



Hosted by
Delegate Delores Oates
Virginia HD 31

AGRITOURISM *Summit*

Speakers:

Charles Green,
Commissioner of VDACS

Katie Conner &
Kelli Weaver,
Virginia Tourism

Date Presentation: **August 26, 2026**



Welcome

Delegate Delores Oates

Agritourism Summit

Speakers:

Commissioner Green

Virginia Department of Agriculture Consumer Services

Kelli Weaver

Virginia Tourism

Questions



Contact:

Delegate Delores Oates

DelDOates@House.Virginia.Gov

804-698-1031



Charles Green Commissioner VDACS

Charles Green became the 19th Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) on January 17, 2026, after more than 20 years with the agency. He previously served as Deputy Commissioner and Director of Marketing and Development, where he helped expand domestic and international markets for Virginia agricultural products.

A Rockbridge County native, Green holds a B.S. in Forestry and Wildlife from Virginia Tech and an MBA from Campbell University, and his family owns a multigenerational farm in King William County.

As Commissioner, he is focused on expanding opportunities for Virginia farmers and agribusinesses while supporting responsible regulatory oversight and economic growth.

Contact:

Charles Green
VDACS Commissioner
804-786-3501



Virginia Agriculture & Agritourism

Charles R. Green

Commissioner

Virginia Agriculture Economic Impact

- Agriculture is Virginia's largest private industry
- Economic impact of **\$82 billion** annually
- Provides over **380,000** jobs
- Ag and forestry total of **\$106 billion** impact jobs
- Every job in ag and forestry supports 1.7 jobs elsewhere in the Virginia economy
- About 14% (1/7) of total ag and food revenue is at the farm. The remainder is value-added.
- Agricultural exports account for more than 20 percent of the value of U.S. agricultural production



About VDACS

- Established in 1877 to address the growing need for a centralized agency to support and regulate Virginia's agricultural industry, protect consumers and promote the state's ag products.
- Headquartered in Richmond and has several field offices, four regional diagnostic animal health laboratories and a global network of representatives promoting Virginia products internationally.

Agency Mission

VDACS has a dual mission to support and protect.

1. Promote the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture
2. Provide consumer protection and encourage environmental stewardship



Division of Marketing (Condensed)



Marketing Director

Rob Davenport

Deputy Director of
Marketing

Melissa Ball

Agriculture & Forestry
Development
(AFID Grants)

Rachel Meyers

Domestic Marketing

Sarah Jane Thomsen

Promotions

Lindsey McDonald

International
Marketing

Jesse Phillips

Food Distribution

Jose Millan

Market News
Service

Brett Richardson

Domestic Marketing and Promotions

- Regional Marketing Managers :
 - Offer assistance to local farmers to market Virginia agriculture products
 - Develop value-added ventures
 - Support new marketing initiatives & promotional activities
 - Connect producers with buyers through buyer tours, meetings, and marketing events
 - Manage commodity boards and work with associations – Soybean Board, Corn Board, Horse Board, Cattle Board, Small Grains Board, Wine Board, Spirits Board, etc.
 - Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – A Federal grant program administered by the state to improve the production and consumption of specialty crops in the state

Your Promotions & Marketing Team

- Promotions Manager,
Lindsey McDonald
 - Formerly was the Northeast VDACS Marketing Specialist, and previously worked at Farm Credit
 - Virginia Tech alumna
- Domestic Marketing Manager,
Sarah Jane Thomsen
 - Formerly worked at Virginia Farm Bureau | State Fair of Virginia and the Virginia Agribusiness Council
 - University of Georgia and Virginia Tech alumna



