

- Governor Northam Announces Grant to Assist Virginia Farmers and Food Producers Selling Directly to Buyers

~ Three Shenandoah Valley counties receive funding to support vendor training, creation of toolkit for hosting of local food trade shows ~

RICHMOND—Governor Ralph Northam today awarded a planning grant from the Governor’s Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund to Augusta, Rockingham, and Shenandoah counties to support the development of an innovative local foods program and share the program with other communities. The AFID planning grant program helps localities engage and promote the agriculture industry by providing and expanding new market opportunities at the local and regional level. Shenandoah County is serving as the lead for this project, which leverages an AFID award of \$11,885 with an additional \$14,000 in local funds.

“Supporting regional efforts to grow and develop the Commonwealth’s agriculture sector, our largest industry, is key to ensuring long-term economic success,” said Governor Northam. “Bringing opportunity to all parts of Virginia demands innovation and partnership like that which is on display with this project, and I commend Augusta, Rockingham, and Shenandoah counties for thinking strategically about how to best integrate regional agricultural assets into their larger economic development plans.”

While agriculture is the Shenandoah Valley’s leading industry, a challenge faced by many small and mid-sized farmers is selling to larger, local buyers like restaurants and institutions. This project addresses that issue in two ways by leveraging the Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair, a successful local foods trade show. First, in the lead-up to the event, training will be provided to farmers and producers on how to network and market their products to wholesale buyers. Second, following the event, a toolkit will be developed for use by other local governments in the Commonwealth on how to host their own local foods event and train their producers to take advantage of opportunities to market and sell their products.

“Agriculture is an essential piece of Virginia’s economy and it benefits the whole state to support new and creative ways for producers of all sizes to get their products to market,” said Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring. “I applaud efforts like the Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair and hope to see more like it across the Commonwealth.”

Since its creation in 2012, the AFID planning grant program has awarded \$807,482 to 38 projects covering 58 unique localities across the Commonwealth. The planning grants are part of the Governor’s AFID program, an economic development program for political subdivisions of the Commonwealth committed to growing and developing their local agriculture and forestry industry sectors. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services administers the AFID program and planning grant applications are accepted on a rolling basis.