

FEDERAL ISSUE

Federal Resources- USDA, Farm Bill, and Natural Resources Funding

The Virginia Agribusiness Council encourages critical assessment of budget decisions to ensure that core services to the agribusiness industry are preserved, including water quality investments for agribusinesses, and that additional costs are not imposed on the agribusiness industry. We support adequate funding and staffing, and appropriate organization of Federal Agencies and Programs in order to effectively and efficiently promote and support the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture and forestry. Specifically, the Council requests consideration of the following resource needs:

USDA AND FARM BILL PROGRAMS

- *The Council encourages funding and assistance for domestic and foreign market development, including the Market Access Program (MAP) within the Farm Bill.*
- *The Council supports reliable funding and fulfillment of program contracts with producers for Farm Bill programs throughout the entire term of the Farm Bill authorization. Farm Bill programs are regarded as multi-year contracts with the government, resulting in long-term business and investment decisions for producers, bankers, and others in rural economies*
- *The Council supports programs that enhance the viability and growth of the agribusiness industry which in return ensures that rural economies thrive.*
- *The Council supports USDA Rural Development, FSA loan programs and guaranteed loan programs with reasonable interest rates, especially programs that assist in the purchase of land by new and young farmers and ranchers, and recognizes their importance to the continued enhancement of rural communities.*

NATURAL RESOURCES AND FORESTRY PROGRAMS

- *The Council supports an emphasis on sustainable private forest conservation and management, including planning, technical assistance, education, and outreach to landowners.*
- *The Council supports funding assistance to states for forest assessment and planning, and to restore private forests after disasters.*

WATER QUALITY AND SOIL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

- *The Council supports equitable funding and complete implementation of environmental and conservation programs in which farmers participate in voluntary, incentive-based cost-share programs to meet Total Maximum Daily Load allocations through actions that improve soil and water quality, protect open spaces and wildlife habitat, and prevent flooding, drought losses and erosion. The Council supports adequate funding for technical assistance to implement these conservation programs.*
- *The Council supports federal and state efforts to identify, support, and accurately account for agriculture and forest best management practices, implemented both through voluntary efforts and in cooperation with adequately funded federal programs. These programs will assist in efforts to meet nutrient and sediment reduction goals through the utilization of unbiased, accurate, complete, and scientific data.*
- *The Council supports utilization of agricultural best management practices that: 1) are scientifically developed, 2) properly interpreted, 3) consider current agricultural practices, and 4) do not require actions unsupported by modern science, technology and economic feasibility in order to meet Chesapeake Bay goals.*

EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND EXTENSION PROGRAMS

- *The Council supports federal matching funds for the Perkins Vocational and Technical Education program. Loss of funding will directly affect operational and curriculum needs in local school*

districts, could reduce teaching or administrative positions, and have a dramatic and negative impact on agricultural and technical education, as well as future workforce readiness programs for Virginia.

- *The Council supports sound agricultural research critically important for agricultural production practices and to providing a safe, reliable, and affordable supply of food, fiber, and energy. The Council urges greater priority, attention, and funding to this critical need.*
- *The Council supports federal formula funding of agriculture and forestry related extension and research programs at our land grant universities, specifically formula funding of the Hatch Act, the McIntire-Stennis Act, and the Animal Health program.*

IMPACT ON AGRIBUSINESS

- USDA funds, and specifically Farm Bill programs, are regarded as multi-year contracts with the government, resulting in long-term business and investment decisions for producers, bankers, and others in rural communities. Consistent funding for these programs is critical.
- Virginia is home to a diverse agribusiness economy that consists of row crops, livestock and poultry operations, specialty crops, aquaculture, agritourism, and emerging agribusiness industries. As such, a variety of programs are needed to meet the different needs of our industry in Virginia, including commodity, conservation, trade and marketing, rural services, specialty crop research, disaster assistance, and energy development programs.
- Conservation programs such as EQIP are heavily utilized by many farmers in Virginia, and year after year, oversubscribed. These programs protect our valuable natural resources and leverage the investment of farmers with federal and state funds to implement conservation practices.
- Additionally, federal funds from the EPA and Chesapeake Bay Program are provided to Virginia DCR to assist farmers in implementing best management practices, facilitating nutrient management planning, and assisting with meeting water quality goals for the Chesapeake Bay and local TMDLs.
- Approximately 17% of the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOP) budget is derived from federal funds. These funds are utilized to assist with riparian buffer plantings, urban forest cover, and water quality technical assistance for loggers.
- Research and education funding are critical for the continued growth of our industry. Loss of formula funding results in deep reductions in these programs and a loss to Virginia's universities in matching state funding and faculty positions, and diminished quality of research which benefits all Virginians.

ACTIONS REQUESTED

- In an era of "doing with less", support the critical programs of importance to Virginia's agribusiness industry in the upcoming budget negotiations and the reauthorization of the Farm Bill. Recognize the significant decline in funding that has already taken place in recent years for agricultural programs.
- Advance programs that recognize Virginia's diverse agribusiness interests, which may be different from the needs of other states.
- Maintain funds for programs throughout the life of contracts with farmers, local governments, and universities.
- Support federal funding for water quality programs to allow state programs that achieve reasonable water quality benefits on farms and forestlands.