

***Don't Forget About Our
Legislative Activities....***

2015 Legislative Reception

January 29, 2015
5:30—7:30 pm

Old City Hall
Richmond, Virginia

2015 Legislative Trail Ride

May 15-17, 2015

W.E. Skelton 4-H Center on Smith Mountain Lake
Wirtz, Virginia



VIRGINIA
HORSE COUNCIL

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 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 2015 Policy on State Issues was approved by the Board of Directors on January 28, 2015.

2015 Legislative Policies



VIRGINIA
HORSE COUNCIL

...Working to Keep the Ride Alive!

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VIRGINIA HORSE COUNCIL

2015 POLICY ON STATE ISSUES

EQUINE SPECIFIC POLICIES

- The VHC supports expanding public access to trails for equestrians and enhancing existing properties to support the growing interest in trail riding in the industry.
- The VHC supports a tax policy that allows for fair and equitable treatment for the equine industry as an agricultural business.
- The VHC continues to oppose the expansion of hunting to include Sundays. Hunting every day of the week adversely impacts the safe use of rural lands, both public and private, for agricultural and recreational activities such as livestock grazing, trail riding, and hiking.
- 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 practice of "horse tripping" in some small Mexican charro rodeos whereby a horse is roped and intentionally caused to fall at high speed, often resulting in serious injury.

- The VHC supports adequate state funding for programs, initiatives, maintenance and operations, 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 supports accountability and transparency with respect to how Virginia Tech and Virginia State University funding is distributed, including VCE and Virginia's land-grant agricultural research stations.
 - The VHC supports changing or moving the agricultural animal facilities for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech from their current locations with 1) complete funding for equal or improved replacements, and 2) the uninterrupted use of facilities, and 3) the preservation of educational opportunities and experiences for students. The VHC encourages the development and implementation of an agricultural land-use 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.
 - The VHC supports soil testing services at Virginia Tech and adequate resources to ensure their viability.
- Virginia Cooperative Extension and Agricultural Research Stations**
- The VHC supports Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station (VAES), and other land-grant agricultural research station programs which are essential in providing the latest information, research findings, and technologies to the agribusiness industry.
 - The VHC supports keeping VCE and Virginia's land-grant agricultural research stations 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 land-grant agricultural research stations must recognize that reductions cannot be offset by tuition increases.
 - The VHC supports agriculture and 4-H being the priority for VCE programs.
 - The VHC supports the inclusion and review of the needs and priorities of local governments and the agribusiness community on a regular basis.
 - The VHC supports a continued assessment, with industry involvement, of VCE and land-grant agricultural research stations 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, and the adequate funding of these programs.
 - The VHC supports agriculture-based Career and Technical Education positions through Virginia Tech, Virginia State University and the Virginia Department of Education.
 - The VHC supports efforts to educate students in public schools about the benefits and positive impacts of the agribusiness industry on local communities, food safety and availability, and economic development.

GENERAL INDUSTRY POLICIES , Cont'd

- 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.

Terrorism

- The VHC supports strong effective systems to prevent, detect, and respond to acts of

terrorism directed toward any facet of the agribusiness industry including research, production, processing, and distribution.

- The VHC supports full enforcement of the law against persons who threaten or carry out violence and other extremist acts directed at scientists and agribusinesses.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

Agricultural Stewardship Act - The VHC believes a successful Agricultural Stewardship program must be adequately staffed, sufficiently funded, complaint-driven, and managed by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

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 strategies 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.
- The VHC supports funding, education and deployment of Nutrient Management Plan writers as necessary to comply with the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Plan and statewide permitting requirements.
- The VHC supports increased flexibility in required Nutrient Management Plans for state-owned lands for research purposes.

EDUCATION, OUTREACH, AND RESEARCH POLICIES

The VHC supports adequate funding for education, outreach, and research services and programs .

Higher Education and Land Grant Universities

- The VHC encourages exploration of admission policies at colleges, particularly at Land Grant Universities, to afford the greatest opportunities for students seeking degrees or professional certificates in agribusiness related fields.

