

Talking Points for Virginia Cooperative Extension

Budget Amendment-Item 219 #2H

This document provides talking points to address the impact of the House of Appropriations Committee proposed budget amendment offered on Sunday, February 21. The amendment number is Item 219 #2H and is available on line at:

<http://leg2.state.va.us/WebData/10amend30.nsf/ab35158e9e81b1f48525688b005f54a7/91de82f03f2d46d7852576d200822379?OpenDocument>

We believe that this proposed restructuring reflects an intent to consolidate and focus most of Cooperative Extension efforts on agriculture. It is important to note that many of the goals emerging from the strategic plan represent the agriculture industry in Virginia and focus on profitable agriculture for our farmers in addition to spurring economic development through entrepreneurship and community viability and building and sustaining healthy communities. As part of this process, VCE is currently going through an assessment of its structure to identify cost savings and efficiencies to better deliver our programs. We have already begun consolidating districts, local offices, and eliminating programs and positions to address the budget reductions of the past two years.

VCE programs are critical to implementing Virginia Tech's research programs in agricultural and natural resources. We provide programs and services to the following industries in Virginia: Forestry and Natural Resources, Livestock and Poultry, Crops and Soils, Forage and Grasslands, the Green Industry, Viticulture, Dairy, Equine, Aquaculture and Seafood, Small Vegetables, Fruits, and Grains.

Impacts and Costs of the Proposed Budget Amendment

- Only 14% of Virginia Cooperative Extension's state salary resources are dedicated to Community Viability and Family Consumer Services programming efforts. The majority of these programs are supported through federal grants and local funds.
- The elimination of Family Consumer Sciences (FCS) and Community Viability (CV) will lead to the significant reduction or total elimination of the following non-state resources:
 - Loss of the College of Agriculture's largest grant; an annual \$5.8 million Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program education (SNAP-ED) grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which provides nutrition education to youth and adults in impoverished areas of the Commonwealth where adult and childhood obesity has become pandemic. FCS is instrumental in implementing this program at the community level.
 - Over \$1.3 million in endowments for FCS and CV
 - \$1.7 million in Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) federal formula funds used to support developmental nutrition education for limited resource families. Programs delivered by paraprofessionals who are trained and supervised by agents

include Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids; Literacy, Eating and Activity for Preschoolers; Smart Choices in the Grocery Store; and, Eat Smart, Move More. Partnerships with food banks, job readiness sites, schools, WIC, Head Start, Childcare providers are a few of the collaborations that will be lost.

- Eliminating FCS and CV would require us to terminate employees in those areas regardless of performance or impact and would result in severance costs that are staggering:
 - Approximately \$2.7 million in severance payments for FCS and CV faculty.
 - Approximately \$509,300 in severance payments for staff at eliminated or merged units.
 - Approximately \$1.2 million in severance payments for faculty at eliminated or merged units.
- The elimination of Community Viability programs takes away an important community capacity building tool for rural and urban communities. Community Viability works with Extension faculty to help local elected officials, farmers, and community members develop their capacity to take advantage of expanding food and energy markets. Programs such as Virginia Citizen Planner 101, Public Issues Education, Innovative Leadership, Sustainable Communities, Community Food Systems, Strengthening Your Facilitation Skills, among others, enable local business owners, and their local officials create business friendly places that support healthy people and the environment. VCE is mandated to assess and report agricultural damage as part of Virginia's Emergency Response Team. This initiative is led through the CV program.
- Many of the programs that might fall into the "lawn and garden" category as referenced in the budget amendment include programming dealing with water conservation, proper fertilization, soil erosion, and pesticide management, all critical to the sustainability of the environment. Further, work in this area includes education of citizens and businesses in the green industry, the leading agricultural industry in the Commonwealth.

Closing Urban Offices

- Urban offices like those in rural areas level state funds with federal and local funds to provide a variety of programming focused on the communities where they operate.
- Urban communities' programs include: Annually, 4-H offers a variety of educational experiences to 36,000 4-H youth, ages 5-19, in the units targeted for elimination or consolidation. There would not be 4-H programs in the units where we do not have Virginia Cooperative Extension unit offices. Therefore, urban areas would not have the benefit of a 4-H program. In addition, 2,637 youth from these units who camp at our 4-H educational centers would be directly impacted by the proposed amendment. We currently have 2,167 adult 4-H volunteers in the units that would be impacted. In the urban areas that are targeted, the 4-H program would not exist and thus the volunteers and their valuable work with youth would be lost. In consolidated areas, without a local presence programming would be impacted. Youth and adult volunteers

- This proposed amendment eliminates VCEs ability to carry out state legislative mandated programs: Emergency Preparedness; Pesticide Safety and Integrated Pest Management; representation on District Soil and Water Conservation Boards. VCE is a member of Virginia's Emergency Response Team of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. It is the mandated responsibility of VCE to assess and report agricultural damage as a result of disaster. Federal and state pesticide laws and regulations require pesticide applicators to be certified to use restricted use pesticides. In addition, Virginia law requires all commercial applicators to be certified to use any pesticide. Without pesticide safety and integrated pest management (IPM) education to enable these individuals to do so, many would suffer economic hardships and violate the law. A lack of knowledge in pesticide safety and IPM practices threatens human health and the environment. From an economic perspective, there are approximately 3,000 pest control businesses across Virginia, many of which are located in urban areas. These businesses could not operate without being licensed.
- The value of volunteers lost in eliminated urban units is \$1,580,646 (based on 1,850 volunteers giving 76,992 hours at the Virginia Employment Commission rate of \$20.53 per hour).

Consolidation of Offices

- Local governments pay for all rent and leased space at unit offices. There are **no state savings** on space utilized by Virginia Cooperative Extension in these areas and costs could potentially rise with additional travel costs.
- Mandating certain office consolidations does not take into consideration the needs of the community or the most efficient way to consolidate programs and staff. Cooperative Extension is undergoing a major strategic planning process that will generate a programming and staffing plan that considers multiple factors.
- The value of volunteers lost in merged units is \$4,057,383 (based on 7,707 volunteers giving 197,627 hours at the Virginia Employment Commission rate of \$20.53 per hour).