



Halifax County  
VIRGINIA

*Strategic Plan  
for Agriculture  
and Forestry*



*August 2017*

Report prepared by The Virginia Tech Office of Economic  
Development



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, Halifax County, with the support of its county partners including the Halifax Farm Bureau, commissioned the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development (OED) to assist in the development of a Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Forestry for Halifax County. The purpose of this plan is to support this vital industry sector by leveraging existing assets and highlighting opportunities for the future. Development of this strategic plan consisted of an 18-month, community engagement process beginning in Spring 2016, during which OED gathered input from farmers, foresters and industry experts through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and community meetings. The plan defines a clear set of goals with strategies and action items that the county and its partners may pursue in the coming 5-10 years. To promote the development of Halifax's agriculture and forestry sector, the county and its partners have established the following goals:

**GOAL 1.** Improve planning and project coordination for agriculture and forestry

**GOAL 2.** Preserve and increase actively managed farm and forestry land

**GOAL 3.** Improve competitiveness of local farm and forestry operations

**GOAL 4.** Ensure continuance of the industry sector by supporting farm succession and the agriculture workforce

**GOAL 5.** Increase agriculture and forestry entrepreneurship



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- Kimley Blanks (Halifax County Administration)
- Scott Crowder (Farm Bureau)
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- Greg Maxey (Farm Bureau Federation)
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- Joe Wilkerson (Southside Nursery & Landscape Co. LLC)
- Page Wilkerson (Farm Bureau)

Numerous individuals contributed knowledge and expertise to the study. Thank you to the citizens and civil servants of Halifax County who provided their crucial input and assistance during community meetings, focus groups, and interviews.

This report was prepared by the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development (OED), [www.econdev.vt.edu](http://www.econdev.vt.edu). OED connects VT faculty, companies, and communities in ways that help create, retain, and enhance the quality of jobs and opportunities around the Commonwealth. VTOED provides training, applied research, and technical assistance services to increase clients' abilities to prudently manage economic change and improve their quality of life. Examples of such services include completion of feasibility studies, economic impact analysis, industry and occupational analysis, strategic planning, and community visioning. Virginia Tech faculty and staff who contributed to this report include Emma Buchanan, Maeve Gould, Josh Hamme, Sarah Lyon-Hill, Ronnie Stephenson, Elli Travis, and Albert Alwang.



Office of Economic Development

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## Introduction

Located in Southern Virginia, Halifax County has a rich history and culture heavily influenced by the evolving agriculture and forestry industry sector. Even before the county's formation in 1721, most Halifax residents farmed tobacco, a growing agricultural industry product at that time. Large tobacco farms would have supported multiple family livelihoods, fostering a sense of shared purpose and community. Later, Halifax's abundant forests contributed to the wood products industry, particularly as mechanization led to the growth of paper, furniture and other value-added wood products manufacturing in Southern and Southwest Virginia.

Today, Halifax still supports a substantive agriculture and forestry industry sector despite changing market demands. Of the roughly 528,000 acres in the county, approximately 57% comprises farmland, and as much as 70% is forested land (note that some farmland is forested).<sup>1</sup> Agriculture and forestry are among the county's top traded industries, or those that export products outside the region thereby generating new money for the economy. Animal and crop production are ranked 6th and 8th respectively among top exporting industries in Halifax. For every \$1 spent on animal production in Halifax, an additional \$1.23 is generated in household income, while \$1 spent on crop production yields \$1.14 in income. Finally, \$1 spent on timber and logging generates \$1.16 in income. Value-added agriculture production, which is part of the industry sector's downstream supply chain, has even greater multipliers: wineries, breweries and sawmills generate two to three additional dollars of income from one dollar spent.<sup>2</sup>

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1 United States Department of Agriculture. *Census of Agriculture 1935-2012 State and County Data*. Retrieved from [www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications); United States Forest Service Timber Product Output Report, 2011. Retrieved from [www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb\\_srs197.pdf](http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb_srs197.pdf).

2 EMSI Q2 2017 Data Set. EMSI provides up-to-date labor markets data including employment numbers, impact multipliers and additional industry data.

The agriculture and forestry industry sector also significantly contributes to the county's gross regional product (GRP) and tax income. Crop and Animal Production accounted for more than \$30 million of the county's GRP in 2016, while forestry and logging accounted for almost \$8.2 million. Together, these sectors contributed to approximately \$2.7 million in taxes, or 3.2% of total taxes for the county in 2016. The only other industries that contributed equally or more to taxes are utilities, beverage and tobacco manufacturing, merchant wholesalers, retail, and restaurants. Some of these industries, however, rely on the agriculture and forestry industry sector as an upstream supply chain (e.g. tobacco manufacturing, wholesalers and restaurants) or as customers (e.g. utilities, wholesalers, retail and restaurants).<sup>3</sup> Thus the agriculture and forestry industry sector continues to play a pivotal role in Halifax's economy and future prosperity.



*A historic tobacco barn in Halifax County. Image Source: Wikimedia Commons.*

Farmers in Halifax continue to look for opportunities to grow their businesses and diversify their products, and many stakeholders in the county cite trees as one of the least leveraged resources. In addition, with a growing interest in national food security, nutrition, and buying local to support regional economies and cut distribution costs, many

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3 Ibid.

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new opportunities exist for Halifax county. To leverage existing assets and support this vital industry sector, Halifax has developed a strategic plan for agriculture and forestry. The purpose of this plan is to highlight opportunities for the agriculture and forestry industry sector in the county and to define a clear set of goals with implementable strategies that the county and its partners may pursue in the coming 5-10 years. These five goals are:

1. Improve planning and project coordination for agriculture and forestry
2. Preserve farm and forestry land for future use
3. Improve competitiveness of existing farm and forestry operations
4. Ensure continuance of the industry sector by supporting farm success and the agriculture workforce
5. Increase agriculture and forestry entrepreneurship

This plan breaks each goal into specific strategies and action items. Each action item will provide details on possible implementation period required, potential lead and partners, financial needs and measurable outcomes.

Development of this strategic plan consisted of a yearlong community engagement process beginning in summer 2016. County administration worked closely with the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development to gather input from farmers, foresters and those supporting each industry. They used four different methods of engagement:

- Forty interviews with farmers, foresters and those supporting the industry sector.
- Producer surveys distributed electronically by the county, Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Farm Bureau, and several of those interviewed during summer 2016. The county also distributed paper surveys at select events. Seventy-three survey responses were collected.

- The county held three community meetings that took place across the county on three separate evenings in November 2016. During these meetings, community members heard and responded to a report on existing conditions of the industry sector and brainstormed possible future strategies for the county. In total, 47 people attended these meetings.
- In spring 2017, the county convened four focus groups to gather additional information on key areas of interest.

In addition, the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development gathered data on state and national industry sector trends to supplement the community engagement process, review the possibility of certain opportunities, and identify additional opportunities for the county. The research team collected data from secondary sources as well as interviews with industry experts.

The following plan consists of a brief overview of Halifax County and a description of its agriculture and forestry industry sector, as well as recommendations for future goals, strategies, and action items for the county. Additional data supporting implementation strategies and action items are in the Appendices of this document. ■

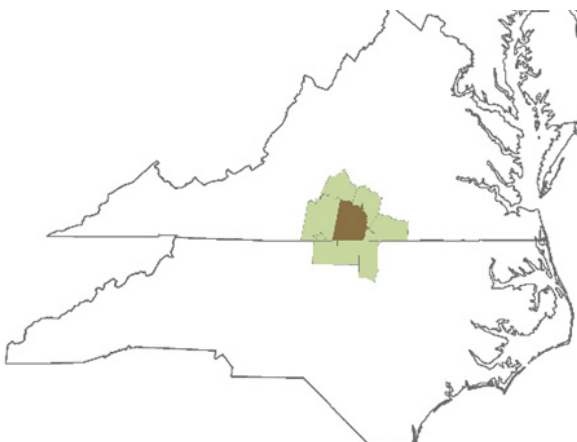


*Halifax County strawberries*

# Halifax County Overview

Located in Southern Virginia, Halifax is surrounded by Pittsylvania, Campbell, Charlotte, and Mecklenburg Counties in Virginia and Person, Caswell and Granville Counties in North Carolina. Halifax’s population was about 35,000 people in 2015. Between 2005 and 2015, the population decreased by about 1,300 people or 4%, whereas the population of the region, state and nation increased. This decrease occurred across all age groups except ages 55 and over. An increase in the number of older residents (55 years of age and over) is part of a regional trend influenced by aging residents and an in-migration of retirees to the region. Looking ahead to 2025, the population in Halifax County is projected to decrease by 3%, to approximately 33,800 people.