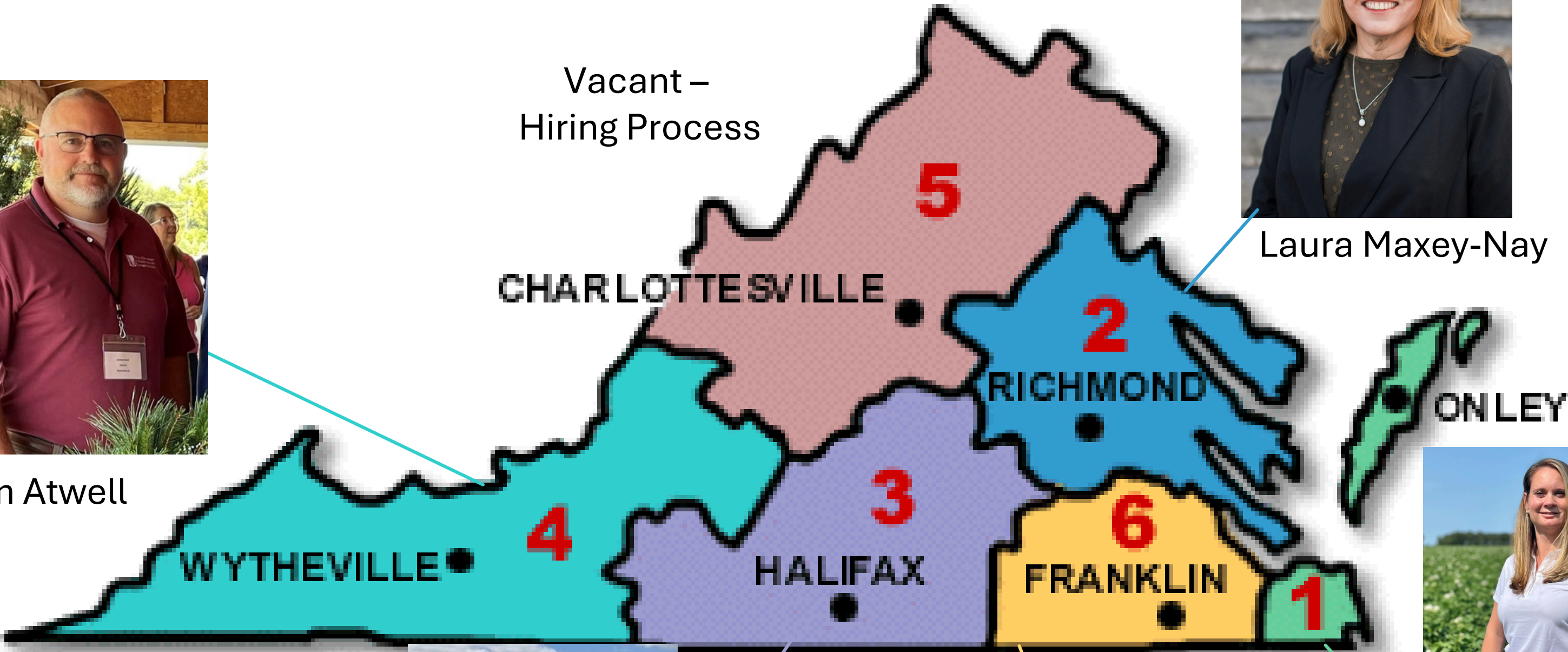
Domestic Marketing Regional Staff



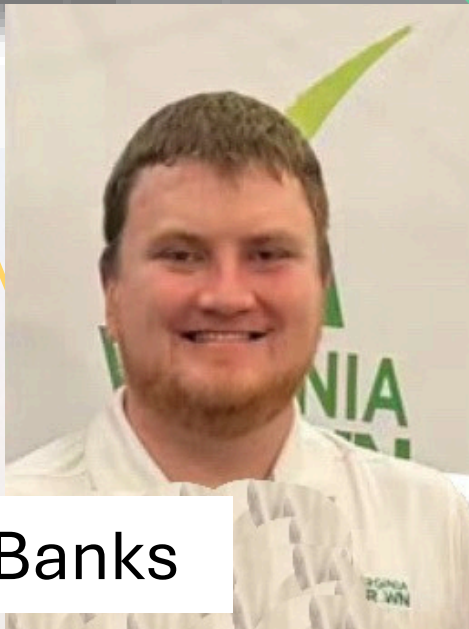
Jim Atwell



Laura Maxey-Nay



Jennifer Atkins



Scott Banks



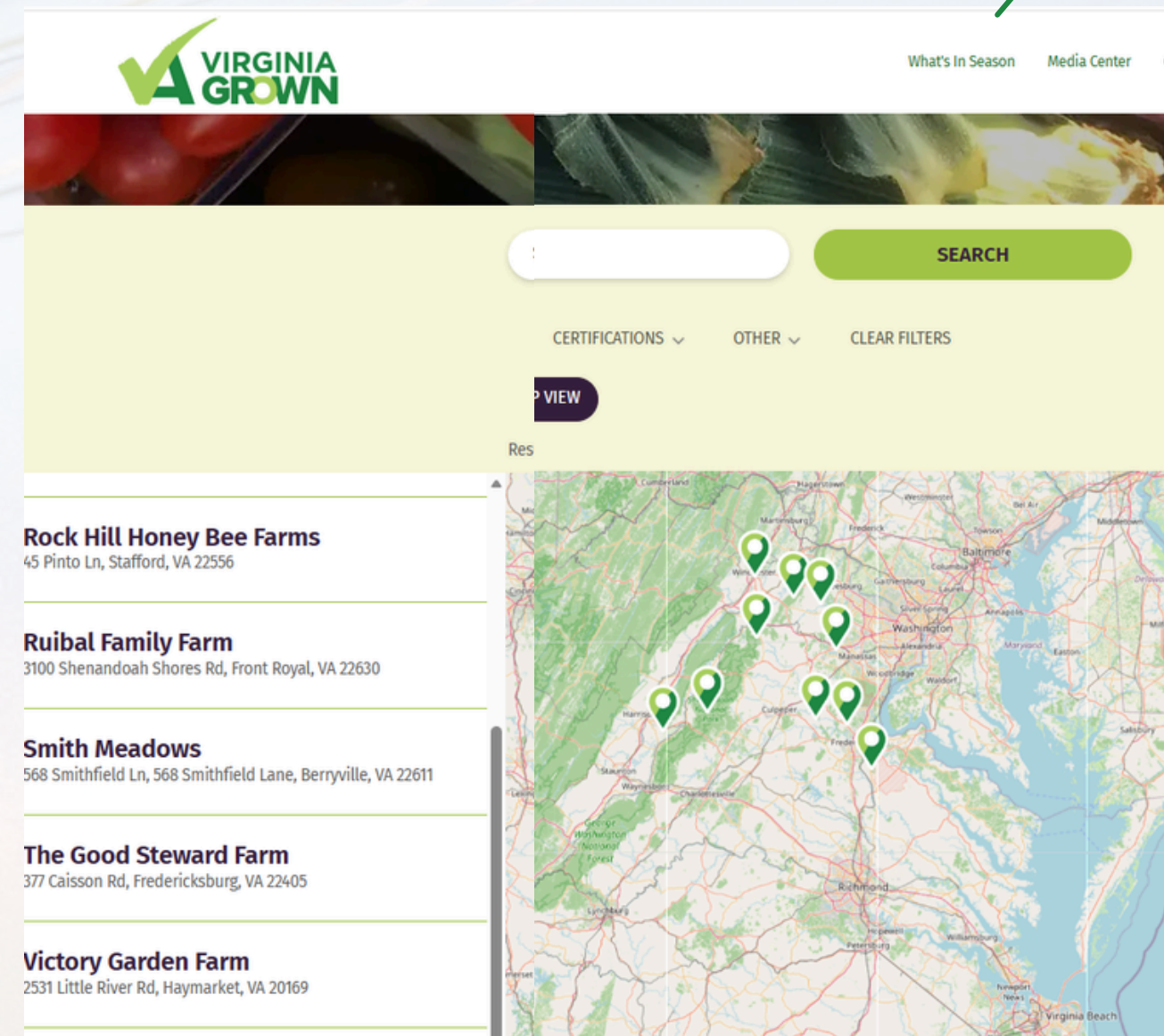
Ursula Deitch

Virginia Grown

- A branded program started in 1995 to offer marketing tools, education opportunities, and materials for growers
- The program is free to participants
- Virginia Grown.com is an online platform highlighting members
- Members may use Virginia Grown trademarks and have access to free point of sale materials
- *VaGrown.vdacs.virginia.gov*



Garrett Petro



Virginia's Finest

- A branded program that began in 1989 to promote specialty food and beverage products
- The logo is a guarantee of top-quality Virginia-produced products
- Products must meet or exceed quality standards and meet food safety inspections and labeling
- *VaFinestProducts.vdacs.virginia.gov*

Member Login

Enter your credentials to access

Email

Password

☐

By checking the box, I agree to the Privacy Policy.

