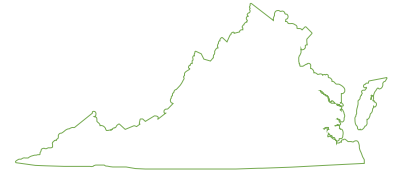


Agricultural Boards and Development Officers



REBECCA DROBIS

Communities across the country have created both formal and informal advisory boards to give agriculture a larger voice in local decisions. Often these boards identify and resolve agricultural issues and ensure local policies value and support agriculture. Sometimes, they help support local marketing efforts and organize events to raise community awareness of agricultural issues, or they ensure that local departments are in regular communication with one another. Generally voluntary boards and committees, in some states they are called agricultural commissions. Their size and composition vary by location and may include members of other local boards with related interests, such as a planning commission, zoning board, conservation district, or economic development commission.

Some local economic development authorities have created agricultural development staff positions to promote agricultural economic development, and some planning departments have created agricultural planning positions, as well. In California, for example, several counties have created a *Farmbudsman* position to help farmers navigate complex regulatory processes.

Virginia Programs Description

PURPOSE

Virginia has several types of agricultural advisory boards, committees, and development officers. Each has its own purposes.

- ▶ Virginia Code [§ 15.2-4304](#) requires local governments to establish **agricultural and forestal district (AFD) advisory committees** as soon as they receive their first application. AFD committees advise Boards of Supervisors and Planning Commissions on additions to, withdrawals from, and reviews of AFD districts. They include four landowners engaged in farming or forestal production, four other local landowners, the commissioner of revenue or the local government's chief property assessment officer, and a member of the local governing body.
- ▶ While AFD committees are prescribed by the Code of Virginia, other advisory boards, commissions, and committees can be created and authorized by Boards of Supervisors. **Agricultural development boards and committees** promote agriculture as an industry,

develop and implement plans to sustain agriculture and other rural economies, increase farm viability, and provide advice and recommendations to local governments on agricultural issues.

- » Some Virginia counties schedule regular meetings with representatives from different local government departments that touch or influence agriculture, calling these groups **agriculture collaboratives**. (See [Fauquier County Agriculture Collaborative profile](#).) Meeting regularly can create opportunities for frequent communication and minimize misunderstandings and missed opportunities. Each county or community may decide on a different composition for their agriculture collaboratives. However, it is often beneficial to invite representatives from the following types of offices: Economic Development; Cooperative Extension; Soil and Water Conservation Districts; Planning and Zoning; Community Development; Environmental Services; Finance; Tourism; County Administration; and possibly others.
- » Virginia Farm Bureau has volunteer advisory committees on about a dozen specific agricultural industries, like dairy, peanuts, and feed grains. **Farm Bureau committees** identify commodity-specific issues and make legislative recommendations to address concerns.
- » **Agricultural development officers**—sometime known as agricultural economic development directors—support the farming community through strategic economic development, and they serve as a voice for agriculture within the county government. Some counties have set aside funding to hire full- or part-time agricultural development officers. These individuals work for the county, focusing mostly on agriculture-focused economic development opportunities. They help farmers apply for grants, host events enhancing public engagement with the agricultural community, lead local marketing efforts, and more. For an example, see the [Grayson County Agriculture Economic Development Director profile](#).

How It Works

Communities can hire staff and establish agricultural boards and committees through local bylaws, codes, and ordinances. Generally, the Board of Supervisors will appoint committee members and may designate subcommittees, such as land protection and conservation, education, marketing, and so on. Specific departments may hire agricultural development officers, or the jurisdiction may create a new department focused on agricultural development. AFD Advisory Committees are governed by state law and must uphold the authority of the Virginia Code. Members are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the local governing body.

Considerations

These boards, and in some cases employees, can give a more formal voice to agriculture in community decision-making processes. They can pursue local priorities, plan for the future, and make residents aware of agriculture's local significance. Communities have a great deal of leeway to decide if they want to establish agricultural and forestal districts, tap existing bodies for support and guidance, create new boards or commissions, or hire employees to advance agriculture and related economic development priorities.

To Learn More

- » [Code of Virginia: Agricultural and Forestal Districts Act](#)
- » [Bedford County: "Bylaws for Ag Economic Development"](#)
- » [Essex County: "Agricultural and Forestal Economic Development Advisory Board"](#)
- » [Fauquier County: "Agricultural and Forestal District Advisory Committee"](#)
- » [Grayson County profile](#)
- » [Fauquier County profile](#)
- » [Matson Consulting: "Agricultural Development Board Guide: Creating Effective Local Support for Agriculture"](#)