**Figure 1: Map of Halifax County and Region**



Region: Halifax, Pittsylvania, Danville, Campbell, Charlotte, Mecklenburg (VA); Caswell, Granville, Person (NC)

Halifax County tends to trail behind most of its neighbors and the region as a whole with a lower per capita income, lower median household income, and a significantly higher poverty rate. The median household income for the region is \$41,049 compared to Halifax’s \$35,093. Lower household and per capita income in Halifax is not a result of lower wages, as median earning in Halifax is actually slightly higher than the region. Instead, these demographics are representative of higher unemployment and retired or discouraged workers who have left the labor force entirely.

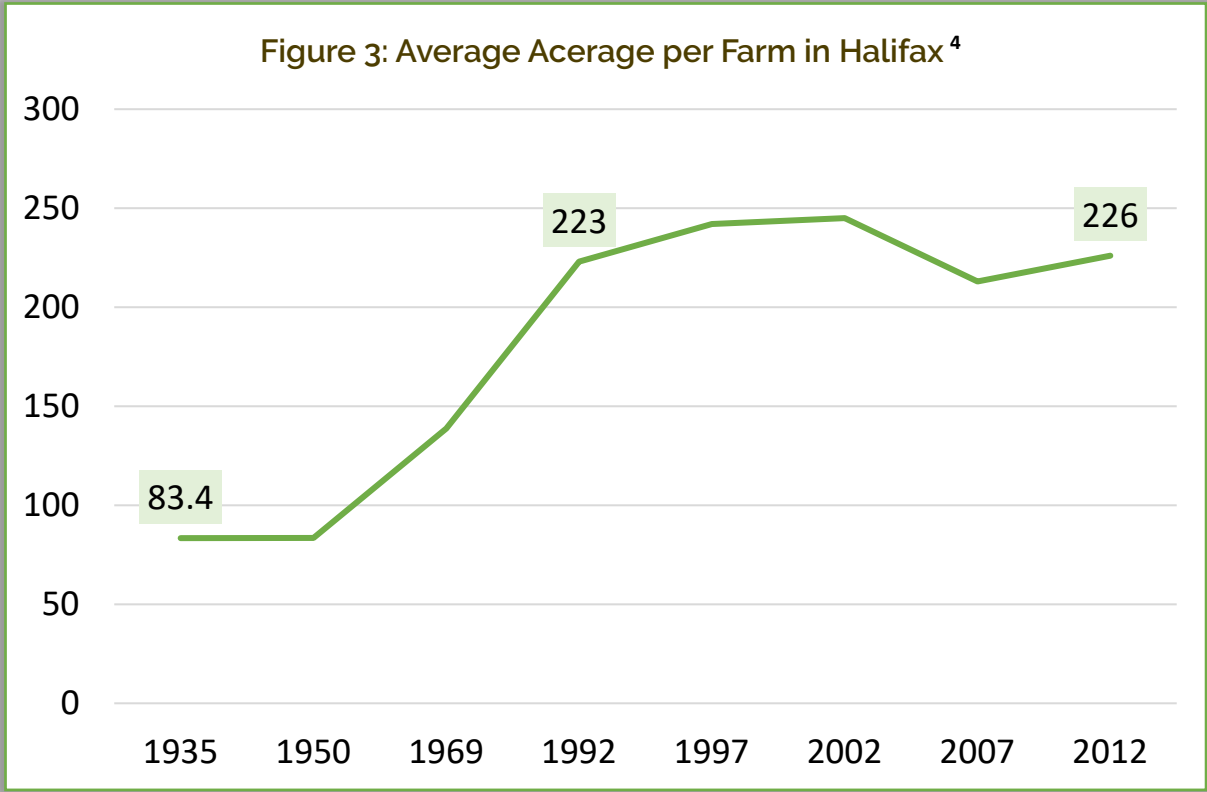
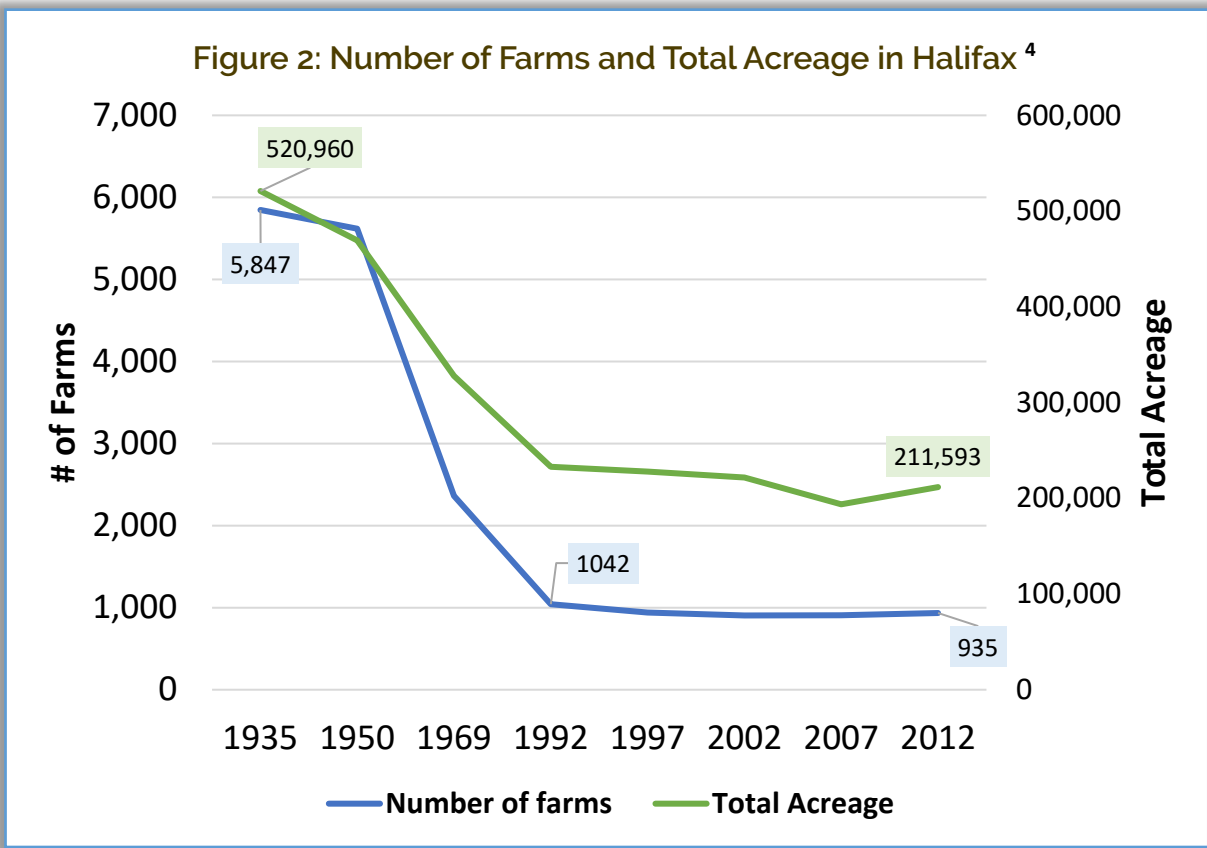
## Crop and Animal Production

Halifax County has historically been known for agricultural products such as tobacco, hay, and livestock, with tobacco being the major cash crop. Between 1885 and 1914, tobacco production declined and other agricultural pursuits like grain milling, tanning, and sawmilling became important factors in the regional economy. In the early 1900s, Halifax transitioned from the cultivation of burley tobacco to bright tobacco and became one of the two largest tobacco-producing counties in Virginia. South Boston became Virginia’s second largest tobacco market, and

**Table 1: Demographic Information for Halifax County, Region, State, and Nation**

	Population (2015)	% Population Change (2005-2015)	Civilian Unemployment Rate (ACS)	Per Capita Income (ACS)	Median Earnings for Workers (ACS)	% of Families Below the Poverty Line (ACS)
<b>Halifax</b>	35,001	-4%	9.3%	\$19,777	\$26,853	15.6%
<b>Region</b>	316,084	1%	9.2%	\$20,970	\$26,749	13.2%
<b>Virginia</b>	8,410,175	13%	6.9%	\$33,958	\$34,987	8.2%
<b>U.S.</b>	321,252,599	9%	9.2%	\$28,555	\$30,815	11.5%

**Table Source:** United States Census Bureau (2015). *Selected Economic Characteristics from American Community Survey 2014*. Retrieved from [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov) (Advanced Search).





