gardner (*At-Large*)

Staff Present: Pam Armstrong (*Economic Development Director*), Niki Feazell (*Administrative Assistant*), Scott Baker (*Extension Office Director*)

Guests: Johnny Divers (*Guest*), Joy Powers (*Guest*)

Absent: Justin Stauder (*Deputy County Administrator*), Mickey Johnson (*Board of Supervisors, District 1, Guest*), Bob Davis (*Board of Supervisors, District 6, Guest*)

(1) CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m.

(2) APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Powers called for a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Matt Baumgardner moved, seconded by Ken Newman, agenda approved as presented unanimously by members present.

(3) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES – June 3, 2026

Chairman Powers called for a motion to approve the June 3, 2026, minutes. Matt Baumgardner moved to approve meeting minutes as corrected due to error regarding agenda item (10) part C, news channel was listed incorrectly, seconded by Ken Newman. Minutes approved unanimously by members present.

(4) ADMINISTRATION REPORT

- Deputy County Administrator Justin Stauder was not present, nothing new to report. Economic Development Director, Pam Armstrong, introduced new Ag Board member Ralph White from District 4.

(5) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

- Director Pam Armstrong reported provided updates on two upcoming initiatives. First, the office is organizing a public training session to educate citizens on conservation easements. Staff will hold a planning meeting next week to finalize a date and determine whether the session will be hosted via Zoom, allowing the recording to be shared on YouTube, or held in person.

- Planning is underway for a comprehensive farm tour project targeted for next summer or fall. A recent survey confirmed strong interest from local landowners, and staff intend to involve 4-H and FFA participants. The tour is intended as a standalone event to complement the County Fair rather than replace it. Additional discussion focused on potentially partnering with local artisans to create a multi-stop itinerary, while remaining mindful of scheduling conflicts with local farmers' markets.

(6) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT

- Scott Baker reported that Bedford County has officially received disaster declarations for both the April freeze event and the ongoing drought. Producers are urged to contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA), which is currently offering specialized transportation assistance to help offset the cost of importing hay from other regions due to low local supplies. Although recent rainfall has marginally improved Bedford's status from an "extreme drought" to a "severe drought," conditions remain critical.
- Information regarding county-wide disaster relief programs has been posted to the local Facebook page. Additional clarification was provided regarding a rare emergency well and water program available through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) due to the ongoing severe drought.
- A native warm-season grass field day in late June at Keith Tuck's property, attracting approximately 30 attendees from multiple counties. Additionally, the Bedford Beef Producers recently met at the Edwards farm, managed by Kurt Martin. The meeting served to introduce Dr. Bernard, a new large animal veterinarian practicing out of Gretna who will now be servicing the Bedford area. Finally, it was noted that the annual 4-H camp has recently concluded.

(7) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU YOUNG FARMERS REPORT

- Joshua Leamy reported the Young Farmers committee announced an upcoming meeting scheduled for August 13th at 7:30 p.m. at Cilantro Mexican Grill in downtown Moneta. The meeting is open to anyone interested in joining or learning more about the Young Farmers group. Members are encouraged to invite and refer to potential new recruits.
- Matt Baumgardner reported the Farm Bureau Annual Meeting is scheduled for October 6th at 6:00 p.m. at Thaxton Baptist Church.
- The County Farm Bureau Board approved a \$1,000 donation toward the upcoming Deer Project. The board requested that the funding be split into two \$500 prizes rather than a single \$1,000 grand prize to increase the number of award recipients. The committee agreed to accommodate this adjustment.
- State Initiatives: The State Farm Bureau is currently expanding initiatives focused on land preservation and conservation services to assist farmers with cost savings.

(8) COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Education & Events

i. Upcoming Events

- Bedford County Fair August 21st-23rd
- Livestock and Equine Show, September 5th-6th
- Huddleston Fire Department Dinner, September 26th
- Chapel Creek Farms, farm dinner September 5th

ii. School Ag Programs update

- A report submitted on behalf of Hunter Wimmer highlighted a highly active summer and upcoming fall schedule for the Bedford County FFA chapters, including Smith Mountain Lake, Liberty, and Liberty Middle. During the

summer, all chapters participated in the 100th Annual Virginia FFA State Convention, where multiple local teams placed well in competitive events, while Liberty FFA members attended the Virginia FFA Leadership Overnight Camp. Looking ahead to the school year, the chapters are preparing for back-to-school night activities and finalizing a volunteer schedule for the "Old McDonald" tent at the local fair. Additionally, Bedford County will host the South Ridge Area COLT (Chapter Officer Leadership Training) conference at Falling Creek Park. Finally, members are gearing up for fall competitions, such as the forestry contest, and launching fundraising campaigns to help offset rising travel costs for students attending the National FFA Convention in October.

