



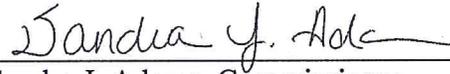
*VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE AND  
CONSUMER SERVICES*

**Report on the Response of the Virginia  
Department of Agriculture and  
Consumer Services to the Impact of the  
Aging of Virginia's Population**

**Sandra J. Adams  
Commissioner**

**November 14, 2014**

Pursuant to Code of Virginia §§ 2.2-5510 and 51.5-136, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) submits this report of its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of Virginia's population.



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Sandra J. Adams, Commissioner  
November 14, 2014

Designated agency official responsible for reviewing policy and programs and accommodating the interests of older adults and adults with disabilities under Code of Virginia § 2.2-604.1:

Name: Kevin Schmidt

Title: Director, Office of Policy, Planning and Research

Phone: 804-786-1346

Email: [Kevin.Schmidt@vdacs.virginia.gov](mailto:Kevin.Schmidt@vdacs.virginia.gov)

## **Executive Summary**

The mission of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) is to promote the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture, encourage environmental stewardship, and provide consumer protection.

While all VDACS programs and services are designed to serve all citizens, the agency's Division of Marketing and Development (DMD) and Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) provide direct services to seniors. VDACS DMD partners with the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services to implement the U. S. Department of Agriculture grant-funded Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). The program provides low income senior citizens the ability to purchase locally produced fresh fruits, vegetables, honey, and cut herbs. VDACS OFP administers the Virginia Farm Link and Century Farm programs. The Virginia Farm Link program aims to link retiring farmers with new and beginning farmers and to help retiring farmers and their families better plan for the transition of their farms. The Century Farm program is an honorary designation bestowed upon farm families that have owned and operated a family farm for 100 years or more.

Over the next ten years, as the population of Virginia ages, VDACS expects demand for SFMNP to remain steady or increase modestly. VDACS also anticipates that an increasing number of Virginians will be interested in resources relating to farm and forest land transitioning as the average age of the Virginia farmer increases. The agency expects to continue to have the capacity to adequately handle the service demands of older Virginians for SFMNP, the Virginia Farm Link program, and the Century Farm program.

### **Agency Description**

VDACS is responsible for administering over 60 laws and more than 70 regulations relating to consumer protection and the promotion of agriculture. VDACS' mission is to promote the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture, encourage environmental stewardship and provide consumer protection. In furthering that mission, the following strategic goals were included in the 2014-2016 agency strategic plan:

- Goal #1: Enhance opportunities for the growth, profitability, diversity and continued viability of the Virginia agriculture industry.
- Goal #2: Enhance public health by ensuring the food supply is safe and wholesome.
- Goal #3: Provide agricultural and consumer protection services that support economic growth, meet consumer needs and encourage environmental stewardship.
- Goal #4: Enhance Agency services and productivity through efficient work processes and procedures, technology, e-government applications and training.
- Goal #5: Enhance Virginia's ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from agricultural infestations, animal disease events, foodborne illness outbreaks and other natural and manmade disasters.

VDACS is organized into four units: the Commissioner's Office, Division of Animal and Food Industry Services, Division of Consumer Protection, and Division of Marketing and Development. The agency employs about 500 employees who work in and out of its headquarters in Richmond and several field offices and in the agency's five regional diagnostic animal health laboratories located in Warrenton, Lynchburg, Ivor, Harrisonburg, and Wytheville. The agency has an international marketing presence in China, India, Mexico, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and Canada.

In carrying out its responsibility for representing the concerns and interests of Virginia agriculture and consumers, VDACS works in cooperation with Virginia State University, Virginia Tech, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension on research, education, and marketing projects.

## Service Delivery Analysis

**1. If your agency has undertaken any actions to respond to the current and future impact of an aging population, such as needs assessments, strategic planning, or use of best practices, please briefly describe those actions. Please indicate what assistance from DARS could help your agency as it prepares to serve an aging Virginia population.**

Data from the 2012 United States Census of Agriculture released the spring of 2014 shows the average age of the typical Virginia farmer to be 59.5 years old with 36 percent of farmers being over 65 years old. As more farmers approach retirement age, more farmland and farming operations will be transitioning to future generations in coming years. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) continues to prepare for the aging of Virginia's farmers by providing the Virginia Farm Link program. The Virginia Farm Link program consists of a database that aims to link retiring farmers with new and beginning farmers as well as farm and forest land transition workshops held throughout Virginia in conjunction with the Virginia Cooperative Extension. These workshops aim to help retiring farmers and their families better plan for the transition of their farms. DARS could assist OFP by ensuring that Virginia Farm Link program materials are "senior-friendly".