much of the county's commercial and trade activity centered on the Halifax-South Boston area.<sup>4</sup>

For more than 75 years, however, Halifax has experienced a decline in the number of farms and acreage dedicated to farming. Beginning in the 1950s the number of farms and total acreage of farmland steadily decreased (Figure 2), with a total decrease of 83% and 55% respectively by 2012, according to the most recent Agricultural Census numbers. Today, Halifax hosts as many as 935 farms with a median farm size farm of 50 to 179 acres, consistent with the region and state. Halifax's strength compared to the region and state is its larger concentration of 180-499 acre farms, which comprise 25% of total Halifax farms (compared to 21% for the region and 17% for the state). Growth in the average acreage per farm reinforces this strength (Figure 3). As farmers have left the industry, those who have stayed have often increased their land and production. Tobacco farming is a good example of this trend. Nevertheless, recent years have seen a slight increase in smaller farms of less than 50 acres, a reflection of the trend toward more small-scale farming.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the overall acreage, the majority of farms in Halifax County, as well as the state and the region, are small family farms; that is, their gross annual sales are less than \$250,000. Indeed, 50% of Halifax farms reported making less than \$5,000 a year in 2012. On the other hand, approximately 2% of farms in Halifax County are categorized as large family farms (\$250,000 to \$500,000 in gross annual sales) and an additional 2% that are categorized as very large (more than \$500,000 in gross annual sales).<sup>6</sup>

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4 The History of Halifax County, Virginia 1750 – 1940. Retrieved from [www.oldhalifax.com/county/historicalMonograph.htm](http://www.oldhalifax.com/county/historicalMonograph.htm)

5 United States Department of Agriculture. Census of Agriculture 1935-2012 State and County Data. Retrieved from [www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications).

6 United States Department of Agriculture. U.S. Farms: Numbers, Size, and Ownership, 2007. Retrieved from [www.ers.usda.gov/media/201431/eib24b\\_1\\_.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/201431/eib24b_1_.pdf).

Employment numbers for 2017 reflect similar trends of majority small farms and a small percentage of large scale production. Of the estimated 827 people<sup>7</sup> employed in crop and animal production, only 34 consider this work their primary source of income. The remainder are extended proprietors, or those that view their agricultural work as added income. Halifax has a significantly higher concentration of extended proprietors in agriculture compared to the nation and state, as illustrated by a 6.18 location quotient, which indicates opportunities for growth in this area. Note that these employment numbers do not account for migrant worker employment.<sup>8</sup>

As seen in Table 2 (page 6), the top agricultural commodity product in Halifax County in terms of market value is still tobacco at \$13.4 million, followed by cattle and calves at \$8 million. Soybeans, corn and vegetables have a lower market value in Halifax, each at \$2 million or below. Of the eight commodity products listed, hogs have the lowest sales value in the state of Virginia; however, they are the third highest sales in Halifax County, indicating their significance to the county's agriculture economy.<sup>9</sup>

Markets are a critical consideration for agricultural producers as they determine how and where to sell their products. Commodity production involves sales to intermediaries or wholesalers who then sell products to consumers or processors. The costs and logistics of transporting products to direct-to-consumer and non-direct-to-consumer markets must be considered for financial reasons. The map below

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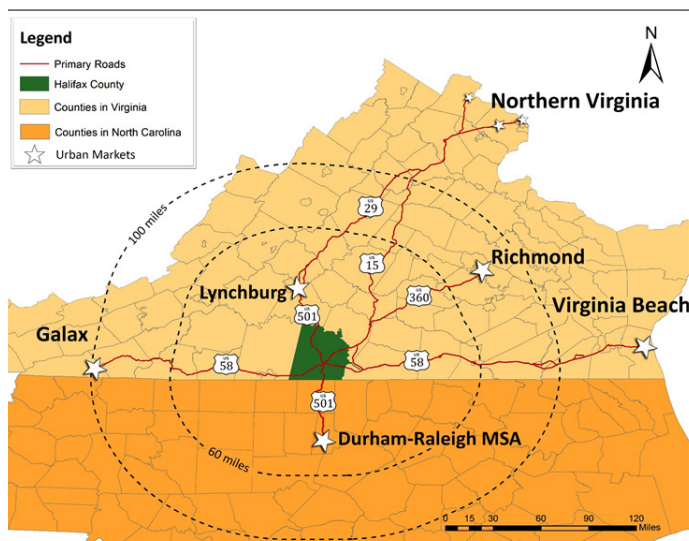
7 Note that this employment number does not account for migrant workers. The USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service collect data on migrant worker employment, but only at the regional level. In Fall 2016, for example, both Virginia and North Carolina employed approximately 47,000 migrant workers.

8 EMSI 2017.2 Data Set; QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, Self-Employed, and Extended Proprietors; Retrieved May 2017

9 United States Department of Agriculture. *Census of Agriculture 2012 State and County Data*. Retrieved from [www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012).

(Figure 4) shows major roads leading to market destinations. The Lynchburg, Greensboro, and Raleigh-Durham markets are within 60 miles of Halifax, and Charlottesville, Richmond, and Winston-Salem are within 100 miles. Halifax farmers and foresters selling their timber report these market destinations as places where they take and sell their products.

## Forestry and Forest Products



**Figure 4: Market Destinations within a 60-Mile and 100-Mile Buffer of Halifax County**

Timber poses significant opportunities for the county. Out of roughly 528,000 acres of land in the entire county, 370,917 acres or 70% is forested land in Halifax County. Table 3 displays the acreage of forestland in Halifax County, the surrounding Virginia counties, and the state as a whole. Timberland in Halifax County is 96% privately owned and 4% publicly owned, whereas Virginia’s timberland is 85% privately owned and 15% publicly owned. This distinction highlights the need for public entities to support and operate through private landowners to capitalize on the opportunity to leverage forest assets in the region.

There are two major categories of tree species in Halifax: softwoods (pine, cedar, fir, hemlock, etc.) and hardwoods (oak, maple, poplar, hickory, sweetgum, black gum, etc.). Historically, the forest land of Halifax has been approximately 40% pine (softwood), slightly over 50% upland hardwood, with the remainder being bottomland hardwood. Halifax’s greater proportion of softwoods relative to the state offers a comparative advantage within the timber industry.

According to trends in Halifax County, more pine acres are harvested than are planted, which poses a strain on softwood resources in the county. Although the differential between planting and harvesting has

**Table 2: Top Commodity Agricultural Products**

	Halifax (2012)			U.S. (April 2017)
	Halifax Total Sales	Virginia Total Sales	# of Farm	Price per Unit
<b>Tobacco</b>	\$13.4 million	\$100.9 million	79	\$5.23/lb
<b>Cattle</b>	\$8 million	\$708 million	412	\$128/cwt
<b>Hogs and pigs</b>	\$3.4 million	\$67.7 million	30	\$48.40/cwt
<b>Other crops (e.g. grass seed, greenchop, hay)</b>	\$2.8 million	\$139.8 million	--	\$143/ton
<b>Soybeans</b>	\$2 million	\$286.1 million	58	\$9.32/bu
<b>Wheat</b>	\$1.4 million	\$92.3 million	65	\$4.17/bu
<b>Corn</b>	\$1.2 million	\$239.7 million	38	\$3.43/bu
<b>Vegetables (fresh)</b>	\$917,000	\$92.3 million	49	\$126/cwt

**Table Sources:** EMSI 2017.2 Data Set; QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, Self-Employed, and Extended Proprietors; Retrieved May 2017

United States Department of Agriculture. *National Agriculture Statistics Service, 2012 Crop Data and 2010 Livestock Data*. Retrieved from <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>

declined in recent years, sustaining these resources is still a concern. More lands may need proper forestry management to ensure these softwood resources are available for future harvests. According to the county's 2007 Comprehensive Plan, significant acreages of previously harvested land are left to grow naturally each year instead of being actively managed. As a result, native pines are growing in place of other, more valuable pine useful to the timber industry.<sup>10</sup>

The forestry and logging industry currently employs 119 people. As with agriculture, percent employment in forestry-related jobs in Halifax County is much higher than state and national levels. Between 2007 and 2017, the forestry and logging industry gained about 59 employees (87% growth), compared to the region's 7% growth in jobs. Forestry and logging is the second fastest growing industry in Halifax County and is expected to grow another 17% by 2022. The average annual earnings for all people employed in this industry in Halifax County is \$51,486, which is nearly

\$10,000 higher than the national forestry industry average and more than \$13,000 higher than the state forestry industry average.<sup>11</sup>

## Findings from Industry Survey

Beginning in summer 2016 through January 2017, the Halifax County Agriculture Director, Farm Bureau, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and other stakeholders in the county distributed paper and electronic surveys to agriculture and forestry operators. Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development collected and analyzed 73 surveys (19% drop off rate) from a variety of agriculture and forestry operators.

