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Governor Northam Awards Grants to Fauquier, Pulaski, and Roanoke Counties to Advance Local Agriculture and Forestry Initiatives

Projects highlight unique approaches to expand food access, support farmers and forest landowners during COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

CATAWBA—Governor Ralph Northam today announced that Fauquier County, Pulaski County, and Roanoke County will each receive a grant of \$20,000 from the Governor’s Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund Planning Grant program to support local agriculture and forestry initiatives amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These grants will be matched by more than \$67,000 in additional funding from the applicant communities, non-profit organizations, and local governments.

This announcement comes on the heels of the Governor’s visit to the Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center today, where he toured the facility and highlighted one of the three projects receiving AFID Planning Grants. Photos from the Governor’s visit are available below.

Fauquier County will use the funding to assess the feasibility of creating additional farmers’ markets in the county, including a year-round market. The grant will also assist producers and consumers in navigating market disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which have led to increased demand for local foods and marketplaces.

Pulaski County will use the funding to create the Lena Huckstep Community Kitchen at the Calfee Community and Cultural Center (CCCC). The CCCC is a multi-faceted project that is transforming an historic African American school in Pulaski into a new community center, while preserving and honoring its history. Named after the school’s beloved cook, the community kitchen will include space for local food producers to create value-added products and expand their businesses. The funds will also support cold storage for a new mobile market, providing immediate support to Pulaski citizens experiencing food access challenges during the pandemic and growing connections between local producers and consumers.

Roanoke County will use the funding to expand the production of medicinal and edible forest plants in the Commonwealth. The Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center will partner with forest farmers to provide site assessments, technical assistance, and support for products that are in high demand, such as black cohosh and goldenseal. This project will help local producers

access markets and further develop a pipeline of products for forest farmed medicinal plants, both locally and nationally.

“As Virginia’s first and third largest industries, agriculture and forestry are vital to the health of our economy, and they have been upended by the pandemic,” **said Governor Northam**. “I commend Fauquier, Pulaski, and Roanoke Counties for identifying innovative ways to support local farm and forest producers in responding to immediate challenges from the current health crisis and creating sustainable industry growth. This assistance will go a long way in moving our recovery forward.”

Governor Northam [announced revised guidelines this spring](#) to better equip the AFID Fund Planning Grant program to function as a resource for local governments seeking to assist their agricultural communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes included expediting the review and award process for applications that address challenges related to the public health crisis and expanding the types of eligible match to allow localities to utilize additional funding sources.

“In these unprecedented times, it is important to support our local food system, agriculture and forest products industries, and our citizens with both immediate and long-term solutions and improvements,” **said Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring**. “I am pleased these localities have been able to identify creative ways to support agriculture, forestry, and agroforestry, and I am proud that VDACS can play a role.”

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) administers the AFID Planning Grant program and is accepting applications on a rolling basis. Successful applications demonstrate a clear need, a proposed solution, strong support from local government and the agriculture and forestry community, and the ability to provide matching funds. Additional information about the AFID Planning Grant program is available [here](#). Questions about the program and application process should be directed to Jennifer.Perkins@vdacs.virginia.gov.

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