Name / Description / Product

Search Virginia's Finest Products or Companies

Search

Search Results

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#)



A Bowl of Good Inc.

Katrina Didot
831 Mt. Clinton Pike
Harrisonburg VA 22802
540 437-9020
Email: abowlofgood@gmail.com

Product(s): Frozen gourmet soups and stews. Products include; Imagine Jollof, Red White and Moo, red a chocolate; V2 - Veggie Squared, vegetarian vegetable soup; Smok'n Cub'n, (

Brand Name(s): A Bowl of Good.

R, W, MO



A Thyme To Plant at Lavender Fields Farm

Stan and Nicole Schermerhorn
Nicole Schermerhorn
11300 Winfrey Road
Glen Allen VA 23059
804 262-7167
Fax: 804 262-3347
Email: admin@athymetoplant.com; sales@athymetoplant.com
Email 2: shaun@lavenderfieldsfarm.com

Product(s): USDA Certified Organic herb and vegetable plants. Over 200 varieties and classes available all by reservation.

Brand Name(s): A Thyme to Plant Herb Farm.

DS



AR's Hot Southern Honey/LMP Food Group LLC

Ames J. Russell
PO Box 7910
Richmond VA 23223
804 502-2950
Email: ames@hotsouthernhoney.com

Product(s): We produce an award-winning line of honey products: hot honey, wildflower. Completing our brand family of products are our Peach Hot Sauce, and

Brand Name(s): AR's Hot Southern Honey. AR's Southern Honey.

W, R, FS, MO

You're invited –
March 24

Virginia Made. Market Ready.

The 2027 Virginia Food & Beverage Expo showcases the best of the Commonwealth's specialty food and beverage industry. Take advantage of this exclusive experience to discover hundreds of Virginia-made, market-ready products and connect with industry buyers, sellers, and partners.



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
WHEN 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
WHERE Main Street Station
Richmond, VA
DETAILS <https://vafinest.vdacs.virginia.gov/virginia-food-and-beverage-expo>

You're invited –
***Virginia Made.
Market Ready.***

The 2027 Virginia Food & Beverage Expo showcases the specialty food and beverage industry in Virginia. Take advantage of this exclusive experience to connect with hundreds of Virginia made, market ready products, buyers, sellers, and partners.

SAVE the Date for March 24, 2027!

*To: Virginia
Food L♥vers*

Virginia Food & Beverage Expo

- One-of-a-kind opportunity to connect with hundreds of Virginia made, market ready products, buyers, sellers, and partners.

Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund

- Economic development incentive fund created by General Assembly in 2012 to specifically benefit ag and forestry companies
- Provides grants or loans to localities to attract new and expanding ag and forestry
- Comprised of three programs:
 - AFID Facility Grants: economic development incentive grants for new or expanding agriculture and forestry value-added or processing facilities
 - AFID Planning Grants: supports local planning efforts and initiatives benefiting agriculture and forestry
 - AFID Infrastructure Grants: build local food and farming infrastructure.

2026 AFID Infrastructure Grant Award Recipient Examples

- **New Market, New Market Downtown Marketplace — \$50,000**
 - The town of New Market is using grant funding to support the construction of a permanent **Downtown Marketplace Pavilion** that will serve as a year-round marketplace, community gathering space, and event venue.
- **Page County, Page Valley Food and Visitor Hub — \$50,000**
 - Page County is creating the Page Valley Food & Visitor Hub, a fully licensed, **shared-use commercial kitchen** that is county-owned and locally operated to help expand infrastructure for food businesses and value-added agricultural production.
- **Orange County, Furniture By Design Expansion — \$25,000**
 - Furniture by Design's kiln project will create **new wood processing facilities for local producers and small businesses** to dry their own lumber and buy locally sourced and dried lumber and provide the urban-forest-to-home-goods connection the local community needs.