While respondent types varied, larger businesses and those who rely more on agriculture and forestry as their primary source of income were disproportionately represented. This fact is seen best by the number of responses by business type (Figure 5), the amount of sales revenue (Figure 6), and the

10 United States Forest Service Timber Product Output Report, 2011. Retrieved from [www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb\\_srs197.pdf](http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb_srs197.pdf).

11 EMSI 2017.2; QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, Self-Employed, and Extended Proprietors

**Table 3: Area of Timberland by County and Major Ownership Group, 2011**

	Halifax	Halifax % Breakdown	Virginia	Virginia % Breakdown
Public ownership	16,612	4%	57,837	5%
Total	370,917	100%	1,118,202	100%

\*Region includes surrounding VA counties only; data is unavailable for surrounding NC counties.

**Table Source:** United States Forest Service Timber Product Output Report, 2011. Retrieved from [www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb\\_srs197.pdf](http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb_srs197.pdf).

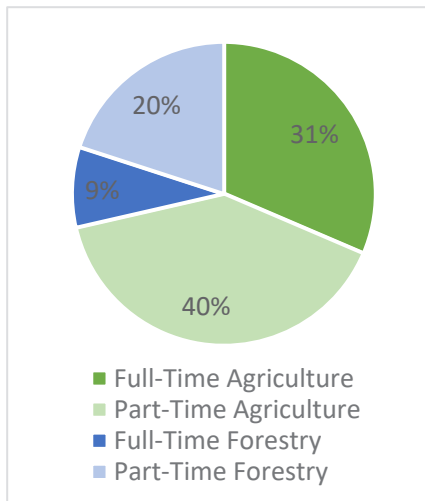
**Table 4: Volume of Live Trees on Timberland by Major Species Group (Million Cubic Feet), 2011**

Major Species Group	Halifax	Halifax % Breakdown	Virginia	Virginia % Breakdown
Softwoods	269.8	45%	7,965.9	23%
Hardwoods	331.2	55%	25,953.10	77%
Total	601	100%	33,919	100%

**Table Source:** United States Forest Service Timber Product Output Report, 2011. Retrieved from [www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb\\_srs197.pdf](http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb_srs197.pdf).

number of workers employed by businesses. About 44% of respondents were sole proprietors and 40% had less than ten employees. The 10% of respondents who had 10-30 employees were primarily full-time agriculture businesses, and the two respondents that had 100-299 employees were full-time forestry-related operations. While disproportionate, these respondents are those that would most likely benefit from the changes made in Halifax to support the agriculture and forestry industry as they are actively engaged and potentially more reliant on the work.

**Figure 5: Type of Operation**



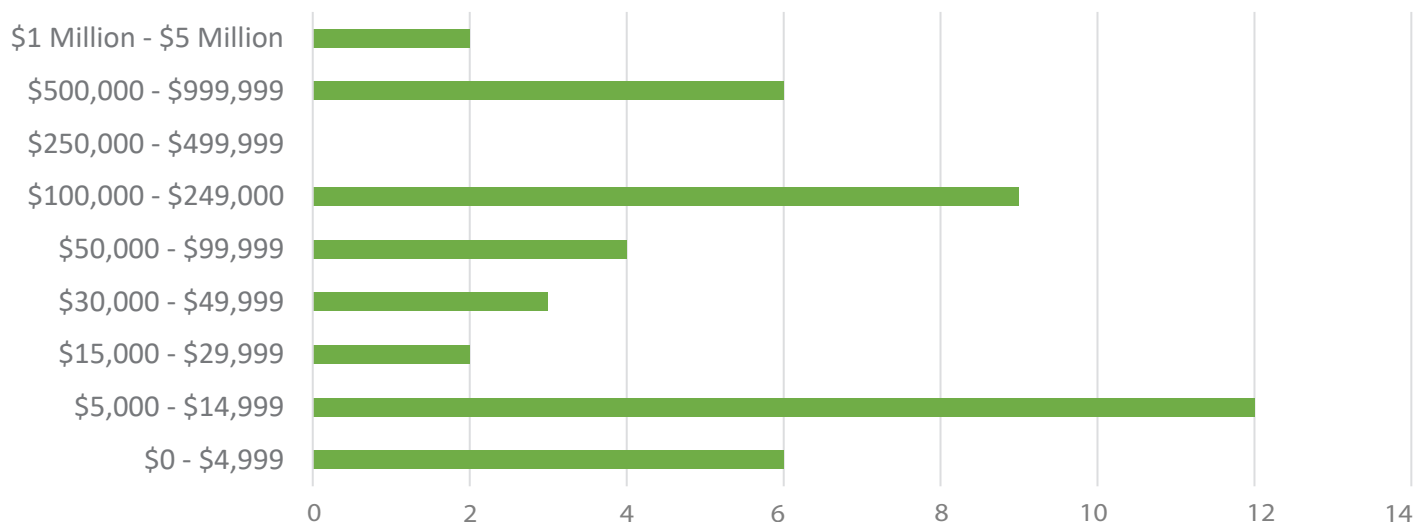
Respondents' types of production also varied. Production includes animals (42 responses), commodity crops (38 responses), produce (24

responses), timber products (27 responses), and niche production (five responses). The majority of respondents listed their top production items as feeder cattle, timber, tobacco, beef cattle, and soybeans. Specific products include (in descending order):

- Animal Production: Feeder and Beef Cattle, Chickens and Eggs, Hogs, Goats, Sheep and Lamb
- Commodity Crops: Soybeans, Tobacco, Wheat, Corn, Hay and Straw
- Timber Products: Timber, Pulpwood and Chips, Wood Product Manufacturing
- Produce: Tomatoes, Cantaloupe, Watermelon, Strawberries, Cabbage, Pumpkins, and assorted vegetables
- Niche Products and Agritourism: Tilapia, Soap, Baked Goods, Horses, Hunting (one response each)

Finally, respondents represented both those new and experienced in the sector. Forty-three percent of respondents had been in their industry for over 35 years. For those with 11-15 years and 25-35 years of experiences, each represented approximately 20% of respondents. The remaining 17% of respondents have been working 1-10 years in their agriculture or forestry-related business.

**Figure 6: Sales Revenue for FY2015**



## Markets and distribution

Farmers, particularly those with larger scale production, tended to use a variety of methods to transport products to market. The majority of these operators, 70%, delivered their own products to buyers or markets by their own truck, while 36% had products picked up by buyers, 14% used third parties for distribution, and only 7% coordinated with other farmers to distribute products.

Most survey respondents sold their products on a variety of geographic scales, including locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. For agriculture-related businesses, 79% sell their at least some of their products in Halifax and the surrounding region. Only 23% of respondents rely solely on local markets, most likely those that sell their products at farmers markets and through tourism. About 54% sell their products in Virginia, 40% sell their products in Southern and Southwest Virginia, and 17% sell in the Southern United States. Logically, respondents whose primary source of income was their agriculture business had greater market reach. Three full-time producers reported selling their products nationally

and internationally. Forestry-related businesses tend to sell their products in Virginia, nationally, as well as to local manufacturers.

