



August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Members of the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation AgPAC Board of Trustees:

For centuries, Virginia farmers have served as the cornerstone of many local communities. Today, agriculture is the largest private industry in the Commonwealth and contributes over \$70 billion to our economy and provides over 334,000 jobs. Ninety percent of farms are owned by families or individuals, and they often represent multi-generational endeavors to protect lands and produce crops. Farmers understand the importance of the environment of the Commonwealth because they are closest to it. However, recently passed legislation out of Richmond will impose regulations that threaten the long-term business viability of these family businesses.

For Virginia's agricultural community to continue to prosper, we must match funding to regulatory requirements, grow our farmer's access to national and global markets, and bring more agriculture product processing to Virginia. Innovation in farming, protecting against a rising tax burden, and promoting access to labor and next generation talent will be instrumental to achieving a robust agricultural economy. Virginia must be wary of California style regulations that negatively impact the daily business and lives of the Commonwealth's farmers and cattlemen.

Farming is a highly competitive business, and Richmond should not impose additional costs on farmers with new burdensome regulations that reduce profits and lessen our competitiveness. Instead, we should focus on growing our agriculture export market by strengthening our transportation infrastructure and increasing port access for farmers to reach more international markets. In addition, we must advance agricultural technology and find innovative ways to increase crop yields using "smart" farming practices to assist and ensure that small farmers have opportunities to succeed in a rapidly changing industry.

Virginia needs to bring more food and product processing into the state. A revitalized agricultural processing industry will create a new source of exports and will stimulate production and our economy. We can create new jobs by expanding the processing industry for key products such as meat, milk, and lumber.

Richmond has initiated mandates that will make it more expensive to grow crops, raise livestock, and harvest timber. We can't disadvantage our farmers in this highly competitive industry, and our state agencies must become collaborative partners with Virginia farmers and our forestry industry to solve problems and challenges. As Governor, I will make it a priority to

meaningfully engage with your organizations to ensure that Virginia becomes the best state for farming.

In 2020, Governor Northam signed legislation requiring water quality goals for the Chesapeake Bay. If not met by 2025, regulations targeting farmers, including proscribing fertilizer practices and mandating the fencing of streams, become law in 2026. Water quality is vitally important in the Commonwealth; we all love and cherish the Chesapeake Bay. However, while we share the goal of improving water quality, we are not going to impose unfunded mandates on farmers to change their land management practices. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality has said that the new Best Management Practice (BMP) mandates will cost farmers \$100 million dollars annually to meet the Chesapeake Bay targets, but Virginia has not come close to funding that amount in the current budget cycle.

Virginia must have a fully funded BMP Cost Share Program. If we are unable to support farmers at these levels, we need to extend these deadlines and not unfairly burden these small businesses. I do not believe mandatory regulations are the right approach if the state has not met its obligation to help farmers install changes in their farming practices. All Virginians benefit from improved water quality, and farmers should not bear all the costs. We must maintain a collaborative partnership approach to achieve water quality goals. We should also recognize the strides Virginia farmers have already taken to protect water quality, and we should share costs with farmers in the effort to improve water quality in the Chesapeake.

In the farming and forestry industries, a reliable work force is critical to the timely harvest of food and timber products. Virginia must ensure that any changes in our laws do not negatively impact the federal government requirements for the H-2A program and hurt our agriculture businesses.

While state taxation significantly impacts all residents and businesses in Virginia, property taxes and estate taxes disproportionately impact farmers. For example, land is definitional for farming, and the Land Use Assessment is a critical provision in the tax code for both farmers and forest landowners. Farmland and forest owners don't require the same level of common services as other properties and should have lower property tax rates. In addition, farmers rely on the sales tax exemption to purchase large pieces of machinery and capital equipment to keep costs low. Our farmers need modern equipment to remain competitive.

Many farms are multi-generational and the implementation of an Estate Tax would dramatically impact family farming businesses in the future. I have signed a pledge to oppose any tax increases and will fight against provisions such as an estate tax. We need to reduce the burden of taxes on all Virginians, not increase them. If the Virginia General Assembly attempts costly adjustments to our taxation system, I will veto them.

I am proud of the wide variety of products grown in the Commonwealth--many of them are ranked top 10 in the nation for produce. Virginians grow, harvest, and raise everything from apples to cotton to peanuts to grapes to poultry and more. We need to open more markets for our Virginia produce, both domestically and internationally, to take advantage of our farming diversity. When I am governor, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

and the Secretary of Commerce and Trade will work to establish new markets around the world for Virginia products. With one of the best ports in the world, we need to supply our agricultural products to more customers worldwide. I look forward to events such as the Governor's Agricultural Trade Conference where I can highlight the quality and success of our agriculture industry, and we will increase our exports from Virginia.

In our own communities, we will enable more opportunities for the farm to table movement. The past Administration closed farmers' markets during COVID, which hurt these important outlets for produce and penalized both consumers and farmers. For example, the Old Town Farmers Market, which has been in operation for over 260 years, was deemed non-essential and closed. Farmers are the key fabric of their communities, and I will ensure that Virginians have access to these great products by keeping Virginia businesses open.

Virginia is an agricultural leader, and we will continue to support the education programs that assist our farming industries. The extension programs of our land grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State, should remain a priority so they can maintain the staffing and facilities to support world class teaching, research, and extension programs in agriculture. These programs are vital to propelling Virginia's agriculture through improvements in efficiency, quality, and innovation for the future.

Virginia ranks among the top states for livestock, but the expansion of agricultural regulations threatens the livelihood of cattlemen. Virginia farmers and ranchers do not need outside groups lacking appropriate experience to create rules on how to farm or raise livestock. We have seen the effects in states like California, where activist groups have been successful in achieving regulatory mandates that put many farmers out of business and raised the costs of production for all others. When I am governor, Virginia will not follow the California model. We need to allow Virginia to perform to its highest ability and maintain our own state standards for livestock production from companion animals.

Farming is critical to the Virginia economy and remains a cornerstone in our communities. I look forward to working with the VAFB on policies that improve production and profits for farmers.

Sincerely,

*Glenn Youngkin*

Glenn Youngkin  
Candidate for Governor