VDACS Food Safety Program

Program Overview

- The VDACS Food Safety Program works to ensure that food and dietary supplements manufactured, processed, stored and sold in Virginia are safe, wholesome and properly labeled.
- The program currently inspects over 13,000 retail and manufactured food firms making, holding, or selling food products in the Commonwealth, including:
 - Bakeries
 - Convenience stores
 - Grocery stores
 - Ice cream/frozen dessert shops
 - Seafood Markets
 - Alcoholic beverage tasting rooms
 - Food manufacturing plants
 - Commercial kitchen-based food processors
 - Home kitchen-based food processors
 - Food storage warehouses and distribution centers
- Currently, approximately 1,000 permitted home kitchen food processing operations are successfully operating in Virginia with state government oversight. These firms can sell at any location, including wholesale.

Home / Cottage Food Processing in Virginia

- Legislation enacted in 2008, 2013, and 2024 amended the Law to allow specific lower-risk foods made in a home kitchen to be sold without a food safety inspection or permit if they met certain requirements.
- Virginia is one of only a few states that currently allows for the sale of many foods produced in inspected and permitted home kitchens.
- The primary goal of the current limitations in law are to prevent uninspected food from entering commerce in a way that could mislead consumers unaware of the reduced food safety protections. A critical aspect of being an informed consumer is purchasing directly from the producer of the uninspected product.

Foods Currently Allowed Under Exemption

Baked goods	Candies	Cereals	Coated and uncoated nuts	Cotton candy	Dried fruits	Dried herbs
Dried pasta	Dried tea	Dry baking mixes	Dry mixtures	Dry seasonings	Granola	Honey
Jams and jellies*	Pickles and acidified vegetables**	Popcorn and popcorn balls	Roasted coffee	Trail mixes	Vinegars and flavored vinegars	

- Exempt food products cannot require time or temperature control for safety after preparation

*Jams and jellies not considered to be low-acid or acidified low-acid food products

** Pickles and acidified vegetables with an equilibrium pH of 4.6 or less

LABELING Requirements for exempt low-risk foods and acidified vegetables

- Packaged food products must be labeled as required by law
- In addition to standard labeling, exempt product labels must include:
 - Producer's name and telephone number
 - Producer's physical address (*NEW eff. July 1, 2026: or PO box number in place of street address*)
 - Date food product was processed/made
 - Disclaimer Statement
 - “NOT FOR RESALE — PROCESSED AND PREPARED WITHOUT STATE INSPECTION”

2026 Code Changes

- HB402 became law July 1, 2026
- It expands the circumstances under which exempt “cottage food” products can be sold.
- Allows them to be sold at any location instead of limiting sales to homes, farmers markets, and temporary events.
- Additionally, it permits these products to be delivered and sold online within the Commonwealth.
- Allows a PO Box to be used in place of a street address on exempt labels.

Point-of-Sale Requirements for exempt foods

PREVIOUS

- Sold to an individual in the Commonwealth for his own consumption:
 - In person
 - At the private home, temporary event, or farmers market
- **CANNOT be:**
 - Sold online
 - Delivered in person, by mail, or by delivery service
 - Sold for resale or consignment
 - Sold across state lines
 - Offered for sale to be used in or offered for consumption in retail food establishments

Effective July 1, 2026

- Sold to an individual in the Commonwealth for his own consumption:
 - In person, online, by phone
 - At any location (with some exceptions), delivered in person, by mail, or by delivery service
 - **CANNOT be:**
 - Sold for resale or consignment
 - Sold across state lines
 - Offered for sale to be used in or offered for consumption in retail food establishments
- NOTE: Honey processed under the exemption can be sold at any location. There are no restrictions on how it can be sold**



Questions?