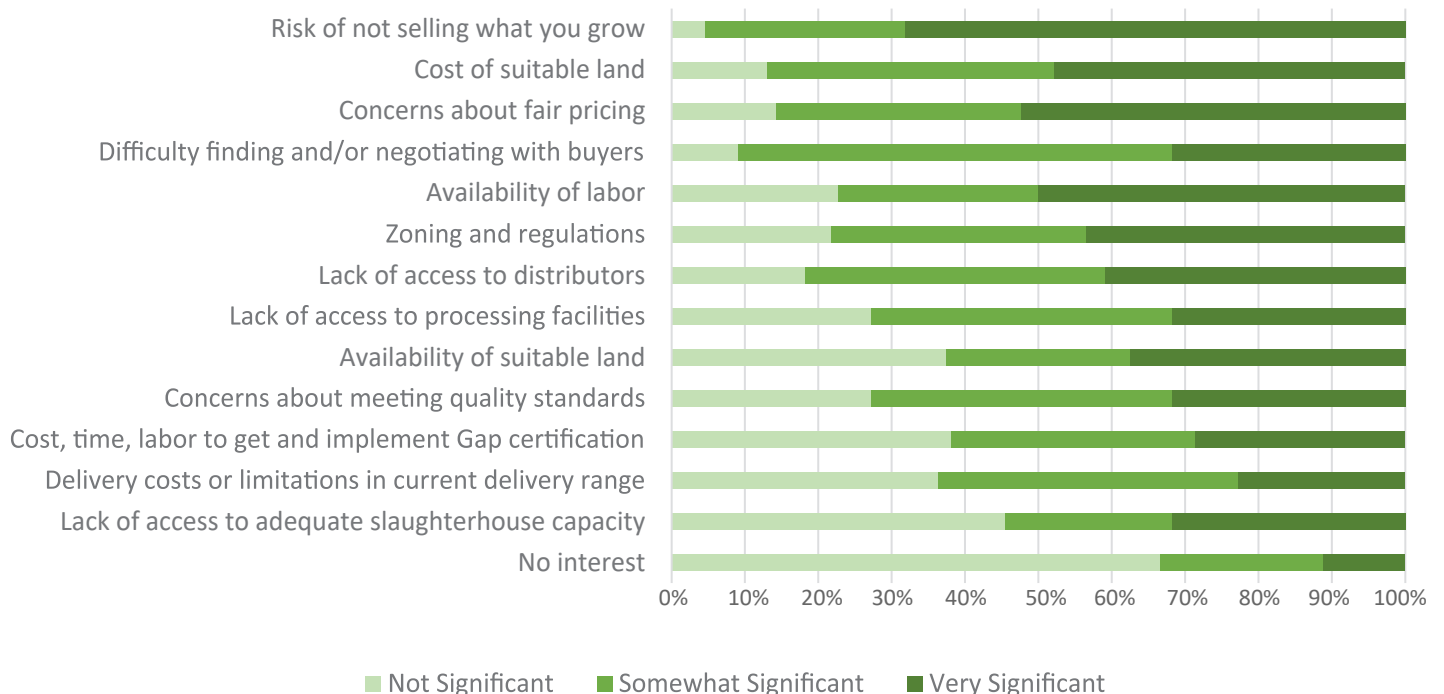
## Entering and increasing participation in non-direct-to-consumer markets

Approximately 66% of farmers and 47% of foresters<sup>12</sup>, regardless of whether they were full- or part-time, were interested in the prospect of expanding their production to more non-direct-to-consumer markets provided certain barriers were reduced. Figure 7 shows the barriers considered significant by the majority of respondents. These barriers include the availability of labor, the risk of not selling what they grow, and zoning and regulatory concerns. Survey and interview results show that availability and cost of land were the immediate concerns among most respondents.

Some statistically significant differences arose between producers who considered their agriculture

12 These percentages represent some minor overlap as some agriculture producers also sell their timber as added-income. Twenty-six out of forty-three respondents expressed an interest in expanding their markets.

**Figure 7: Barriers to Expansion**



business their primary source of income and those that considered it added income. For instance, 80% of full-time agriculture producers compared to 56% of part-time producers considered the costs, time and labor required to get and implement GAP certification standards a significant burden. Compared to full-time producers, part-time producers were more concerned with lack of access to processing facilities such as a slaughterhouse or community kitchen<sup>13</sup> (88% versus 50%) and delivery costs or limitations in current delivery range (75% versus 50%).

For producers who expressed an interest in expansion, their key concerns dealt largely with market access and distribution regardless of what they produced (e.g. cattle, commodity crops, produce,

<sup>13</sup> The term “processing facility” is any facility that adds values to a crop or animal product through specific treatments. This could include a slaughterhouse, a packaging facility, a cannery or community kitchen, etc.

etc). Of producers concerned with selling their entire product, 68% saw market access and distribution as a very significant barrier, and 27% saw it as a somewhat significant barrier. Access to distributors was a significant barrier for 82% of producers interested in expanding. Meanwhile, 91% of producers interested in expansion considered finding and negotiating with buyers at least somewhat of a hindrance to expansion.

Some survey response variation<sup>14</sup> occurred amongst agriculture and forestry operations producing different primary products as seen in Table 5. Note these responses are those who expressed an interest in expansion.

When asked what kind of market assistance they would like from support organizations, cooperatives or food hubs, respondents most valued services

<sup>14</sup> Due to the low response rate, this variation is statistically insignificant; however responses do reflect what was said in interviews and community meetings.

**Table 5: Most and Least Significant Challenges by Primary Product Produced\***

Primary Product	Most Significant Challenges	Least Significant Challenges
Cattle (7 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of not selling what you grow</li> <li>• Zoning or other local regulations</li> <li>• Availability of labor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of suitable land</li> <li>• Concerns about meeting quality standard</li> <li>• Lack of access to adequate slaughterhouse capacity</li> </ul>
Chicken and Hogs (4 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of suitable land</li> <li>• Risk of not selling what you grow</li> <li>• Lack of access to adequate slaughterhouse capacity</li> <li>• Availability of suitable land (most likely zoning in this case)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost, time and/or labor to get and implement GAP certification</li> <li>• Delivery cost or limitations in current delivery range</li> </ul>
Commodity Crops (7 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of not selling what you grow</li> <li>• Concerns about fair pricing</li> <li>• Concerns about meeting quality standards</li> <li>• Cost of suitable land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of suitable land</li> <li>• Delivery cost of limitation in current delivery range</li> <li>• Lack of access to adequate slaughterhouse capacity</li> </ul>
Produce (4 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of suitable land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery cost or limitation in current delivery range</li> <li>• Lack of access to adequate slaughterhouse capacity</li> </ul>
Forestry (3 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns about fair pricing</li> <li>• Risk of not selling what you grow</li> <li>• Cost of suitable land</li> <li>• Availability of labor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of suitable land</li> <li>• Lack of access to adequate slaughterhouse capacity</li> </ul>

\*These responses are based on a multiple choice question. Based on their knowledge of the county, respondents marked which challenges were least, somewhat, or most significant.

were assistance in: 1) diversifying sales outlets, 2) identifying markets for surplus product, 3) connecting to large volume sales outlets, and 4) spending less time on sales and marketing.

### **Opportunities for future growth**

When asked about specific products of interest for the coming five years, respondents provided a variety of answers. Some showed interest in forestry products, cattle, vegetables and hay. Several responses showed interest in niche crops such as value-added animal production (pasture-raised, organic, genetic improvement and processed), berries, apple trees, bok choy, and honey.

Agritourism represents another potential opportunity. Of total survey respondents, 20% said they engaged in some sort of agritourism already, while 27% expressed an interest in agritourism. Those who had an agriculture or forestry related business as added-income (extended proprietors) were more likely to engage in agritourism activities or show interest in engaging in agritourism in the future.

The top five opportunities respondents believed to be most helpful in Halifax were:

1. Institute more agriculture-friendly zoning, tax incentives and protection policies – Open responses to this question included comments on setbacks for chicken and hog farms. One farmer noted, “The setbacks currently in effect prohibit confined livestock production and deny farmers the opportunity to use their own farms as they see fit to feed their families and many others.” Others discussed the need for extended agriculture and forestry districts.
2. Promote forestry and soil management practices to sustain/increase production over time – This response reflected comments by industry experts who expressed a desire to see more landowners engage in forestry management planning and contemporary, more sustainable soil management practices. Several noted that these

activities could improve long-term production quality and/or quantity for farmers and foresters.

3. Identify new and/or growing markets outside of the county for agriculture/forestry businesses to sell their products – One respondent noted that while it is ultimately up to the producer, increasing awareness of market needs and opportunities would help them to be more informed.
4. Offer more programming to attract and train young farmers – one respondent expounded on the need to connect retired farmers, whose land is vacant, with young farmers.
5. Foster value-added agriculture/forestry businesses in the area to take advantage of raw resources – in one interview in particular, a respondent mentioned the county should actively support efforts to leverage on Halifax’s comparative advantage—its raw agricultural and forestry material—and develop value-added processing to better grow the county’s economy.