**2. Briefly describe your agency's services that are used primarily by older Virginians and the funding streams (types and amounts) that support those services. If these particular services or funding streams are provided in conjunction with other state or local agencies or other for profit or non-profit organizations, please list them.**

### Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

VDACS participates in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services – Virginia Division for the Aging (DARS-VDA) to help implement the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). SFMNP provides low-income seniors with coupons that they can exchange for eligible foods (fruits, vegetables, honey, and fresh-cut herbs) at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture programs. VDACS' role under the MOU is to certify farmers and markets as eligible for participation under the federal regulations of the program. Low-income seniors, generally defined as individuals who are at least 60 years old and who have household incomes of not more than 185 percent of the federal poverty income guidelines (published each year by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), are the targeted recipients of SFMNP benefits.

The program is administered by DARS-VDA with federal grant money. The grant funding utilized to provide these benefits to seniors was \$445,878 in 2013. VDACS uses existing state personnel and resources to carry out the agency's obligations to DARS-VDA under the terms of the MOU.

Last year, 193 growers, 43 farmers' markets, and 32 roadside stands were certified as eligible for participation in this program. These entities served 11,150 senior citizens who purchased fresh produce using SFMNP.

### Virginia Farm Link Program

The VDACS OFP Virginia Farm Link program has components that are utilized by older Virginians. However, older Virginians are a subset of users, not necessarily the primary users of this program. As described above, the Virginia Farm Link program consists of a database that aims to link retiring farmers with new and beginning farmers as well as farm and forest land transition workshops held throughout Virginia in conjunction with the Virginia Cooperative Extension. The workshops are focused towards older Virginia farmers and their families. These workshops are intended to help older Virginians understand and better facilitate the transition of their farming and forest land to the next generation. The Virginia Farm Link program is funded by revenue generated from the Virginia agricultural license plate.

### Century Farm Program

The Century Farm program is another agency program that is utilized by older Virginians. The Century Farm designation is an honorary designation bestowed upon farm families that have owned and operated a family farm for 100 years or more. Often applicants for this program are older Virginians interested in recognizing their family's long-standing commitment to Virginia agriculture. This program is funded solely by VDACS – this program does not have an application fee and only charges a nominal fee for those who desire additional or replacement Century Farm signs.

**3. Identify current agency programs specifically designed to serve older Virginians that fall into any of the following eight categories: Health Care/Wellness; Education; Public Safety (including Adult Abuse Prevention); Recreation; Housing; Accessibility (including Livable Communities <http://www.vadrs.org/vblc/>); Financial Security; Transportation.**

#### Health Care/Wellness

SFMNP provides low-income seniors with coupons that they can exchange for eligible foods (fruits, vegetables, honey, and fresh-cut herbs) at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture programs.

#### Education

The Virginia Farm Link program database and farm and forest land transition workshops are intended to help older Virginians understand and better facilitate the transition of their farming and forest land to the next generation.

The Century Farm program recognizes and honors those farms that have been in operation for at least 100 consecutive years and the generations of Virginia farm families who maintained these farms.

#### Financial Security

The Virginia Farm Link program database and farm and forest land transition workshops are intended to help older Virginians understand and better facilitate the transition of their farming and forest land to the next generation, thereby assisting older farmers in making educated financial decisions.

**4. Is your agency able to meet all of the service demands of older Virginians for the services listed above? If there are any instances where the demand for services exceeds your agency's ability to meet the demand, please indicate the service and the extent of the unmet demand. Also, if your agency maintains waiting lists for services, please provide this information, including the waiting list numbers for each service.**

Currently, the agency has the capacity to adequately handle the service demands of older Virginians for SFMNP, the Virginia Farm Link program, and the Century Farm program.

**5. Provide the number of persons, by gender if available, who received services from the agency in each of the past five state fiscal years (FY 2010 through FY2014) who fell into the following age ranges: 60-64; 65-74; 75-84; and 85 and older. If your agency lacks specific information about the numbers of older Virginians it serves but has other evidence indicating that it is serving more or fewer older Virginians than it has in the past, please describe the basis for that estimation.**

VDACS does not maintain specific information about the age ranges of the older Virginians it serves. The agency estimates that the older farmers who utilize the agency's Virginia Farm Link and Century Farm programs are in the 60-74 age range.