VDACS Food Safety Program:
foodsafety@vdacs.virginia.gov
804-786-3520

Thank you!



**HOLD YOUR QUESTIONS
BECAUSE THERE'S MORE...**

KELLI WEAVER

Destination Development Manager



Contact:

Kelli Weaver

Virginia Tourism Corporation
540-679-6697

Kelli serves as the Destination Development Manager for the Shenandoah Valley and Virginia Piedmont regions. Through her roles in government, higher education, and recreation, Kelli has been involved in tourism and community development, destination marketing, and uplifting agritourism businesses within her service regions.

In addition to her role with VTC, Kelli is a member of the 2026 Virginia Rural Leadership Institute (VRLI) cohort and serves on the Technical Advisory Committee for the Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP). Kelli is a proud graduate of Laurel Ridge Community College, James Madison University, and Shenandoah University and holds a professional certificate in Sustainable Tourism Destination Management.

Katie is the Director of Destination Development for the Virginia Tourism Corporation, where she leads statewide efforts to advance tourism, economic development, and community growth across the Commonwealth. She oversees the Destination Development Managers who work closely with communities, tourism organizations, businesses, and government partners to realize their tourism potential.

Katie has worked in hospitality for nearly 20 years and has dedicated her career to helping communities leverage tourism as a catalyst for economic opportunity and quality of life. Katie received her MBA from Longwood University, BS in Communication from Radford University, and is a graduate of Lead Virginia.

Contact:

Katie Conner

Virginia Tourism Corporation
540-676-4953



KATIE CONNER

Director of Destination Development

CREATING OPPORTUNITY & CULTIVATING CONNECTION

Regional Opportunities

Community Leaders

- Provide valuable resources to constituents, producers, partners, and the business community
- Bring additional revenue to the area – Tourism contributed **\$2.6B** in state and local taxes and saved households an average of **\$1,020** in 2025

Producers & Agritourism Venues

- Share your agritourism experiences with visitors
- Explore opportunities for collaboration
- Identify key funding, marketing, and educational resources

Regional Stakeholders

- Share the region's history, culture, and traditions
- Invite visitors to immerse themselves in the Shenandoah Valley
- Uplift your stories



