

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 6, 2017

Contact: Michelle Olgers, Marketing & Communications Dept., 804-524-6964,
molgers@vsu.edu

VSU Receives \$600,000 to Assist Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

VSU's Cooperative Extension Small Farm Outreach Program (SFOP) has received a grant award of \$600,000 to educate and mentor socially disadvantaged and veteran Virginia beginning farmers and ranchers (SDVBFR) so they have the information they need to allow their farms to be sustainable and economically successful.

The grant is one of 36 totaling \$17.7 million funded through fiscal year 2017's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP). The BFRDP is a competitive grant program administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) that funds education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance initiatives directed at helping beginning farmers and ranchers of all types. It was authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill to help address issues associated with the rising age and decrease in the number of U.S. farmers and ranchers.

"Agriculture is the number one industry in the commonwealth," said William Crutchfield, SFOP Director. "But high barriers to entry make farming and ranching one of the hardest careers to pursue, and the number of people entering into farming has been slowly declining each year."

The average age of the typical Virginia farmer is 59.9 years old. Thirty-six percent of Virginia farmers are 65 years of age or older. The average farm size is 181 acres.

Despite significant hurdles like land acquisition and potentially significant start up costs, there are people who see great opportunities in agriculture today and want to start their own farm or ranch businesses. They tend to be younger on average than those who started farming decades ago and less likely than established farmers to farm full-time. They also tend to operate smaller farms, have more diversified operations and come from non-agricultural backgrounds, which means little to no access to farmland that traditionally is passed down from one generation of farmer to the next.

The BFRDP grant is the only federal program exclusively dedicated to training the next generation of farmers and ranchers. This highly successful initiative provides grants to academic institutions, state Extension programs, producer groups and community organizations to support and train new farmers and ranchers across the country. The program funds everything from

production techniques to mentoring new farmers in how to develop a business plan and has proven a critical resource in ensuring the success of the next generation of farmers—one that faces unprecedented challenges pursuing a career in agriculture.

The three-year grant was awarded to VSU's SFOP program, which specifically targets SDVBFR in 54 Virginia counties. These audiences have been traditionally undeserved and have been plagued by several barriers such as: high start-up costs, limited access to credit and capital, lack of knowledge on land acquisition and transition process, lack of skills in agribusiness and financial planning, lack of adequate production skills, and limited access to existing and viable markets. VSU's SFOP, in a continued partnership with the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program (BFRCP), proposes to address these barriers by using the "Whole Farm Planning" curriculum developed by BFRCP as one of the tools to train these farmers, with the expected result of an improved quality of life for them and their communities.

Farmers enrolled in the program will begin by attending a small farmer orientation and must commit to attending a series of educational workshops that include estate planning, financial and business management, sustainable production practices and marketing. They will also be connected to a farmer mentor.

If you are farmer interested in joining the program, contact the SFOP at 804-524-3292 or SFOP@vsu.edu.

Extension is a joint program of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state and local governments. Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg.

“The information in this email and any attachments may be confidential and privileged. Access to this email by anyone other than the intended addressee is unauthorized. If you are not the intended recipient (or the employee or agent responsible for delivering this information to the intended recipient) please notify the sender by reply email and immediately delete this email and any copies from your computer and/or storage system. The sender does not authorize the use, distribution, disclosure or reproduction of this email (or any part of its contents) by anyone other than the intended recipient(s). No representation is made that this email and any attachments are free of viruses. Virus scanning is recommended and is the responsibility of the recipient.”