



**RAPPAHANNOCK-RAPIDAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL**  
**Meeting Minutes – April 28, 2016**

**Members Present:**

Linda Blair	Orange County Representative
Michelle Edwards	Chair and RRRC Liaison Member
Jill Jefferson	Processing and Distribution Technical Advisory Member
Kenner Love	Rappahannock County Representative
Jess Palmer	Farmland Preservation and Conservation Technical Adv. Member
Becky Sheffield	Culpeper County Representative
Ken Smith	Production Sector Technical Advisory Member
Clyde Firman	Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member

**Members Absent:**

Ray Pickering	Fauquier County Representative
Kirsten Dueck	Health Sector Technical Advisory Member

**Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order at 6:38pm by Michelle Edwards, chair, with a quorum present, and introductions were made. Ms. Edwards noted that Kirsten Dueck of the Fauquier Health Foundation and Ray Pickering of Fauquier County Department of Agriculture Development could not be present; however, Ms. Dueck submitted her votes by written proxy.

**Review of Draft Bylaws**

Ms. Edwards presented the Draft Bylaws to ensure the Council had a clear understanding of key aspects of the document, and to discuss any comments member may have. Ms. Edwards reviewed Article 2 of the Bylaws, which included the vision developed through the Community Conversations for the Rappahannock-Rapidan Farm and Food Plan adopted by the regional commission in October 2015.

Ms. Edwards reviewed the criteria for Council membership and noted that Madison County has not yet appointed its Locality Representative, but is working with the local Cooperative Extension office to do so. Additionally, Jim Hankins of the Fauquier Education Farm recently decided to decline his appointment as Education Sector Technical Advisory Member, which leaves the position unfilled. Jill Jefferson asked if a Council member could assume more than one position; Ms. Edwards clarified that the Council needs a representative from each county and

each food system sector named in the bylaws. The Council has 60 days to replace a technical advisor; however, locality's control their appointee and have no time period.

Further, Ms. Edwards explained absence and dismissal requirements, term limits, her position as initial chair person, and voting procedures. Lastly, Ms. Edwards outlined how the Council serves as an advisory capacity to the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC), and any policy recommendations of the Food Policy Council must be approved by the Regional Commission.

A motion to approve the Draft Bylaws was made by Becky Sheffield and seconded by Linda Blair. Ms. Edwards noted that Kirsten Dueck, who could not be present, submitted her approval of the Draft Bylaws via email. Upon Council vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

### **Local Food Marketing and Agri-tourism Grant Proposal**

Ms. Edwards provided an overview of a potential USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program Grant proposal for local food and agri-tourism marketing in the RRRC region (see attached handout). The grant proposal is due May 12, 2016 and has no match requirement. RRRC will be the applicant for the grant and \$100,000 would fund a local food marketing plan, which is a one of the nine Priority Projects outlined in the region's Food and Farm Plan. The marketing plan would have two phases: the first phase would emphasize raising public awareness of local food products in the RRRC region, and the second phase would extend promotion to nearby metro areas such as Washington, DC and Charlottesville.

For the purposes of the grant proposal, Ms. Edwards suggested that a working brand concept could be titled "Virginia Piedmont Grown" since the RRRC used to have a "Piedmont Grown" campaign in the past. Additionally, recent interviews of regional stakeholders conducted by RRRC indicated that a brand specific to the five-county region may be too limited. "The Virginia Piedmont" is well-established and recognized by consumers and tourists outside of the region and may be a good compromise between the state local food brand and local branding.

Kenner Love questioned if the brand should be "Northern Piedmont Grown" since the Piedmont region technically extends to the southern border of the state. Members discussed this suggestion, but no agreement was reached. Rather than rushing to a vote, Ms. Edwards suggested for the purposes of the grant application, "Virginia Piedmont Grown" could be used as a placeholder until a consensus could be reached. The Council decided to table this discussion until the next meeting.

Ms. Edwards continued explaining other aspects of the grant proposal, including partnering with Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) and the Warrenton, Culpepper, and Madison farmers markets, as well as further development of the Tween Rivers agri-artisan trail. Jessica Palmer noted that the grant would support printing and mailing of the Buy Fresh-Buy Local Guide, which has a distribution of 74,000, and also PEC's Farmers-Chef Express tool, including farmer-buyer mixers similar to "speed dating." Ms. Edwards mentioned the grant would provide funding for a regional food expo/tasting event during the third year of the project.

Mr. Love suggested if the national online software tool, Market Maker, which connects producers to buyers, could be used to enhance the grant application. Mr. Love noted that Virginia Farm Credit funded market maker for three years and is looking for new sponsors to continue using the program. Ms. Edwards and Ms. Sheffield agreed that the best fit would be to invite representatives of the tool to present at one of the farmer marketing workshops to be funded by the grant.

Ken Smith asked about other farmers markets and counties that are not currently represented in the grant. Ms. Edwards responded that any direct-to-consumer retailer, including farm stands, and CSAs, would benefit from this grant. Mr. Smith then asked if funds will help individual business owners. Ms. Edwards explained that grant funds cannot be used to market individual businesses, but individual farmers and agribusiness owners can benefit by attending the marketing workshops and indirectly through the region's local food campaign.

Ms. Jefferson asked if there is a way to help the reestablish the Orange Farmers Market, which did not reopen this season. The Council discussed the matter and concluded that future workshops may help galvanize the market in the future.

Mr. Love asked if farmers markets are the best investment for the grant and cited several concerns with farmers markets, including that farmers markets are not the best outlet for producers to sell their products. Mr. Smith agreed and further elaborated upon the challenges facing local producers selling at farmers markets, including the long time invested and small profit margins. He suggested that producers need to focus on making their products visible online and through smart phones. Ms. Edwards acknowledged the two member's points and noted that farmers' market promotion is only a small facet of the grant. The other proposed activities will benefit the larger local food and agri-tourism market within region.

A motion to officially approve submission of the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program Grant was made by Becky Sheffield and seconded by Jill Jefferson. The motion was unanimously approved, including Ms. Dueck's vote by written proxy.

### **Education Sector Member Vacancy**

Ms. Edwards asked the Council for potential candidates to fill the Education Sector vacancy. Council members discussed several names. Ms. Edwards asked the Council to submit nominees within one week. Members will then have one week to vote on the nominees via email after which Ms. Edwards will offer the appointment to the Council's top choice.

### **Future Meeting Scheduling and Agenda Development**

Ms. Jefferson proposed providing an overview and update of the Carver Incubator Project as an Agenda Item for the Council's next meeting. Ms. Sheffield agreed to join Jill in presenting.

After discussion, Ms. Edwards stated that the next meeting will be held on either May 24 or 25, depending on the preference of those absent. The meeting will be held in the RRRC Conference Room at 6:30 pm.

The Council adjourned the meeting at 8:06pm.