## **Summary of Community Engagement Findings**

In addition to the industry survey, the Halifax Agriculture Director and Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development engaged industry stakeholders through 40 one-on-one interviews, three community meetings, and four focus groups. Through this engagement process, the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development assessed the state of Halifax’s agriculture and forestry industry sector and developed a summary SWOT analysis. This analysis reviews the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to a particular community, organization or industry. Specifically:

- Strengths of the local agriculture and forestry industry sector including the assets and systems that support the sector

- Weaknesses of the local agriculture and forestry industry sector including the assets and systems (or lack thereof) meant to support the sector
- Opportunities external to Halifax that the industry sector could capitalize on and benefit from
- Threats external to Halifax that stakeholders should consider when moving forward, but over which they may have little to no control

## Strengths

Halifax County's agriculture and forestry industry sector has a long history of success, having served as the backbone of the county's economy and helping to cultivate a proud, rural identity among Halifax residents. Today, the industry sector benefits from its access to markets via three US highways (501, 58 and 360), good weather and soil for crop production, and multiple organizations that support the industry sector. These organizations provide educational, technical, and financial support. The county, for instance, regularly convenes an Agriculture Development Advisory Committee to provide advice on agriculture and forestry-related issues, and is among a small handful of counties in Virginia to prioritize agriculture to the point of creating a department and Agriculture Development position within the county administrative body. The county has also developed Agriculture and Forestry Districts (AFD) to support active farming and forestry operators. Organizations such as Farm Bureau, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources and Conservation including Soil and Water, and the Department of Forestry all have long histories of providing vital support to farmers and foresters. Some organizations also offer access to spaces used for educational and convening purposes, e.g. the Halifax School District and County Firehouses. Figure 8 lists organizations providing support to the industry sector.

With ever-changing market demands, agriculture and forestry businesses are becoming more aware of

the need to diversify their products and adapt their operations. For instance, many farmers are managing and selling their timber to pay for farm expenses such as land and capital. They also see opportunity in the region's growing agritourism industry, particularly as land parcels are small.

A growing strength in this region is also the increased awareness and interest in the agriculture and forestry industry sector. The county has experienced in-migration of those interested in agriculture as a second career. Many in the Millennial generation are also increasingly interested in agriculture and forestry as an alternative to moving to larger metropolitan areas and getting a 9 to 5 job.

## Weaknesses

Despite the abundance of resources and industry sector strengths in Halifax, the county faces some challenges. Notwithstanding the influx of second career individuals, the overall population is declining, and those who remain are older. While youth are

### Figure 8: Sampling of Ag-Forestry Resources

- Commodity and Industry Groups – e.g. Southern Virginia Beef Alliance, Southern Virginia Meat Goat Association, Halifax Beekeeper Association
- County Government – Agriculture Dept.
- Halifax County School System
- County Tourism
- Farm Bureau
- Farm Credit
- Farmers Markets
- Farm Service Agency
- Industrial Development Authority
- Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) – Virginia State University (VSU) and Virginia Tech
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VDCR)
- Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOP)
- Virginia Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation and Rural Sustainability (Virginia FAIRS)



interested in farming, they face many barriers when entering the industry sector and therefore do not stay in the industry or county. These barriers include limited availability and affordability of land in the county for new farmers or those wishing to expand their operations. Many land parcels have been divided over the years to the extent that they are now small parcels. It is logistically and financially difficult for farmers to buy a larger, contiguous land tract. Other challenges for farmers hoping to establish or sustain their operations include insufficient access to capital, markets, and marketing resources. Similar to challenges faced by any business, farmers must also be very business savvy, developing viable business models and adapting to changing markets in order to grow and sustain their operations.

While many farmers and foresters understand the need for change in their operations, practiced change is difficult. Many farmers in Halifax are still over-reliant on traditional farming practices such as tilling.<sup>15</sup> They have not adopted contemporary farming approaches; for example, soil management techniques that would increase overall crop productivity. Many landowners also do not participate in active forestry management, which would ensure more quality timber products in the future. In addition, even as agritourism grows in the region, coordination among agritourism stakeholders is still limited.



*Tobacco cultivation in Halifax County*

15 An overreliance on high-tillage systems and a lack of crop rotation limits the fertility of the land, requiring higher inputs of pesticides and fertilizers.

Through interviews and surveys, several agriculture-related businesses in the area expressed a desire to see more, proactive support from county government. They felt that the county does not prioritize the agriculture industry as much as it should. One aspect of this limited support is seen in county ordinances that are not industry-friendly such as zoning that makes hog and chicken production more difficult.

## Opportunities

National and regional trends pose opportunities for agriculture and forestry in Halifax. Today, commodity crop production often hinges on larger, corporate producers. To compete, independent farmers are often better off producing unique strains of a commodity crop and/or improving the quality of their products to sell to more niche markets. Through university research and emerging markets, new crops for niche markets are continually becoming products of interest including: hops, barley, wine grapes, hemp, turmeric, ginger, etc. Those in the cattle industry may benefit from collaborating to standardize the quality and weights of their feeder cattle, guaranteeing a more consistent weight range among lots of cattle and thus higher prices per head. Encouraging farmers to produce more finishing cattle for meat production may also be an opportunity if the region wishes to attract a meat processing plant to the county. Counties and regions across Virginia have conducted several feasibility studies for meat processing, particularly for cattle, and most have questioned whether there is enough supply of finished cattle and other livestock.

Other industry prospects include the growing poultry market, increased demand for agritourism nationally, and value-added agriculture-forestry products. While industry experts expect the demand for poultry to increase in the future, Halifax would have to develop appropriate crop yields or a supply chain of grain to feed a prospective poultry industry in the region. Strong regional collaboration in Southern Virginia and North Carolina would also be necessary. The growing agritourism market poses opportunities

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as an additional source of income for many farmers, but like the tourism industry in general, it is limited by seasonality. Value-added production, while more labor intensive, can have higher returns on investment over the long-term. Producers interested in value-added production often require an initial investment in capital and infrastructure, starting small and expanding production over time.

Halifax is uniquely positioned to take advantage of growing North Carolina markets. While many in the industry sector already sell their products across the state line, the growing Raleigh-Durham markets represent greater opportunities. The use of online marketing through websites and social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) is one good way to reach these markets. Online marketing has lowered financial barriers to reaching customers for many smaller businesses.

Finally, as Halifax looks to grow its industry, the need for young farmers and foresters is essential. Although many millennials prefer to move to larger cities, at least one segment of the generation is interested in sustainable food systems, farming, and natural resources. They exhibit a growing desire to move to rural regions. Indeed, several younger adults in the Halifax agriculture and forestry industry sector expressed a desire to continue the agriculture and forestry traditions of the region.

## **Threats**

Forestry and agriculture production are highly dependent on nature and downstream industries. For example, annual production for farmers hinges on the weather—the rain, sunshine, snow, and wind. Even with good weather, commodity markets are cyclical. This means industries might slow their production with lower prices and less revenue. For instance, as the price for pork has fallen, large-scale hog corporations such as Smithfield have slowed expansions of Virginia operations. Individual operations also may be at risk if they do not account for cyclical dips in prices.

For example, forestry and timber pricing depends primarily on the construction industry. During the Great Recession, the failure of the housing and construction industry negatively affected forestry and timber companies. Today, this supply chain is growing again. Although demand for agritourism is still growing, tourism demand is also cyclical. Agritourism is prevalent in late Spring through Fall, but usually tapers off in the winter. Several in the industry also foresee potential for market saturation in the distant future.

Farming practices may also be affected by two key threats. First, many farmers expressed a concern about changing GAP certifications. The time, labor and costs associated with gaining GAP certification and then implementing GAP standard practices can often be arduous for independent farmers. Second, the decline of small, independent farming in lieu of larger-scale, corporate farming necessitates more collaboration among independent farmers in order to compete. Collaboration could include aggregating products to reach larger markets or sharing equipment. Interviews and community meetings with stakeholders have revealed limited collaboration among Halifax farmers thus far.

Finally, individual localities are often interested in building infrastructure in support of agriculture and forestry. These opportunities include meat processing facilities, commercial kitchens, food hubs, agriculture incubators, grain integrators, and more. While this infrastructure has potential to grow the industry, there is not enough supply and demand for agricultural products in each individual locality to justify private investment. Moreover, these localities compete with each other for such facilities. This competition and lack of collaboration can threaten the region's ability to make its case to the private companies that would invest in building and operating these facilities, thereby hurting localities in the process. ■

## Goals and Action Items

The following goals address key priorities identified during the community engagement process. Strategies and action items align with opportunities to leverage county assets, capitalize on national trends, and strengthen industry sector capacity. Each strategy has one or more possible action items, which offer recommended implementation periods, project leads, potential partners, financial considerations and measurable outcomes. Potential partners listed under these actions have expertise or access to resources pertaining to the individual action item. It is not obligatory that they play a part in the final project, and specific roles may vary depending on the partner. The county and its partners should reevaluate action items on a regular basis according to the conditions of the time. The table below provides a summary of Halifax’s vision, goals and strategies for the agriculture and forestry industry sector. The remaining section provides an in-depth description.



