



RAPPAHANNOCK-RAPIDAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes – June 20, 2016

Members Present:

Linda Blair	Orange County Representative
Michelle Edwards	Chair and RRRC Liaison Member
Jill Jefferson	Processing and Distribution Technical Advisory Member
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County Representative
Clyde Firman	Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member

Members Absent:

Kirsten Dueck	Health Sector Technical Advisory Member
Kenner Love	Rappahannock County Representative
Jess Palmer	Farmland Preservation & Conservation Technical Adv. Member
Rebecca Sheffield	Culpeper County Representative
Ken Smith	Production Sector Technical Advisory Member

Guests:

Carl Stafford	Virginia Cooperative Extension and GWCARC
Khalil Hassan	Rural Madison

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Michelle Edwards, chair, and introductions were made. Ms. Edwards noted that a quorum was not present, so no votes could be taken and none were on the agenda.

Member Vacancy Update

Michelle Edwards, RRRC

Ms. Edwards offered the Education Sector Technical Advisory Member appointment to the Council's top choice, Taylor Richardson. Ms. Richardson has not responded to the emails at her Fauquier County School's address. Since school is no longer in session, Ms. Edwards is currently working with Ken Smith, who nominated her, to find another means of contact. Should Ms. Richardson decline the nomination, the second and then third nominees will be contacted.

Ms. Edwards also informed the Council that she received notice today that Madison County has appointed Susan Vidal of Brightwood Farms as its representative on the food council. Brad Jarvis, Cooperative Extension Agent, worked with the County Administrator to find a suitable representative and will provide Ms. Edwards with official confirmation of the appointment and Ms. Vidal's contact information when he returns from an exchange program in mid-July.

George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center (GWCARC) Workplan
Jill Jefferson and Carl Stafford, GWCARC

The Research Center recently received a \$59,000 Ohrstrom Foundation grant for beginning farmer program development, market research and high tunnel construction. Jill Jefferson provided an overview of GWCARC's draft work plan for the project and asked the council members to provide feedback (see attached). Grant activities are projected to conclude in Spring 2017.

Ray Pickering asked whether the project focus is solely on organic agriculture. Mr. Stafford responded that the production/incubator farm component will be solely organic. The education component will focus on organic, but also include some classes of interest to conventional farmers.

Khalil Hassan noted that there are very few organic farmers in the region, with only one certified organic farmer in Madison County, so demand may be issue. Other council members expressed similar concerns. Ms. Edwards suggested that the interviews, focus group meetings, and other research planned for the grant project could be utilized to determine whether sufficient demand exists for organic focused education.

Ms. Edwards stated that whatever GWCARC's decision, they must be upfront about the methodology and results of the study, including limitations of the conclusions that can be drawn. If only or predominantly organic farmers are interviewed, attendees recommended GWCARC clearly state in its report that the selection of farmers interviewed represents a small sector of the producers in the region, and the results do not necessarily reflect the needs of the region's agricultural community as a whole.

Mr. Hassan asked how GWCARC defines sustainable and organic practices. Under Task A-1, the workplan calls for interviews of a "representative sampling of farmers with organic or sustainable practices" to determine needs. Ms. Jefferson responded that she is not certain, but will consult with Roger Williams, who will be heading up the GWCARC's beginning farmer education, to define those terms within the workplan. Ms. Edwards noted that RRRC's Food System Plan included the following categories of farming methods: conventional, USDA certified organic, organic but not USDA certified, and a mixture of conventional and organic practices. These categories could be used by GWCARC to categorize farmers attending focus group meetings, for example.

Mr. Pickering asked whether the beginning farmers will be required to lease the land at the incubator farm. Mr. Stafford responded it is yet to be determined, and if so, the cost will be minimal. When asked whether the grant will fund all equipment needs, Mr. Stafford replied that GWCARC has also been receiving donations and will likely be able to make the grants funds

stretch to cover their equipment needs. Mr. Pickering also inquired whether livestock will be included on the farm. Ms. Jefferson answered that GWCARC may add livestock as the program grows.

Ms. Edwards asked whether the surveys called for in the workplan were actually interviews, to which Ms. Jefferson responded yes, that was a error she would correct. Ms. Edwards recommended using focus groups to collect a larger number of farmers' input quickly, in addition to more in-depth interviews. She also suggested holding focus group discussions during or following existing producer meetings, such as cooperative extension trainings.

For additional information on the George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center, visit www.gwcarc.org.

Food System Analysis Results

Michelle Edwards, RRRC

As requested by council members during the previous meeting, Ms. Edwards provided an overview of the results and conclusions contained within the 2015 Rappahannock-Rapidan Farm and Food Plan, focusing especially on the producer survey and focus group results. Both her presentation and the plan can be found on RRRC's food system webpage at www.rregion.org/foodsystem.html.

Future Meeting Scheduling and Agenda Development

Council members suggested VDACS staff be asked to attend the next council meeting to speak about their marketing services. Ms. Jefferson suggested having a brainstorming session during the next meeting in order to develop a policy and programmatic agenda for the council. Ray Pickering recommended that Cindy Web of the Virginia Employment Commission be asked to speak at a future meeting. Ms. Edwards noted that RRRC's previous intern, Zach Beard, had conducted research on local food marketing that she would like to present during the next meeting to guide the council in planning the regional marketing campaign.

After discussion, Ms. Edwards stated that the next meeting will be held on Thursday, July 21, 2016, at 6:30 pm in the RRRC Conference Room.