



2017 State Critical Issues

Current Impact of Budget Shortfall on Key Ag and Forestry Programs

Action Requested of General Assembly

Virginia Farm Bureau acknowledges the current and possible future fiscal constraints of the Commonwealth. However, additional cuts could have a drastic impact on the economic impact of the largest industry in Commonwealth. Based on the information available at the end of October, we request legislators consider the impact by:

- **Supporting maintaining and identifying the shortfall of funding needed in the agriculture best management practices cost-share program** to meet water quality goals as well as the operational and technical assistance to get those conservation practices implemented by local Soil and Water Conservation Districts
 - Only \$8.8 million was appropriated by the 2016 General Assembly for FY2018 for agriculture conservation practices and technical assistance. Even if \$8.2 million is pulled from reserve accounts for this program, it falls short by almost \$45 million to maintain level funding from FY2017 and by an additional \$40 million to meet the identified need.
- **Supporting restoring and opposing further cuts to the wildlife damage cooperative program** for matching funds from Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) for implementation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services for landowner assistance programs for coyotes and black vultures.
 - With the first cuts made to this program, the Commonwealth will lose a minimum of \$95,000 of matching federal funds. With coyote and black vulture populations increasing and impacting every part of the Commonwealth, Virginia livestock farmers suffer estimated \$2 million in cumulative losses from coyotes alone. These services are only able to help a fraction of the number of farmers that need assistance. As a result of state funding in FY2015, an additional 65 farms were assisted with depredation over the previous year.
- **Supporting maintaining the funding** provided for equipment replacement and upgrades and **personnel for emergency preparedness for fighting fires** by the Department of Forestry
 - Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) already has regions suffering from lack of foresters who incorporate serving as first responders fighting the outbreak of forest fires as one of their mandated job tasks. 62% of Commonwealth's land base is forested. The Agency relies on 154 highly-trained and experienced personnel for quick response to any reported wildland fire or other weather-related emergency. In an average year, the VDOF responds to 1,000 wildfires that burn a total of 11,000 acres and 74 homes and other structures. Their fire territories range on average of 162.3 square miles or over 103,000 acres.
- **Support funding for equipment and facilities replacement and upgrades for twelve regional Virginia Tech's Agricultural Research and Extension Centers** (off campus) to help address emerging plant and animal diseases and speed up specific commodity product development as a strategic investment in continuing to expand Virginia farms' economic growth
 - A cure to a decline in tax revenues is to increase job and income growth. For every dollar invested by the state in Virginia Cooperative Extension and Agriculture Research, an additional \$1.68 is generated by the agency. These Centers are at the point of becoming irrelevant without some facility upgrades to support emerging areas of research needed by farmers.