**Table 7: Vision, Goals and Strategies for Halifax County Agriculture and Forestry**

<b>VISION:</b> Halifax envisions a growing and diversified agriculture and forestry industry sector that leverages the area’s rich cultural, economic and geographic assets, and successfully supports the livelihoods of county residents.	
<b>GOAL 1.</b> Improve planning and project coordination for agriculture and forestry	<b>STRATEGY 1.1.</b> Align the role of the Halifax Agriculture Director with the priorities adopted in the agriculture and forestry strategic plan
	<b>STRATEGY 1.2.</b> Enhance agriculture representation and collaboration in the county
	<b>STRATEGY 1.3.</b> Coordinate plans and activities with local, regional and state organizations and agencies
<b>GOAL 2.</b> Preserve and increase actively managed farm and forestry land	<b>STRATEGY 2.1.</b> Raise awareness of the natural, cultural and economic value of agricultural and forestry assets in Halifax
	<b>STRATEGY 2.2.</b> Implement land use policy that will support active farming and forestry practices, particularly for those whose primary source of income comes from the industry sector
<b>GOAL 3.</b> Improve competitiveness of local farm and forestry operations	<b>STRATEGY 3.1.</b> Identify and promote new opportunities for farmers and foresters in the county
	<b>STRATEGY 3.2.</b> Coordinate outreach to external markets
	<b>STRATEGY 3.3.</b> Support local agritourism development in Halifax
<b>GOAL 4.</b> Ensure continuance of the industry sector by supporting farm succession and the agriculture workforce	<b>STRATEGY 4.1.</b> Increase youth exposure to agriculture and forestry
	<b>STRATEGY 4.2.</b> Support beginner farmers training and technical assistance
<b>GOAL 5.</b> Increase agriculture and forestry entrepreneurship	<b>STRATEGY 5.1.</b> Incentivize small agriculture- and forestry-related business development
	<b>STRATEGY 5.2.</b> Examine and accommodate when able opportunities for large infrastructure development that would support agriculture and forestry operations

## Goal 1: Improve Planning And Project Coordination For Agriculture And Forestry

Many dedicated individuals and organizations operate in Halifax with the purpose of supporting the development and growth of agriculture and forestry, yet these efforts may be dispersed, have less outreach to community members, and be less effective than efforts involving coordinated planning and project implementation by multiple entities within the region. Coordinating agriculture-forestry activities and leadership as well as building capacity for coordinated outreach to farmers and foresters will help to leverage existing assets and ensure better advocacy for the industry sector moving forward.

### Strategy 1.1. Align the role of the Halifax Agriculture Director with the priorities adopted in the agriculture and forestry strategic plan.

<p><b>Action 1.1.1:</b> The Halifax County Administrator will coordinate with the Halifax Agricultural Director and the Board of Supervisors to align strategies and actions in the Halifax Agriculture and Forestry Strategic Plan with the activities of the Halifax Agricultural Director. This alignment will clearly define the role of the Halifax Agricultural Director in the county and provide goals that guide the activities of the Director.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 2-5 Months (Begin July 2017)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> County Administrator</p>
	<p><i>Financial Considerations:</i> A departmental budget commensurate with the expected goals and activities of the Halifax Agricultural Director</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Inclusion of strategic plan elements into performance objectives and goals of the Agriculture Marketing Director Position as may be determined useful by the County Administrator</p>

### Strategy 1.2. Enhance agriculture representation and collaboration in the county.

<p><b>Action 1.2.1:</b> Develop opportunities for leadership training for members of the Agriculture Development Advisory Committee (ADAC) to build agriculture leadership capacity in the county. The purpose of the ADAC is to support the efforts of the county to grow and sustain the agriculture and forestry industry. To achieve this goal, it is essential for ADAC members to be community leaders, not only serving the committee in an advisory capacity but also identifying opportunities to participate in events and activities that would actively support the development of the agriculture and forestry industry. Investing in member's leadership capacity is therefore vital.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> Ongoing (Begin January 2018)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Agriculture Development Advisory Committee</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director, VALOR, VCE and VSU Extension</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Training/educational budget</p>
<p><b>Action 1.2.2:</b> Encourage agriculture and forestry community in Halifax to serve on town, county and regional nonprofit boards and committees. Representation on different boards and committees throughout the region, not just those focusing directly on agriculture and forestry, will raise awareness of the industry sector across different spheres of influence, including the County Board and advisory committees, the Industrial Development Authority, town councils, Old Dominion Agriculture Foundation, etc.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> Ongoing (Begin January 2018)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director and Agriculture Development Advisory Committee</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> None</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Two or more agriculture and forestry community members or advocates on a list of regional boards and committees.</p>

**Strategy 1.3. Coordinate plans and activities with local, regional and state organizations and agencies.**

<p><b>Action 1.3.1:</b> Convene local stakeholders quarterly to discuss upcoming activities related to agriculture and forestry in the county and region, and explore opportunities for greater collaboration.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> Ongoing</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Agriculture Development Advisory Committee, Halifax SWCD, DoF, VCE, VDAC, FSA, Farm Credit, NRCS, commodity and industry groups</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> None</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Increased number of producers participating and involved in agricultural or forestry activities.</p>

**Goal 2: Preserve And Increase Actively Managed Farm And Forestry Land**

A growing concern among the agriculture and forestry community is the lack of actively managed farm forested land. While Halifax has a large acreage of undeveloped land, much of that land is split into smaller parcels and is left unmanaged. In order to ensure that land is suitable for current and future use, Halifax will increase awareness of the importance of managed farm and forested land and consider implementing land use policy that supports active farming and forestry activities.

**Strategy 2.1. Raise awareness of the natural, cultural and economic value of agricultural and forestry assets in Halifax.**

<p><b>Action 2.1.1:</b> Create and disseminate brochures and podcasts to educate public on the importance of agriculture and forestry in Halifax, and the value of their land to that industry sector. The brochure will provide information on available agriculture and forestry services. Attention should be paid to reach absentee landowners. Featuring local and industry experts, podcasts may address specific issues of interest to landowners, farmers and foresters.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> Ongoing (Begin January 2018)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Halifax SWCD, DoF, VCE, VSU, Farm Bureau, Farm Credit, Schools, Farmers Markets</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Funding to develop an aesthetically pleasing brochure; distribution expenses; and equipment for video and podcasts such as microphones, camera and editing software.</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> County resource providers see an increase in contacts from Halifax residents seeking services to support and manage their land.</p>
<p><b>Action 2.1.2:</b> To encourage and support the activities of the Soil and Water Conservation District county office, coordinate a soil improvement initiative among different county partners meant to educate landowners on the benefits of active soil management such as returns on investment to farmers who maintain good top soil quality.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 3-5 Years (Begin January 2018)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Soil and Water Conservation District</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director, NRCS, FSA, VCE</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Leverage local resources for grant funding.</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Increased interest and activity among farmers to manage and improve the quality of their top soil</p>

<p><b>Action 2.1.3:</b> To encourage and support the activities of the Virginia Department of Forestry’s county office, develop a strategy among interested stakeholders to increase the number of landowners with forest management plans.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 4 Years (Begin January 2018)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Virginia Department of Forestry (county office)</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director, VCE, Forestry industry consultants</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Leverage DoF and county funds to acquire grant funding that will fund a certain number of forest management plans</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Number of forestry management plans and number of new landowners contacting DoF for consultation resulting of initiative activities</p>

**Strategy 2.2. Implement land use policy that will support active farming and forestry practices, particularly for those whose primary source of income comes from the industry sector.**

<p><b>Action 2.2.1:</b> Review Agriculture and Forestry Districts (AFD).</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 18 months (Begin July 2017)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax County Administration</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Agriculture Development Advisory Committee</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> A reduction in tax revenues from one segment of tax payers, which shifts the burden to other tax payers and/or requires a reduction in services</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Decision of appropriateness of renewing AFD policy in Halifax</p>
<p><b>Action 2.2.2:</b> Explore other land preservation approaches such as conservation easements and purchase of development rights (PDRs) as alternatives to landowners participating in AFD. These options may be better suited for those wishing to preserve their lands, but who are not actively farming their land and managing their forests.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 12 months (Begin January 2018)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax County Administration</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), Agriculture Development Advisory Committee</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Potential cumulative reduction in tax revenues</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Develop a county policy and possible support services to interested landowners</p>

## Goal 3: Improve Competitiveness Of Local Farm And Forestry Operations

A key set of challenges for local farm and forestry operations are changing market demands that result in the need to diversify products, adapt operations, and gain better access to markets. Halifax farmers, in particular, need to be aware of and be able to capitalize on new opportunities suitable for their land. They also require support in reaching and developing interest from local, regional, and national markets.

