



**GO Virginia Region One Agriculture and Food Manufacturing
Working Group Meeting**

Thursday, November 29, 2018

1:00 p.m.

Heartwood, Boardroom 2, Abingdon, VA

Participants: Carrie Hardin, Robert Brandon, Ramona Chapman, Gil Patterson, Jerry Moles, Danny Boyer, John Blankenship, Jim Baldwin, David Eaton, Phil Blevins, Keri Hardin, Heather Musick, Whitney Czewnsniak, William Culbertson, Becki O’Quinn, Vickie Ratliff, Andrew Barnes

Whitney Czewnsniak – The USDA is preparing to relocate their headquarter offices out of Washington DC. This could bring over 600 workers to the community. Washington County and the City of Bristol have been working with One Alpha Place to solicit for the relocation of these offices to Bristol, Virginia. Ballad Health, Eastman Chemical Company and other businesses are providing letters of support for Bristol’s attraction effort, and a Formal Expression of Interest is under review. There are 136 localities under consideration, 18 of these are in Virginia. The group voted by show of hands to request a formal letter of support from the GO Virginia Region 1 Council at the Council meeting on December 4th. A decision on the new location will be made by the end of January.

Skill Swap Event- Will Culbertson shared on this big event to be held at the King Center on March 30, 2019. The Skill Swap event will gather guilds, artisans and farmers who will conduct a one hour, teachable, skill swap. The event will be held at the King Center, at Southwest Community College. Cross Hatch is funding this event. Cross Hatch is a group of consultants, out of Michigan, who are working together with local artists and farmers to enlarge the impact on the local community by creating guilds and cooperatives such as hospitality guilds for Air BB, curing meats, drinkable crops, soap making and backyard chickens.

Mountain Empire Community College – Smart Farming Update (CWIA) - Vickie Ratliff shared with the group that Mountain Empire Community College is out of physical space on their campus. The former Appalachia Elementary School building will become an innovative center, and will house MECC’s Center for Workforce and Innovation of Appalachia. Existing workforce programming is being moved to the 72,000 sq. foot facility in Appalachia. MECC’s Unmanned Systems Program has evolved into a stepping point for entrepreneurs, and a potential launch pad for Agriculture uses via Smart Farming. MECC will take on 10 farms in the spring of 2019 that will use drones to do visual scans, address irrigation problem detection and crop health monitoring. This is the first phase, but eventually, MECC will be pursuing aquaculture. The group also talked about the existing need in the region for certified butchers.

Localities and Agency Updates:

Ramona Chapman - DHCD – DHCD supports the efforts of the Region One Agriculture Working Group and encourages further collaboration and business-led ideas.

Robert Brandon – SWCC – Southwest Virginia Community College listed a posting in January for a new full-time professor in Agriculture. Additionally, Russell and Tazewell County recruiters are working with high school students on career opportunities.

Gil Patterson - LMU Vet School –LMU recently conducted over 500 interviews to potential applicants. They emphasize training veterinarians to thrive in rural communities.

Extension Offices:

- **John Blankenship – Tazewell County:** John spoke about the ongoing opioid problems in the region, and mentioned the “Prosper Program” in Grayson Co. This is a preventive program working with at-risk families and offers a curriculum program for prevention and avoidance of opioids.
- **Carrie Hardin-Russell County:** Carrie is a 4H agent in Russell County who spoke about trying to start a homeschool club. The long-term goal for this club is to form greater partnerships with public schools, increasing agricultural interests.
- **Phil Blevins - Washington County:** Phil spoke about the Virginia Quality Assured feeder program. Over \$4 million has been added to the value of 40 thousand calves through this program since 2005. He mentioned that Virginia is a feeder-cattle producing state. The transportation costs of bringing in grain is the main problem in creating finished beef products.

Localities:

Jim Baldwin – Jim spoke of the **Cumberland Plateau PDC’s** revolving loan fund. He also mentioned that the PDCs develop an economic development strategy each year, and that these strategies have seen extensive updates as of late. Agriculture, aquaculture, drone technology and advanced manufacturing are now included in the language for these plans. These updates help to make communities eligible for EDA funding.

Next Meeting: Thursday Jan. 24th at 2:00 at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center.