



**AGRICULTURE AND FOOD MANUFACTURING WORKING GROUP MEETING  
MINUTES**

**MEETING DATE: September 25, 2018**

Present: David Eaton, Chair, Jerry Moles, Danny Boyer, Aaron Sizemore, Susan Copeland, Jeff Mansour, Joe Gillespie, Will Culbertson, Steve Breeding, Becki O'Quinn, via phone, Robert Branham

David Eaton, Chair, opened the meeting with a welcome and roundtable introductions.

In an update on the meat processing plant regional project, David stated that the county will be submitting the plans and the letter of intent for the state application. There will be a letter of intent for the meat processing plant and an agricultural industrial park for each district as well. There will be a regional concept project, an agriculture industrial site project and an agriculture industrial park for BREDC.

Robert Branham with Southwest Community College announced that SWCC will be expanding the agriculture curriculum offerings. They are also working on a "2+2 articulation" through Virginia Tech, students would be able to do 2 years at SWCC and then transfer all credits to Virginia Tech's agribusiness programs. They have also hired 2 recruiters, one in Tazewell County and one in Russell County, to bring in students who would be interested in those programs. SWCC seeks to support the interests of the greater region, and this has led to adding athletics, automotive repair, and CBL classes are all things they are moving forward with.

David stated that Dr. Greg Brown, the superintendent of Russell County Public Schools, had written a letter supporting the use of canneries located in Russel County as USDA agriculture centers of education. He said that the project has expanded to include not only beef but sheep, goats, dairy, and produce and that education and technology will play a vital role for the future of the project. David mentioned the need for a SWVA resource guide for local government officials.

Steve mentioned that including dairy products might be difficult for this and future projects because of the few numbers of dairy farmers in the area. However, he thought that the farm that they visited might be able to include an agritourism aspect because of the farm's location on the clinch.

Becki gave an overview of the other working groups. The Advanced manufacturing group is working on a concept stage enhanced capacity project like the tech group's HUB Link. They want to include job postings, information on grants, wage v cost of living comparison tool. They are also conceptualizing a center of excellence which will be like the agriculture incubator. It would be a place where entrepreneurs and innovators could come in and receive research and development tools to build a product. She also mentioned a prison release program piloted in Bristol. The tech working group's hub link project has been approved and are interviewing companies for the website design. Their other project is called "Try SWVA" and would involve inviting people from NOVA to telework from SWVA so

they can see the benefits of working in the region.

Jeff brought up the idea of having small incubators across the region that are paired with local farms and farmers that seek to create value added products. These incubators would not have a set move out date if they are successful. Becki passed out a sheet with 11 other incubators, one gave people 5 acres of test land and then showed them how to start a farm. Many in the meeting noted that we have land, water, and a low cost of living that could be used to attract agriculture startups.

David thought that the group should invite Ben Gilmer to the next meeting and for him to talk about some things the group could do in the future and to expound on his work with Refresh Appalachia.

Additional Project Ideas:

The group participated in an exercise to identify new project ideas. Those ideas were:

Project	Pros	Cons	Next Steps
Identify the Region's Niche products and create a	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Allows these markets to sell more product at better pricing</li> <li>2. Identifies the variety of niche crops that is available in the region.</li> <li>3. Creates regional processing plants for products that all can use</li> <li>4. Identify how agri-tourism fits in</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the legal status of hemp? Is it currently a marketable product</li> <li>2. Overcoming the perception of SWVA</li> <li>3. Overcoming the perception of hemp growing and production</li> <li>4. The cost of growing, harvesting and production of products</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Identification of the products and where they should be grown? Or where they are.</li> <li>B. Identify processing techniques needed for each product</li> <li>C. Identify the markets for each product</li> <li>D. Research and develop marketing and branding</li> </ol>
2. Maximizing herbs that are conducive to our region	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Appears to be an unknown supply of some herbs</li> <li>2. The herbs can be a value add to the niche products</li> <li>3. the herbs can be sold at higher profits</li> <li>4. Can be marketed and branded alongside the niche products</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The location of these herbs is often kept quiet by individual harvesters</li> <li>2. Is the ROI worth it?</li> <li>3. A lot of the population needs more education on these products</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Contact Virginia Tech for their</li> <li>b. Contact Ben Gilmer</li> </ol>

3.Tie in the organic to the niche products	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Organic produces higher profits</li> <li>2. Organic can be branded for SWVA</li> <li>3. Our temperate climate is good for production</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The costs of organic farming</li> <li>b. The labor needed</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Define what the cost of changing to an organic farm would be</li> <li>B. Define locations</li> <li>C. Define what labor, equipment and supplies are needed.</li> </ol>
--	---	--	--

***Next Steps***

- Becki will contact Virginia Tech for more information on the Vibrant Virginia and it’s action items.
- Becki will contact Ben Gilmer and invite to the next meeting.
- Becki will share the RFP with the Agriculture Working Group.
- David Eaton will reach out for someone with agri-tourism experience

**Next meeting is Oct 25, 2018 at 1:00 pm, at Heartwood in Abingdon, Virginia.**