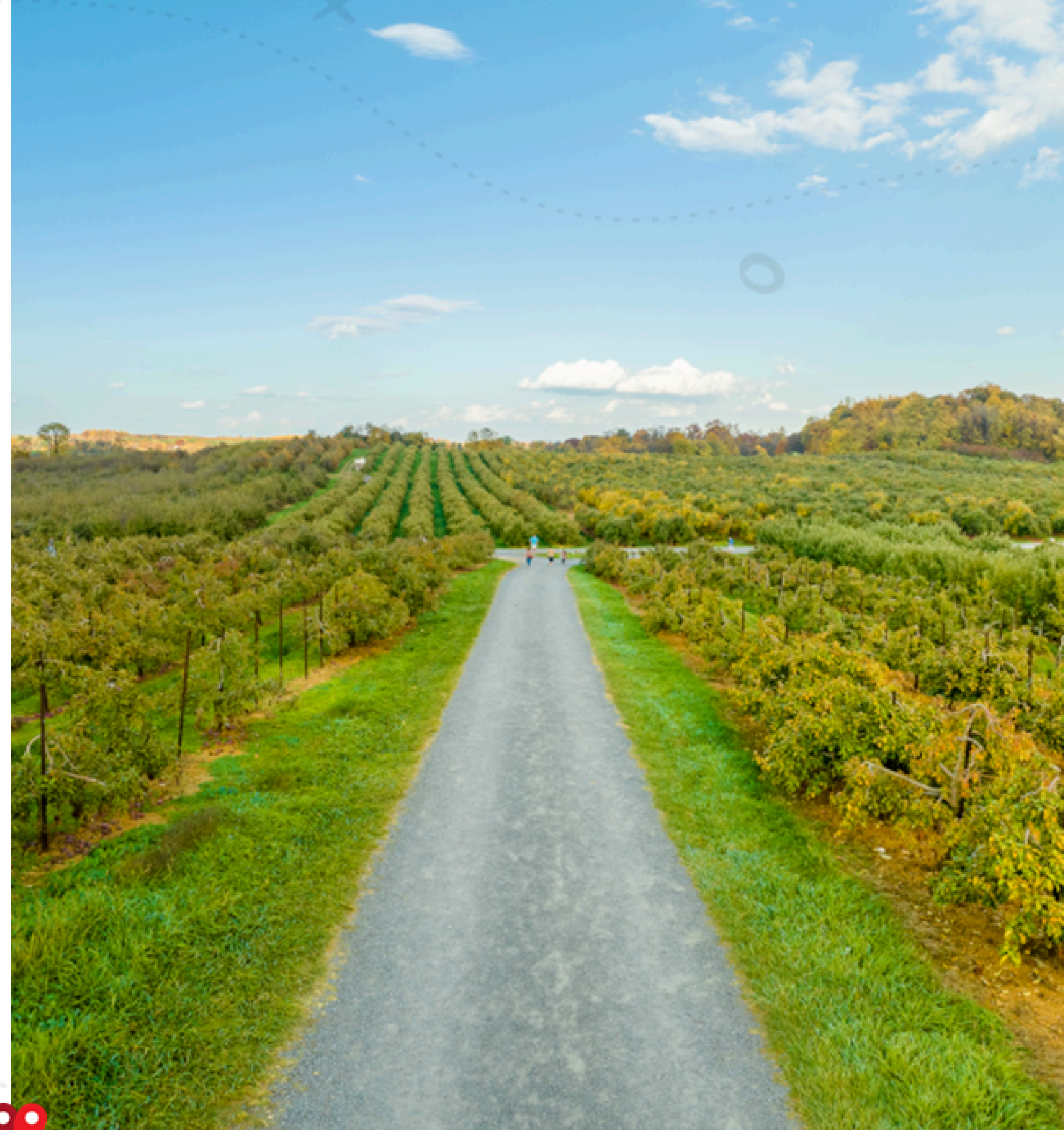
Tourism Industry Partners

Local & Regional Partners

- Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs, CVBs)
- Main Street Organizations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs)
- Planning District Commissions (PDCs)
- Shenandoah Valley Travel Association (SVTA)

State Agencies & Associations

- Virginia Restaurant, Lodging and Travel Association (VRLTA)
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Small Farm Outreach Program
- Virginia Main Street (VMS)



STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO AGRITOURISM

Statewide Strategic Tourism Plan

- VTC partnered with Hunden Partners to update Virginia's Statewide Strategic Tourism Plan. This plan will guide our efforts in understanding how we can enhance Virginia's offerings and encourage travelers to extend their length of stay.

Why It Matters

- Research shows that destinations with strong visitor economies experience stronger overall economic growth, which highlights the need to boost tourism and increase visitor spending.

The Process

- Hunden's assessment accumulated from extensive stakeholder engagement, including regional focus groups, industry-represented steering committees, individual interviews, and region-specific surveys.



Shenandoah Valley Regional Plan

State of the Region

- One of Virginia's most recognizable and picturesque regions.
- Strong concentration of outdoor experiences that attract nature enthusiasts, agritourists, and families.
- Features historic downtowns, Civil War battlefields, Revolutionary War history, and educational and cultural institutions.
- Compared to its neighbors is positioned less as an urban commercial hub and more as a destination for leisure, recreation, and agritourism.

Regional Strengths

- Strongest assets are defined by the region's identity as a nationally recognized recreational and environmental destination.
- Rich with wineries, breweries, and an emerging culinary scene, including many family-owned and operated vineyards and wineries.



Shenandoah Valley Regional Plan

Challenges

- Seasonality and accessibility. As a region centered around recreation, outdoor tourism, and agritourism, the winter months are slower periods.
- Accessibility and connectivity between properties, resulting in challenging commutes for visitors between venues.

Opportunities

- Further collaboration between the region's wineries and local restaurants to enhance brand notoriety across the state.
- Eatertainment concepts that combine dining with family entertainment options within the region to increase visitor spending and complement the recreational tourism draws.



