**Agribusiness Economic Viability**

Over 400 years after the first commercial agricultural production in Jamestown, agriculture and forestry remain Virginia’s top two private industries, contributing nearly $70 billion to the Commonwealth’s economy annually and accounting for approximately 450,000 jobs.

***Produce Safety Rule & Food Safety and Inspections***

* The Council supports maintaining compliance with federal food safety requirements that allow Virginia products to be sold and shipped interstate.
* The Council supports state based implementation of the Produce Safety Rule under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) including inspection by VDACS personnel with appropriate funding.
* The Council opposes the unregulated and uninspected sale of meat and meat products, dairy and dairy products, other “Potentially Hazardous Foods” as defined in the FDA Food Code, and other high-risk foods currently regulated by VDACS or the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).
* The Council supports the proper inspection of food establishments, animal slaughter and meat processing facilities, and food processing facilities by VDACS where necessary to protect public health, safety, and welfare or to comply with federal regulations.
* The Council supports efforts to increase the availability and access to USDA or VDACS inspected meat processing facilities, and efforts to address identified shortages of such facilities to meet local and state needs.
* The Council opposes the sale of unpasteurized milk and dairy products to the public. The Council opposes the sale of unpasteurized cheese and cheese foods unless properly aged according to FDA standards and regulations.
* The Council opposes the use of cow-share agreements for the sole purpose of circumventing laws and regulations prohibiting the sale of raw milk directly to consumers.

*Produce Safety Rule*

*FDA is in the process of implementing the Federal Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), and in particular new regulations that established standards for produce safety or the “Produce Safety Rule”. VDACS has an opportunity to obtain a federal-agreement that would provide funding for VDACS to manage the inspections and enforcement of the federal law, versus federal regulators. Legislation supported by the Council to authorize VDACS to implement the Produce Safety Law will be considered this year.*

*Food Safety and Inspections*

*The Council supports efforts to increase access to inspected facilities, so more producers have the ability to market their products in a safe way. Furthermore, the sale of unpasteurized, or raw, milk is currently illegal in Virginia. Unpasteurized milk presents many food safety concerns, allowing for the growth of many harmful bacteria. While some foods and other farm products may already be sold without state oversight, the General Assembly has historically decided that other more hazardous products should be regulated in order to protect the consuming public.*

***Biotechnology & Genetically Modified Organisms***

* The Council supports responsible research, development, and use of bio-engineered products and technologies, to benefit agribusinesses and significantly enhance quality of life for citizens.
* The Council opposes state-level requirements for mandated labeling of foods and products that are derived from crops and plants produced through genetic engineering.

*Genetically engineered (GE) crops have become widely used over the past few decades as research has allowed crops to be genetically modified to address many of the problems faced by conventional production. This summer, Congress passed legislation that will supersede state-level mandates regarding the labeling of food products with genetically engineered material.*

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*“We Represent Virginia Agribusiness with a Unified Voice”*

*For more information, please contact us at vac@va-agribusiness.org*