September 2026 Newsletter

Virginia Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation and Rural Sustainability

Supporting Virginia's agricultural economic development by empowering farmers through grant assistance, business planning, and cooperative development.



VAFAIRS Updates

VAFAIRS continues to serve Virginia agricultural producers through grant assistance, business planning, feasibility studies, strategic planning, and cooperative assistance. Please **contact us** for assistance.

New Team Members!

We are excited to welcome three new team members to VAFAIRS! Their experience and expertise will help us expand our reach and better serve our clients.



Kati McCall, VAFAIRS Specialist

Kati McCall joined the team as a VAFAIRS Specialist in August of 2026. She holds a B.S. in Water Resources, Policy, and Management from Virginia Tech and an M.S. in Applied Economics from the University of Idaho. Her background includes applied economic research, water resources planning, state grant administration, state environmental policy, and stakeholder outreach. With an interdisciplinary background, Kati is passionate about the intersection between agriculture, natural resource

management, and community development, and looks forward to supporting producers across Virginia.



Michele Mickelwait, VAFAIRS Specialist

Michele Mickelwait joined VAFAIRS first as a 2026 Summer Fellow and now serves on the team full-time. She is a two-time Virginia Tech alum with a Master's degree in Agricultural and Applied Economics and a Bachelor's in Agribusiness. She has a background in agribusiness planning, finance, and communication. Originally from the Shenandoah Valley, she is passionate about helping farmers access the resources they need to thrive through education and outreach. Outside of work, Michele is an avid equestrian and loves being outdoors.



Phoebe McLaughlin, Special Programs Liaison

Phoebe McLaughlin is originally from Doswell, VA, and earned a bachelor's degree in Multimedia Journalism with a minor in Professional Sales from Virginia Tech. After an internship with Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, she knew she wanted to use her communication skills to help bridge the gap between producers and consumers. Phoebe supports Special Programs through event planning and marketing efforts and is passionate about agricultural outreach and education. She grew up in Doswell, VA, surrounded by horses, chickens, dogs, and cats, and enjoys volleyball, swimming, and days on the boat.

Opportunities

Value-Added Producer Grant

- Applications are expected to open in November and close in February
- Maximum award: Planning Grants up to $50,000 and Working Capital Grants up to $200,000
- A 1:1 match is required
- Reimbursement-based

The **Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) helps agricultural producers start or expand value-added businesses.** The program provides funding to support labor, marketing, and processing costs over a three-year period. Value-added activities may include changing a product's physical state, producing it in a way that increases its value, or marketing and selling it locally (within the state or within 400 miles).

SDBII Specialty Processing Equipment Grant

- Applications due: September 23
- Maximum award: $150,000, varying depending on project
- A 25% cash match is required
- Reimbursement-based

The **Southeast Dairy Business Innovation Initiative (SDBII)** Specialty Processing Equipment Grant **supports dairy businesses that process milk into finished products by helping fund equipment** and related investments that expand processing capabilities, improve efficiency, and support the development of new value-added dairy products.

Virginia Grown and Virginia's Finest

Virginia producers can benefit from two VDACS marketing programs. **Virginia Grown helps consumers find and support local farmers**, producers, and agribusinesses, while **Virginia's Finest recognizes Virginia-made products that meet or exceed established quality standards**. These programs help showcase the quality of Virginia agriculture and increase visibility in the marketplace.

For a full list visit the Opportunities page on our website.

Opportunities

For more information or grant assistance, visit our website. Contact us early, as we are now scheduling clients for the next VAPG funding round.

Contact Us

Upcoming Events

State Fair of Virginia

September 25th through October 4th, 2026
The Meadow Event Park in Doswell, Virginia

The State Fair of Virginia is a family-friendly event that celebrates Virginia agriculture, food, and entertainment. Visitors enjoy livestock exhibits, rides, live music, competitions, and local foods. The fair showcases the traditions and culture of Virginia's farming communities.

VSU Small Farm Conference

October 15th through 16th, 2026
Norfolk, VA

The Small Farm Outreach Program at Virginia State University empowers small farmers and ranchers with training and resources to strengthen farm management, improve profitability, and support long-term success.

Virginia Food and Beverage Expo

March 24th, 2027
Richmond, VA

The Virginia Food and Beverage Expo is a biennial trade show that connects buyers with Virginia's specialty food and beverage producers, offering opportunities to discover new products, meet suppliers, and place orders directly on the show floor.

VAFAIRS would like to showcase our clients at this event. If you are a past or current client and are interested in participating, please complete the survey linked below.

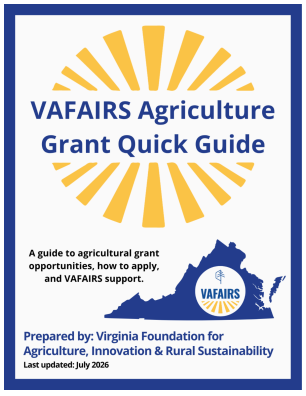
VAFAIRS Food & Beverage Survey

Producer Spotlight

Want to be featured in the VAFAIRS newsletter?

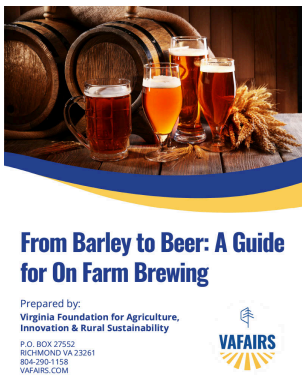
In each newsletter, we will feature a selection of our clients' businesses. **If you'd like the chance to be included in the next newsletter, please email Michele Mickelwait at michele.mickelwait@vafb.com.**

Resources



VAFAIRS Agriculture Grant Quick Guide

A **comprehensive guide to agricultural grants**, including funding opportunities, application guidance, tips for submitting a strong proposal, and other resources to help support your business or project.



VAFAIRS White Papers

We have a variety of **free white papers available in our library on topics including:**

- On-farm distilling and brewing
- Small-volume poultry processing, red meat processing and retail meat sales
- Direct marketing of local foods
- Shared-use kitchen facilities
- Chestnut cooperatives
- Virginia business legal structures

VAFAIRS Resources

Ways to Support VAFAIRS

Donate to VAFAIRS

VA FAIRS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit helping Virginia farmers explore and expand value-added opportunities. Every **donation supports a stronger future for Virginia agriculture**.

Join VAFB

Join Virginia Farm Bureau and become a Friend of the Farm. Show your support for Virginia agriculture while enjoying exclusive member benefits, valuable resources, and money-saving discounts.

Contact Us

Know a producer who could benefit from our services? **Refer them to VA FAIRS!**

Stay Connected!



VAFAIRS | 12580 West Creek Parkway | Richmond, VA 23238 US

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