INDUSTRY TRENDS SHAPING AGRITOURISM

Food & Everyday Culture Tourism

Cultural Immersion in Regional Food Systems

- Travelers are viewing food as a chance for cultural immersion.
- The farm-to-table movement has shifted, focusing on deeper connections with regional traditions and ingredients. This allows travelers to look through a wide lens at the culinary ecosystems of a region.
- Exploring grocery stores, booking farm stays, sampling street food, shopping at local markets, and taking home edible souvenirs have become commonplace practices among travelers.

Authentic Experiences & Hyper-Local Ingredients

- 77% of travelers report that they enjoy exploring local grocery stores to try authentic local food and drink offerings.
- If drinking, travelers tend to lean more into investigative drinking, centered on hyper-regional spirits and artisan ingredients.

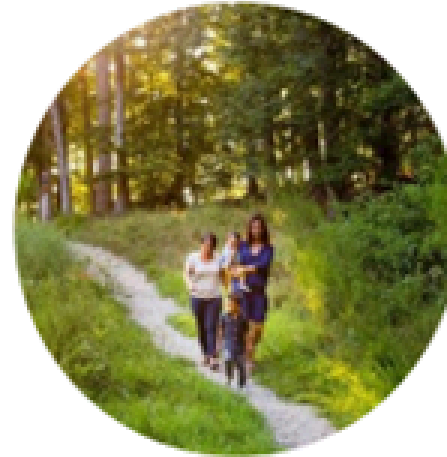


The Enriched Traveler

Audience:

The Enriched Traveler

- Ages 25-54
- Average HHI \$131k
- Married, 43% with children
- Behaviors:
 - Seeks to be **enriched through travel**
 - **Create memories with family** & children
 - **Favor a variety** of attractions and destinations, including the beach, mountains, cities, and historical sites.
 - Wants to try **new experiences**, including food
 - Wants to learn about and experience **different cultures**
 - **Immerse** with locals



RESOURCES FOR AGRITOURISM PARTNERS

Marketing & Communications

Creating Messages that Move

- What tools and strategies can we use to reach new audiences?
- How can we influence visitors in the drive market?
- What content tends to perform well?
- How can we showcase the best of our businesses?

Key Resources

- Digital Listings and Itineraries on Virginia.org
- Advertising in Virginia Welcome Centers (PMAP)
- In-State Media Contact List
- PR Leads
- Partner Collaboration Form
- Virginia is for Lovers® Logo Request



Grants & Funding Sources

Leveraging Your Marketing Dollars

- How can we reach more people with our message?
- How can we expand upon our experiences and events?
- How can we demonstrate the value of our efforts in our applications?

Investments in Your Business and Community

Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) offers several funding programs to support Virginia's tourism industry.

These investments support local communities, create economic opportunities, and contribute to the overall economic growth and prosperity for the Commonwealth.



Research & Industry Education

Understanding Visitor Trends & Path of Travel

- What is influencing visitor demand?
- How do we respond to new trends and consumer behavior?
- What assets connect our community to larger trends?
- How can we pivot in response to seasonal changes?

Key Resources

- VTC Statewide Strategic Tourism Plan
- VTC Regional Tourism Plan for the Shenandoah Valley
- VTC Audience Segmentations
- Economic Impact Reports
- Travel Data & Profiles
- DMO & CVB Strategic Plans



Resources for Localities

Building Thriving Communities

- What do visitors need or expect in our destination?
- What are some gaps we can fill?
- What is the greatest potential for growth in our community?
- How do we retain our authentic regional identity?
- Which partners should we bring to the table?

Key Resources

- VTC Statewide Strategic Tourism Plan
- VTC Regional Tourism Plan for the Shenandoah Valley
- Tourism Zones
- Tourism Improvement Districts (TIDs)
- Tourism Development Financing Program (TDFP)



Thank you!



QUESTIONS?

**Go to menti.com and
enter code 2697 6465**

click “x” and “Open Q&A”

or...

