

**County of Augusta
Agricultural Task Force**

BRAINSTORMING RESULTS

March 3, 2005

KNOWN PROBLEMS, THREATS, ISSUES IN AUGUSTA COUNTY PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURE

- Urban sprawl
- Loss of productive agricultural land
- Increasing land value resulting in increased taxes
- Farming where industry is located
- Reduction in the number of family farms
- Pressure from non-compatible uses
- Criticism of intensive agriculture
- County giving mixed signals – left hand doesn't know what right hand is doing
- Competition for land among ag people
- Conflict on roads – farm equipment & cars
- Farmers die without replacement/aging farmers
- Terrorist action
- Estate taxes
- Markets – the ability to have facilities to market product
- Economic viability of farming (increased costs, decreased income, health insurance costs, etc.)
- Capital investment required
- Flexibility of product prices
- Diseases
- Weather
- Environmentalists target farmers first
- Shortage of affordable labor; labor shortage
- Sewerage treatment plants
- Farmers are in the minority with no lobby, no time to speak up
- Low real estate tax encourages development
- Poor press
- Public fear of biotechnology
- Rapid expansion of technology; need for training
- Public perception of agriculture—need to sell reason agriculture is good

INFORMATION, DATA, AND RESOURCES TO BE EXPLORED

STATE & NATIONAL RESEARCH

- Programs from American Farmland Trust
- Albemarle/Loudon experience – look at their programs
- National programs working in other counties
- Counties that have made PDRs work
- Obtain Ag Enterprise Zone information from state legislator
- Create a list of organizations and businesses that are allies

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- How much flexibility does Augusta County have to do these things?
- How much money is the County willing to spend to pursue this?
- Can we tap into other businesses, organizations like Chamber of Commerce to promote that agriculture is as important as other businesses?
- Ways that Augusta County can work with Virginia's new Secretary of Agriculture
- Ways to convince others that agriculture can improve the quality of life
- County plans for development, i.e. Toyota
- Prototype of development desired by the County

FORUMS

- Ideas, sharing, and discussion with other farmers

COUNTY DATA TO COMPILE

- Residential development information – how many lots? Areas of projected development? Need a map.
- What are the critical areas for agriculture?
- How much does agriculture do for Augusta County/State? What are the \$\$ figures?
- What are the tax dollars paid by farm and nonfarm households?
- Cost of services required by farm and nonfarm households
- Average Augusta County perception of farming – Is it important? Do they want agriculture? What do nonfarmers want?
- Create an economic profile of the Augusta County farmer/farm (investment, income, debt)
- Who is creating lots (in Agriculture)?

OPPORTUNITIES TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE AGRICULTURE

- Revision of the comprehensive plan
- Our new neighbors—are they a market?
- Become a price maker vs. a price taker
- Different nationalities moving in may want a product that we can grow/raise
- The Agricultural Task Force
- Other supportive groups/agencies to partner with
- New ag industries create new ag businesses
- Educational institutions
- How can state provide information, support and help?
- Move ag land use to continued ag land use
- Using groups like 4-H and Valley VoTech to education youth; bring ag into the classroom
- Training opportunities at VVTC and BRCC leading to more labor
- Economic vitality of ag helps economic vitality of others (banks, etc.)
- Education the public
- Host State farm show, state ag events to bring people to the area
- Forums/conferences
- Keep county costs lower with the lower infrastructure and service needs of agriculture

STRATEGIES AND TOOLS (IDEAS) FOR COUNTY TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE AGRICULTURE

- Good press
- Conservation easements
- Comprehensive Plan
- PDR/TDR
- Use the internet to post agriculture information (including Task Force information)
- BMPs
- Ag Districts/Ag Forest Districts
- Zoning
- Land use taxation
- Sliding scale for land use tax
- Recapture taxes removed from land use
- Penalties for use other than agriculture on agricultural land
- Redefine eligibility for land use
- Have a housing number quota
- Limit the number of lots that can be created per year
- Work with state legislators to create legislation
- Law enforcement on violations of farm use equipment and vehicles

- Impact fees
- Concentrating development
- Duct tape ☺
- Brochures to educate
- Real estate surtax to build PDR fund
- Raise real estate taxes on residential property
- Road signage in ag districts and zones
- Rezone appropriate areas to take the pressure off of agriculture
- Special use permits for residential development in agricultural zones
- Stop immediate subdivision of exclusive ag land
- Augusta County create a Director of Agriculture to assist farmers, offer technical assistance, research info from other counties, conduct public relations, offer emergency help, interpret laws/regs
- Create a group health insurance program for farmers
- Bulk/Co-op buying
- Tax relief for ag residences

ACTION OPTIONS FOR THE TASK FORCE

- Review Rockingham County plan
- Review Augusta County ordinances
- Have a speaker (farmer) from an area where a plan has been implemented (an area with a good plan and an area with an ineffective plan)
- Task force members share with each other information collected from other areas/states
- Visit other counties
- Review PDR plans in place elsewhere – like Rockbridge
- Have ag related organizations provide input to the group
- Hold a public meeting for input
- See if the Extension Service has a relevant speaker to speak to group
- Find out where areas are getting PDR money
- Send task force reps to forums and conferences
- Research all strategies on the strategy list
- Brag about what farmers do and contribute to the County
- Post information on the County's web site regarding the Task Force