- The 4-H Youth Development program reported that the 4-H Livestock Club is scheduled to resume its regular monthly meetings, which will continue to take place on Mondays. Additionally, a reminder was issued regarding the upcoming Board of Supervisors meeting on Tuesday, August 11th, where a special presentation will be made to recognize local youth participants from the Central Virginia Livestock Show. For the first time, the Board of Supervisors provided financial assistance to these Bedford youth participants, who were previously recognized by the Ag Board in June.

iii. County Fair Report

- Chairman Powers provided update for the upcoming County Fair, noting that planning is progressing smoothly with no major disruptions. A confirmed commitment from the amusement vendor to provide additional rides this year, including a Ferris wheel and a merry-go-round. The antique tractor showcase is confirmed to return, and competitive events, such as the baked goods contest, are being organized under the picnic pavilion.
- The committee finalized dates for the upcoming events: the County Fair will take place from Friday August 21st through Sunday, August 23rd, followed by the Equine and Livestock Show over Labor Day weekend. The fair planning committee will meet tomorrow evening to begin marking the fields and finalizing logistics with both new and returning food and craft vendors.

b. Marketing & Production

i. Farmer's Market updates

- In recognition of National Farmers Market Week, promotional magnet giveaways were distributed and highly well-received across local markets.
- Montvale Market: The market is currently averaging three to five vendors per week. To boost participation for the upcoming August 15th and 22nd dates.
- Bedford Market: No formal report was submitted, but operational continuity remains steady.
- Forest Market: The market recorded its highest attendance to date last weekend, drawing approximately 2,500 visitors. Representatives from Forest Presbyterian Church are actively engaging with the county to discuss potential structural expansions to further accommodate the growing market.
- Moneta Market: The market experienced its most successful month to date, with its eight active vendors reporting exceptionally high sales volumes. Despite having only two to three weeks remaining in the seasonal schedule, the market continues to secure new vendor commitments. A notable spike in foot traffic was attributed to cross-promotional draw from the neighboring library's summer children's programming.

c. Land Protection & Conservation

- An update was provided regarding regional Tobacco Commission grant funding available to landowners pursuing conservation easements across several jurisdictions, including Henry, Roanoke, Danville, Lynchburg,

Bedford, and Franklin counties. This specialized program provides up to \$10,000 per landowner to directly offset the legal, appraisal, and closing costs associated with establishing an easement. Bedford and Franklin County participants will coordinate applications through the Roanoke office.

d. Public Relations

- The Bedford County Ag Facebook page gained 69 new followers in July, bringing the total to 1,748. A recent photo-only collage featuring multiple local operations—including Gardner Heifers, Layman Family Farms, Little Otter Flower Farm, and Huddleston Hall Group—successfully generated over 5,000 views.
- Dorothy was thanked for hosting the June and July segments of the monthly local ag podcast, which featured Done Roaming Ranch. A farm safety post shared on June 26th went viral, generating 46,000 views and 171 shares. The upcoming August podcast will feature a comprehensive safety panel including Sheriff Miller, WP, Eric Johnson, Johnny, and the Public Relations chair to address the legal, insurance, and practical safety realities of sharing the road with agricultural equipment. Additionally, Media Squatch will provide an in-kind donation to produce commercials and a mini-podcast specifically for the upcoming County Fair.
- "Bedford Grown" promotional rack cards featuring QR codes linking to the county's farm directory have seen high distribution at local farmers' markets, particularly the Moneta market, averaging 15 to 20 cards per market day.

(9) OTHER BUSINESS

i. Informational items

- Scott Baker highlighted Little Otter Flower Farm and their “Random Acts of Kindness” program delivering flower arrangements throughout the local community.
- A community event featuring a chili and baked potato dinner will be held at the Huddleston Fire Department on September 26th.
- A local farm dinner is scheduled for the first Saturday in September. The event will feature live music and a dinner serving beef sourced from Chapel Creek Farms.

ii. Committee discussion

- No additional discussion

(10) ADJOURNMENT

- Chairman Powers stated no further business.

Adjourned
8:33 p.m.