**6. Referring to the services or funding you described in item two, describe any services or funding provided to older Virginians for which the accessibility or availability varies considerably in different parts of the Commonwealth.**

#### Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

Southwest Virginia has 18 farmers' markets and eight roadside stands that are certified to participate in SFMNP. Southside Virginia has eight certified farmers' markets and 10 certified roadside stands. Southeast Virginia has four certified farmers' markets and seven certified roadside stands. The Eastern Shore of Virginia has five certified farmers' markets and seven certified roadside stands. Augusta County has three certified farmers' markets. Arlington County has five certified farmers' markets.

#### Virginia Farm Link and Century Farm Programs

The accessibility or availability of these programs does not vary across the Commonwealth.

**7. Over the next five to 10 years, in what ways do you anticipate that an aging population will impact your agency's services, funding streams, or policies? Consider the impact from an increase in the number of older Virginians and whether the needs of older Virginians**

**will differ from those of today's older adults. Please include any anticipated impacts upon the cost of services, changes in type of services or the manner of service delivery, or modifications to agency policies, staffing needs, or procedures.**

Over the next ten years, as the population of Virginia ages, VDACS expects demand for SFMNP to remain steady or increase modestly. VDACS also anticipates that an increasing number of Virginians will be interested in resources relating to farm and forest land transitioning as the average age of Virginia farmers increases.

**8. Please describe the primary steps that should be taken at the federal, state, or local levels to meet the future demands of older Virginians and to make services delivery more effective and efficient.**

Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

SFMNP is administered by DARS-VDA with federal grant money. The availability of this program in Virginia is dependent upon continuation of the program at the federal level.

Virginia Farm Link Program

Access to improved methods of technology would assist the agency in making this program's online database and other program materials more "senior-friendly."

**9. Identify the extent to which your agency provides "customer-oriented" publications and websites that are designed to be "senior-friendly." If the information you currently provide is not readily accessible to older Virginians, please identify any steps your agency is taking to improve their access to this information.**

The agency website is compliant with both the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) guidelines and the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for Accessibility of State and Local Government Websites to People with Disabilities. One of the requirements of the VITA guidelines is that every state agency website has two prominent search features located in the upper right hand corner, one for the agency and the other for the official Commonwealth of Virginia website. This search feature allows visitors to the VDACS website an easy way to find information specific to their needs. The search feature is in the same location on every state agency website making it easier for all segments of the population to search for items of interest.

One of the requirements of the ADA standards is to make the site usable by those who are visually impaired. A person who has difficulty reading a computer screen or who is legally blind may use assistive technology to enable them to access VDACS' website. Visually impaired people who cannot see computer monitors may use screen reader devices that speak the text that would normally appear on a monitor. People who have difficulty using a computer mouse can use voice recognition software to control their computers with verbal commands.

**10. Describe any other services or programs that your agency plans to implement in the future to address the impact of the aging of Virginia's population.**

VDACS does not anticipate the implementation of new programs to address the impact of the aging of Virginia's populations. However, VDACS does anticipate an increase in the demand for SFMNP, the Virginia Farm Link program, and the Century Farm program.

**11. Please indicate if your agency is experiencing an increase in employees retiring later and describe any actions your agency is taking or plans to take to accommodate its aging workforce with innovative practices.**

VDACS maintains demographic data on employee age and tenure and recognizes a trend in the aging of the agency's workforce. Numerous staff members have considerable years of experience and expertise in specialized programs such as animal health and welfare, plant protection, pesticides, consumer protection, marketing, economic development, policy, finance, budgeting, information systems, and human resources.

VDACS is facing the challenge of losing approximately one-third of its workforce to retirement within the next five years. Many of these individuals are long-tenured staff in key positions. Currently, approximately 68 employees are eligible to retire and an additional 74 will be eligible within the next five years.

In fiscal year (FY) 2003, 54 VDACS employees were 60 years old or older. Currently, 87 VDACS employees are 60 years old or older, a 62 percent increase from FY 2003. As such, it would appear that employees are delaying retirement.

With the potential loss of so many long-term employees with institutional knowledge, documentation of processes and procedures is critical to provide historical information and resource material. Mentoring, coaching, and cross training are increasingly more important. Traditional training programs are used with enhanced methods such as developmental assignments, cross training assignments, temporary duties, and language and cultural sensitivity training. Where possible, mentoring programs that hire a replacement employee prior to a current employee retiring are implemented and provide long-term cost savings. Computer training will continue to be critical as the world of technology becomes more and more fast-paced and complicated. Budgetary constraints will make succession planning a challenge.