- The VHC supports coordination between Land Grant Universities and Community Colleges to provide adequate agriculture and natural resource programs that ease transition to four-year degree programs.
- The VHC supports fulfillment of the three-part land-grant mission for education, research, and extension by Virginia's two land-grant institutions—Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. The VHC supports recognizing that all three parts of the land-grant mission are equally important, and supports maintaining a focus on programs critical to agribusiness.

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 the taking of property, lost access, and lost profits, 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 and Resource 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 agribusiness. The VHC further supports requiring state appropriated funds to be subject to the same restrictions as placed on Federal funds to legal organizations.

Right-to-Work - The VHC supports Virginia's current status as a Right-to-Work state.

Wage Policy - The VHC opposes any change in wage policy that could negatively impact Virginia agribusinesses.

Workers' Compensation - The VHC supports mechanisms to control rising medical costs within Virginia's workers' compensation system while opposing 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 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 favorable current tax status and policies specific to the agriculture and forest industries and updates of policies when necessary to ensure they reflect current industry practices.
- 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 tolls, 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.
- ◊ Requires local governments to refund over-payment of taxes in a timely and efficient manner.
- ◊ 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.

GENERAL INDUSTRY POLICIES

Agribusiness Workforce

- The VHC supports policies that create a skilled, affordable, and accessible workforce, including legal foreign workers, for the agribusiness industry. 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 pre-empted by federal law, or would adversely impact businesses acting in good faith to comply with federal immigration laws.
- The VHC supports secondary, post-secondary, higher education, and other technical certification programs that will generate and maintain a qualified work force for agribusiness

Agritourism - The VHC supports agritourism activities 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.

Agriculture Animal Care Standards

- The VHC supports responsible use of agriculture 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.

Agriculture Animal Care Standards (Enforcement)

- 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 established by the State Veterinarian for Animal Control Officers appropriate for animal agriculture.
- The VHC supports mechanisms to limit taxpayer costs to pay for animals that have been abused or neglected.

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, emergency management, protecting commerce, and maintaining a safe food supply.

Commodity Assessments (Checkoffs)

- The VHC supports both state and federal commodity assessment programs whose focus is industry research and promotion, so long as they are directed and operated by industry members and supported by the industry. (See Page 3, State Funding)

Economic Development

- The VHC supports efforts and programs to promote agribusinesses (including agritourism and direct marketing), establish, expand, and retain traditional and emerging agriculture and forestry 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 programs 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.

- The VHC supports adequate funding for the Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund (AFID) to incentivize job creation and economic development through the expansion and establishment of new agribusinesses.

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 making appointments in a timely manner, preferably prior to current terms expiring. Furthermore the VHC supports appointing 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 to positions impacting agriculture, forestry, or agribusiness.

Land Use Assessment - The VHC supports and encourages localities to keep or 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, and supports enforcement efforts to curb abuses of the program. Eligibility for land use assessment should not be tied to any mandated use of water quality best management practices.

Rural Infrastructure - The VHC supports efforts which will ensure affordability, availability, and reliability of infrastructure to rural Virginia. This includes but is not limited to sewer, water, road and bridge maintenance, electric service, telecommunications service, and broadband access.

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry - The VHC supports the continuation of the Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry as a cabinet level position that is fully integrated into Virginia's economic development efforts and advocates for and enhances the importance and influence of agribusiness in the Commonwealth, as being the largest economic industry.

State Fair of Virginia - The VHC supports the State Fair's mission of agriculture and forestry education and promotion and the efforts of industry organizations, state officials, and education and extension personnel to partner in implementing programs to meet this mission.

State Funding

- The VHC supports adequate funding and staffing, and appropriate organization 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, the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, the Pesticide Control Fund, 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 Virginia Cooperative Extension. 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 the expansion of trade opportunities for the agribusiness industry in foreign markets through funding and resources for international trade offices and programs to promote Virginia agriculture and forestry products.
- The VHC supports restoration of funding to facilitate statistical commodity surveys on a five-year rotating basis including turfgrass, aquaculture, equine, fruit trees, grapes, and greenhouse/nursery/Christmas trees.
- To guarantee fair trade and competitiveness for the Commonwealth's agribusiness industry, the VHC supports adequate state funding for weights and measures, inspection, and grading programs that ensure the integrity of agricultural commodities, commercial animal feed, fertilizer, lime, and seed.