



# VIRGINIA HORSE COUNCIL

## 2011 POLICY ON STATE ISSUES

### Equine Specific Policies

- The VHC supports funding the full percentage of racing commission funds dedicated to the equine industry as stated in Virginia code.
- The VHC supports the reinvestment of Virginia Racing Commission revenue to promote, sustain, and grow the Virginia horse industry.
- The VHC endorses ethical and professional transactions with regard to buying and selling horses and believes that under current contract law, the framework exists to enforce this. Additional laws are unnecessary, would be burdensome to the equine industry, and create an uncompetitive situation.
- The VHC opposes the relocation of wild horses or burros from western land by the Federal Government's Bureau of Land Management to any public land in

Virginia, whether federal or state, due to the potential damage to crops, spread of infectious diseases to livestock, limited land resources and inappropriate use of state funds.

- The VHC opposes any form of Sunday hunting in order to preserve at least one day of the week for horse riders to enjoy the trails and to allow horse to be safely pastured at least one day a week during hunting season.
- The VHC supports the preservation of trails for equestrian use and is committed to the conservation of public lands. The VHC believes that recreational riding is a historic, fundamental and legitimate use of our country's public lands that should be promoted and maintained.

### General Agriculture Industry Policies

#### Agribusiness Workforce

- The VHC supports policies that create for the equine industry a skilled, affordable, and accessible workforce, including legal foreign workers. The use of legal foreign workers is vital to the operation of many agribusinesses.
- The VHC opposes state and local employment requirements, procedures, or penalties that create additional burdens or duplicative processes for employers, exceed federal requirements or are preempted by federal law, or would adversely impact

businesses acting in good faith to comply with federal immigration laws.

**Agritourism** - The VHC supports agritourism activities and events on farms and forests for the purpose of economic development, recreation, entertainment, and education. Agritourism activities should not be subject to locally adopted or enforced restrictions or conditions except those that are based on statewide guidelines and address substantial impacts to the health, safety, and welfare of the general public.

## **Agriculture Animal Care Standards**

- The VHC supports responsible use of animals for human purposes, such as food, fiber, recreation, work, education, exhibition, and research conducted for the benefit of both humans and animals.
- The VHC supports proper handling, nutrition, management, and animal health practices appropriate to the care and use of agricultural animals.
- The VHC supports animal care decisions founded in scientific knowledge and professional judgment.
- The VHC supports the advancement of animal care through scientific research and education.
- The VHC opposes state and local actions which are burdensome, unreasonable, and not based on scientific research and that adversely impact animal agriculture producers.

## **Economic Development**

- The VHC supports efforts and programs to promote agribusinesses (including agritourism and direct marketing), establish, expand, and retain traditional and emerging agriculture operations, and assist in the growth of agribusinesses in Virginia. Economic development of agribusinesses should not be limited by local requirements which are more restrictive than those established at the State level.
- The VHC encourages state and local governments to actively involve agribusiness leaders in creating economic development strategies and ordinances. The VHC supports the State's Agribusiness Development Program as a tool to increase awareness of the economic benefits of agribusiness and encourage growth in the industry.
- The VHC supports the exemption of farm buildings and structures from the provisions of the Uniform Statewide Building Code.

## **Enforcement of Animal Care Requirements**

- The VHC opposes further expansion of animal care investigations by untrained, unsupervised citizen volunteers.
- The VHC supports increased funding and emphasis on training and certification for Animal Control Officers appropriate for animal agriculture.

**Fence Laws** - The VHC supports protection from liability for livestock owners whose animals escape from a legal, well-maintained fence.

**Gubernatorial Appointments** - The VHC supports the Governor appointing to positions impacting agriculture, forestry, or agribusiness individuals who have industry experience or appropriate general knowledge and who

are committed to serving constituents and maintaining the vitality of agribusiness as the largest sector of the Commonwealth's economy.

**Land Use Assessment** - The VHC supports and encourages localities to adopt land use assessment for agricultural, horticultural, forest, and open space uses, believing that land should be assessed on its use rather than its potential value.

**Animal Identification and Tracking System** - The VHC supports the implementation of a voluntary animal identification, registration and tracking system in Virginia provided that producer data and information is adequately protected, the speed of commerce and trade is not adversely impacted, or cost to producers is not significantly increased. Such a program should assist in managing animal health and disease outbreaks, protecting commerce, and maintaining a safe food supply.

**Right-to-Farm** - The VHC continues to support the purpose of right-to-farm legislation, which removes the conditional or special use requirement in an agriculturally zoned area for agriculture and forestry operations. The VHC believes the Act provides adequate public input into the location of agricultural operations.

**Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry** - The VHC supports a Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry as a cabinet level position to enhance the importance and influence of agribusiness in the Commonwealth.

**State Fair of Virginia** - The VHC supports the State continuing its support for the State Fair and its mission of agriculture and forestry education and promotion.

## **State Funding**

- The VHC supports adequate funding and staffing of State Agencies in order to effectively and efficiently promote and support the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture and forestry.
- The VHC opposes the transfer of special dedicated non-general funds (i.e. Commodity Boards, State Milk Commission, the Virginia Agricultural Council, and the Reforestation of Timberland fund) to the general fund of the state treasury.
- The VHC opposes unfunded mandates on the agribusiness industry and affiliated State agencies, land-grant universities, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service. Mandates should be reviewed to assess the costs, impacts, and benefits to the Commonwealth and impacted industries.

- The VHC encourages critical assessment of budget reductions to ensure that core services to the agribusiness industry are preserved and that additional costs are not imposed on the agribusiness industry.

### **Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services**

- The VHC supports an effective level of funding for industry marketing programs including Virginia's Finest, Virginia Grown, and domestic and international promotions.

- The VHC supports funding to facilitate statistical commodity surveys on a five-year rotating basis including turfgrass, aquaculture, equine, fruit trees, grapes, and greenhouse/nursery.
- The VHC supports adequate funding for the State Veterinarian's office to provide necessary services to the agribusiness industry and enhance animal disease monitoring and emergency response efforts.

## **Education, Outreach, and Research Policies**

### **Higher Education**

- The VHC supports higher education programs that will generate and maintain a qualified work force for agribusiness.
- The VHC encourages exploration of admission policies, particularly at Land Grant Universities, to afford the greatest opportunities for students seeking degrees in agribusiness related fields.
- The VHC supports coordination between Land Grant Universities and Community Colleges to provide adequate agricultural science programs that ease transition to four-year degree programs.

### **Land-Grant Universities**

- The VHC supports fulfillment of the land-grant mission for education, research, and extension by Virginia's two land-grant institutions—Virginia Tech and Virginia State University while recognizing that all three missions are equally important.
- The VHC supports adequate state funding for programs, initiatives, and capital projects that advance agribusiness research, education, and outreach through Virginia State University and Virginia Tech. Specifically, The VHC supports state funding to match "1890 Institution" federal funds for land-grant mission programs at Virginia State University.
- The VHC opposes changing or moving the agricultural animal facilities for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech from their current locations without 1) complete funding for equal or improved replacements, and 2) the preservation of educational opportunities and experiences for students. The VHC encourages the development of an agricultural land-use plan as part of the University's comprehensive plan so that the integrity of all agriculture programs is preserved and Virginia Tech's mission as a land-grant institution is visibly demonstrated.

- The VHC supports making state owned and operated facilities available at an affordable rate for youth events such as FFA and 4-H judging events.

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension and Agricultural Experiment Stations**

- The VHC supports Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) and the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station (VAES) programs which are essential in providing the latest information, research findings, and technologies to the agribusiness industry.
- The VHC supports keeping VCE and VAES programs within Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, in coordination with Virginia State University, the Virginia Tech College of Natural Resources and Environment and the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine.
- The VHC believes State funding decisions for VCE and VAES must recognize that reductions cannot be offset by tuition increases.
- The VHC supports accountability with respect to how VCE and VAES funding is distributed.
- The VHC supports agriculture and 4-H being the priority for VCE programs. .
- The VHC supports restructuring of VCE only after it is determined that the plan addresses the needs and priorities of local governments and the agribusiness community.
- The VHC supports a continued assessment, with industry involvement, of VCE and VAES to assure that critical services to agriculture and forestry are preserved and that limited resources are used wisely and efficiently.

**Youth Education** -The VHC supports positive youth education and leadership opportunities through environmental, career and technical education, agricultural education in public schools, Ag in the Classroom, 4-H, FFA, Project Learning Tree, and the Governor's School for Agriculture.

## **Legal and Regulatory Policies**

**Dillon Rule** - The VHC supports the current use of the “Dillon Rule” regarding the relationship of state and local government powers and opposes efforts to amend or abolish the “Dillon Rule” in Virginia.

**Eminent Domain (Rights of Private Property Owners)** - The VHC opposes policies and actions that infringe upon the rights of private property owners. The VHC supports legislative action that prevents unreasonable restrictions and actions against private property owners and supports fair compensation for property when eminent domain authority is exercised.

**Freedom of Information** - The VHC supports amendments to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act that prevent disclosure of proprietary information including: content of nutrient management plans, premises and animal identification and tracking records, investigation reports, testing results, and records related to catastrophic events and losses impacting the agribusiness industry.

