



Agricultural Development and Marketing Support



RENE CARRANZA/USDA

State departments of agriculture and some economic development authorities have programs to support farm viability and agricultural economic development. These programs generally are designed to develop farm businesses and support their promotion and marketing, and to support the development of middle infrastructure: agricultural processing, distribution, and technology to strengthen the overall viability of agriculture as an industry. Some go further by making capital, loans, and other financial support available to producers to relieve the shortage of nontraditional options for investment in agricultural businesses.

Virginia Program Description

PURPOSE

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) helps producers identify appropriate markets for their products, both domestically and abroad.

HOW IT WORKS

VDACS's Division of Marketing and Development serves producers, commodity boards and associations, retailers, and buyers through its field offices, which are located throughout the state, and overseas.

Its *Office of Agriculture and Forestry Development (OAFD)* has several programs to provide economic development assistance to farm, food, and forestry businesses, and maintains a [list of financing resources](#) for agribusinesses.

The governor's [Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund \(AFID\)](#) provides grants to communities for various priorities including planning, value-added processing facilities, and infrastructure to support local food production and sustainable agriculture. This program can require varying levels of match funding, but it remains a beneficial option for local governments across Virginia.

The [Virginia Food Access Investment Fund](#) awards grants to businesses and nonprofit organizations to expand access to fresh food in underserved communities. Local governments can consider encouraging entities and organizations in their area to apply.

Other programs include: The [Farm to School](#) program; International marketing; Domestic marketing and promotions; Virginia Grown; Virginia's Finest; and Virginia Food Access Investment Fund Grants.



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Local governments can create their own agricultural economic development and marketing programs by creating guides to local farm products, establishing farmers' markets, and investing in processing and distribution infrastructure. For example, Fauquier County has created a [“Find Farm Products” directory](#). Hosted on the county’s website, this directory highlights farms that market their products directly to consumers, farmers markets, roadside farm stands, community-supported agriculture subscriptions, online farm product sales, and more.

CONSIDERATIONS

Supporting local farms and farmers through investments in marketing and middle infrastructure is a proven strategy to improve the viability of local agriculture and the conservation of agricultural resources. Leveraging state programs and investing in agricultural economic development efforts can pay big dividends both for individual farms and for Virginia communities.

To Learn More

- › [Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: “Marketing and Economic Development”](#)
- › [Mayors Innovation Project: “Local Food and Economic Development: A Guide for Local Governments”](#)
- › [USDA Agricultural Marketing Service: “The Economics of Local Food Systems: A Toolkit to Guide Community Discussions, Assessments and Choices”](#)