**Initiative and Referendum** - The VHC opposes amending the Virginia Constitution to incorporate initiative and referendum procedures that bypass the General Assembly.

**Legal Services** - The VHC supports accountability and oversight of legal service programs in the Commonwealth to ensure that they are not used to the detriment of agriculture. The VHC further supports requiring state appropriated funds to be subject to the same restrictions as placed on Federal funds to legal organizations.

**Workers’ Compensation** - The VHC supports the existing framework of Virginia’s workers’ compensation law and opposes any changes that will undermine the basic concept and sound balance of this law, such as broadening conditions not clearly arising in the course of employment.

## **Taxes and Fees Policies**

**Estate Tax** - The VHC supports continuing Virginia’s full and permanent repeal of the Estate Tax.

**Homestead Exemption** - The VHC opposes the adoption of the “homestead exemption” for residences due to the increased local government reliance on land-use taxation or taxation of business and commercial property to offset the reductions in other tax revenues.

### **Tax Policy**

- The VHC supports maintaining current tax status and policies specific to the agriculture and forest industries.
- The VHC opposes a burdensome and unreasonable tax clearance policy related to the issuance or renewal of State licenses.

- The VHC supports Virginia tax laws that:

- Rely more on taxes that can be fairly assessed on all taxpayers (i.e., income, non-food sales, and fuels) and less on taxes that are unfairly assessed and are burdensome to agribusiness growth (i.e., real estate, services, personal property, machinery and tools, and BPOL).
- Reduce local dependence on real estate taxes by allowing localities to receive a greater portion of the state sales tax and/or a portion of the state income tax.
- Do not increase pressures on localities to disproportionately increase real estate taxes on agriculture and forestry lands and agribusinesses.

**User Fees** - The VHC opposes the imposition of taxes disguised as user fees to fund mandatory regulatory programs designed to benefit society as a whole.

## Environmental Policies

**Agricultural Stewardship Act** - The VHC supports strengthening the Agricultural Stewardship Act through additional personnel. The VHC believes this program will continue to be successful as long as it is adequately staffed, sufficiently funded, remains complaint-driven, and is managed by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

**Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act** - The VHC opposes the expansion of the existing Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act to localities within the western Chesapeake Bay watershed but supports other water quality improvement incentives suitable for the nature of agriculture production in the region.

**Department of Conservation and Recreation** - The VHC supports balanced decision making between the DCR Director and DCR's Citizen Boards in order to provide transparency and citizen input for programs and regulations impacting agribusinesses. The agribusiness industry should be appropriately represented on DCR's Citizen Boards.

**Environmental Stewardship** - The VHC supports sound, science-based environmental stewardship on all agricultural and forestry operations.

**Farm and Forest Land Preservation and Conservation** - The VHC supports the implementation and funding of voluntary programs that would enhance the viability of the business of farming and forestry and conservation of the working lands upon which they depend. Specifically The VHC supports matching state funds for local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs to preserve working farms and forests. The VHC supports tools that will meet a variety of landowner needs, including perpetual and shorter term easement programs.

**Livestock Stream Fencing** - The VHC supports the proactive, voluntary efforts of the livestock industry to pursue additional implementation of livestock stream

fencing practices, and adoption by federal and state programs of flexible fencing standards and cost-share assistance to implement and maintain this practice.

### **Nutrient Management Program**

- The VHC supports a streamlined and efficient nutrient management program that addresses nutrient applications through site-specific assessments, is flexible and tiered for the size and type of agribusiness operation, and seeks a balance between environmental stewardship and the viability of the operation. Cost-share assistance must be guaranteed, adequate technical assistance and resources provided to impacted industries, and further program enhancements made prior to adoption of mandatory standards.
- The VHC supports a voluntary, incentive based nutrient management program, and efforts to educate and encourage implementation of nutrient management plans.

### **Water Policy and Water Rights**

- The VHC supports sound water policy planning that fairly and equitably addresses water uses, water rights of landowners, and water restrictions during times of drought.
- The VHC supports the protection of water rights for agriculture and turf operations and opposes withdrawal regulations or laws that result in adverse financial or operational impacts.
- The VHC supports policies that encourage the appropriate use and management of water resources, including the reclamation of water for irrigation purposes.
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*The Virginia Horse Council is a non-profit membership organization whose mission is to "Represent Virginia's Diversified Equine Industry with a Unified Voice." Our membership includes breeding operations, event and competition riders and owners, trail and pleasure riders, therapeutic riding and horse show competitors, as well as numerous individual equine organizations across the state. Positions on state issues are reached after thorough study in consultation with VHC members during the State Policy Development Process. The 2011 Policy on State Issues was approved by the Board of Directors on January 36, 2011.*

Virginia Horse Council

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