### Strategy 3.1. Identify and promote new opportunities for farmers and foresters in the county.

**Action 3.1.1:** Encourage adoption of new agricultural product opportunities. Due to market trends and agricultural research, opportunities to pursue new types of production are ever present. While some of these products may not be market ready or market demand does readily exist at present, increasing knowledge among farmers of possible future opportunities, particularly those suitable to the Halifax soil and climate, help farmers as they plan to adapt and diversify their farms according to market trends.

*Duration:* 3-5 Years (Begin January 2018)

*Lead:* Halifax Agriculture Director

*Potential Partners:* VCE and VSU, Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Virginia Tech Soil Testing Lab, IALR

*Financial Needs:* Resources to incentivize and support these technologies and practices

*Measurable Outcomes:* Increased number of farms testing or planning to test new agricultural crops, technology or practices.

**Action 3.1.2:** Explore and encourage opportunities for value-added agriculture products. Similar to diversifying agricultural products, opportunities exist to create value-added products from the raw materials produced in farming and forestry. Products can be value-added in two ways: 1) the physical form of the product is changed in some way such as drying and pelletizing hops for beer or making jam from berries; and 2) the process of growing the agricultural or forestry product brings added value to the product such as organic produce or growing very straight pine trees for electricity polls. While value-added may be more labor intensive, adopting these approaches to agriculture and forestry benefit operations by increasing overall revenue.

*Duration:* Ongoing

*Lead:* Halifax Agriculture Director

*Potential Partners:* Agriculture Development Advisory Committee, VCE, VSU, Danville Regional Foundation, local entrepreneurs

*Financial Needs:* Actively consider annual funding source for future use or leverage grant funding

*Measurable Outcomes:* Number of new farms and residents interested in or pursuing value-added production

### Strategy 3.2. Coordinate outreach to external markets

**Action 3.2.1:** Engage and liaise with out-of-region businesses as potential buyers of Halifax agricultural and forestry products.

*Duration:* Ongoing

*Lead:* Halifax Agriculture Director

*Potential Partners:* Industrial Development Authority

*Financial Needs:* Travel funding to visit companies and industry conferences; funding to host businesses in county

*Measurable Outcomes:* Increased number of businesses with interest in Halifax agricultural and forestry products; number of business connections and partnerships made

<p><b>Action 3.2.2:</b> Establish a business retention and expansion program to engage larger agriculture and forestry operations on issues of distribution and market reach. This program may work with commodity and industry groups such as the Southern Virginia Beef Alliance to address specific industry needs.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> Ongoing</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Soil and Water, VCE, FSA, NRCS</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Unknown</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Increase site visits</p>
<p><b>Action 3.2.3:</b> Promote locally-sourced products and services through the Genuine Halifax website and brand.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> Ongoing</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> County agriculture and forestry businesses, Tourism, VCE, VSU, SWCD, Farm Bureau, FFA, NRCS, School System</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Cost of maintaining and updating content on website, promotional materials, and possible event</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Number of businesses using website increases</p>

Strategy 3.3. Support local agritourism development in Halifax	
<p><b>Action 3.3.1:</b> Leverage the success of local farmers markets and promote further growth. Farmers markets in Halifax and South Boston are already successful, and they play a role in agritourism as they are a converging site for farmers and tourists. Many farmers markets use this opportunity to promote other agritourism sites in their community and promote the consumption of specialty crops grown by local farmers, thereby helping to foster the development of new markets for these specialty products. That Farmers Market Coalition provides additional ideas of farmers market programming that can help to support agriculture activities in communities.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 2 Years (Begin January 2018)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Towns of Halifax and South Boston</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> VCE, County Tourism, Halifax Agriculture Director, Agriculture Development Advisory Committee</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Unknown</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Increased visitation, increased revenue to farmers</p>
<p><b>Action 3.3.2:</b> Help farmers wishing to pursue agritourism opportunities gain access to needed resources. Opportunities for agritourism include but are not limited to wineries, breweries, distilleries, farm stays, you-pick operations, and others that entail visitors to Halifax County engaging in the agriculture and forestry industry sector.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> Ongoing</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Halifax Tourism, VCE, VSU, region industry groups (e.g. Halifax Beekeepers Association)</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> \$3-5K annually</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Increased number of agritourism operations or expansion of current agritourism operations</p>



## Goal 4: Ensure Continuance Of The Industry Sector By Supporting Farm Succession And The Agriculture Workforce

If the local agriculture and forestry industry is to sustain itself and grow in the coming decades, younger generations need to develop an interest in the industry sector, often at an early age, and have the tools necessary to be successful. Already, a growing number of millennials are intrigued by the prospect of growing local foods, timber and value-added products. Three barriers to success hinder their efforts: education and understanding of the industry, access to affordable land, and high upfront capital costs. Halifax has an opportunity to not only engage the interest of youth in agriculture and forestry at an early age, but also to identify and implement approaches to lowering barriers to entry for those wishing to pursue a career in the industry sector.

Strategy 4.1. Increase exposure of youth to agriculture and forestry	
<p><b>Action 4.1.1:</b> Expand current youth agriculture and forestry programming in the school system and with other local entities. For instance, the fairgrounds are already used by Career and Technical Education teachers. With the vast amounts of land, opportunities exist to leverage property assets for grant funding to purchase and build stables, grow tree plots and other learning opportunities, thereby creating a land lab experience.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 2017–2022 (3-5 years)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax County School System</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director, Virginia Department of Forestry, Soil and Water Conservation District, 4-H, VCE, Farm Bureau, local farmers, Agriculture Development Advisory Committee</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Establish and provide annual funding for opportunities as they present themselves. County land and funding may be leveraged for grant funding.</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Increased number of students receiving exposure to the industry</p>
<p><b>Action 4.1.2:</b> Improve agriculture and forestry industry career counseling in public schools by working with career counsellors, convening them with industry workers and experts to talk about career possibilities in agriculture and forestry, and providing them information to share with students.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 3-5 Years (Begin January 2019)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax County Schools in partnership with Halifax Agriculture Director</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Virginia Community College System, Agriculture Development Advisory Committee, Farm Bureau, Young Farmers &amp; Ranchers, VCE, Department of Forestry, SWCD</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Funding for trips to expose career counselors and teachers to possible job markets in agriculture and forestry.</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Career counsellors have greater understanding of careers in agriculture and forestry; career information material for students</p>

<p><b>Action 4.1.3:</b> Connect local farmers with schools to develop supervised farm experiences. These on-site experiences offer students hands-on learning and create opportunities for future internships. The state already intends to establish a policy for high school students, mandating they participate in at least one internship before graduation. This activity would support these efforts and ensure that students have opportunities to intern in agriculture and forestry related operations regionally.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 3-5 Years (Begin January 2019)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director in partnership with Halifax County School System</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Farm Bureau, Young Farmers &amp; Ranchers, Beginning Farmers, Workforce Development Board (Apprenticeship funding)</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Possible opportunities to leverage small funds to support internship opportunities</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Number of internships increase in the region.</p>

### Strategy 4.2. Support beginner farmers training and technical assistance

<p><b>Action 4.2.1:</b> Connect with the Virginia Beginning Farmers &amp; Rancher Coalition Program at Virginia Tech to explore opportunities for collaboration and utilizing their resources. They already have a free online curriculum that has been successfully used to train farmers in agriculture and business planning. Halifax may pursue county trainings, mentoring programs, small-scale funding or disseminating educational material through this partnership.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> 12 Months (Begin July 2018)</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> Halifax Agriculture Director</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> Virginia Beginning Farmers &amp; Ranchers Coalition Program, Farm Credit Ag Biz Planner, VCE, SWCD, Farm Bureau, Young Farmers &amp; Ranchers, Agriculture Development Advisory Committee</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> Unknown; Recommendations for implementation require funding</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> Number of beginning farmers receiving some form of training</p>

## Goal 5: Increase Agriculture And Forestry Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs are problem-solvers willing to take a risk on business venture that they develop, organize and manage. The dedication and hard work needed to run an agriculture or forestry operation aligns well with this vision of entrepreneurship and reframes the industry in a new, innovative light. To grow the agriculture and forestry industry sector, Halifax must engage the imaginations of entrepreneurs, provide them opportunities to test and develop their products, and lower barriers to entry.

### Strategy 5.1. Incentivize small agriculture- and forestry-related business development

**Action 5.1.1:** Assess the potential of resources and implement at least one new ongoing support program or fund to support the growth of small-scale entrepreneurial startups in the sector. A potential program may include a revolving microloan fund, pitch and startup competitions related to ag and forestry, and other entrepreneurial programming. The county should be cognizant and inclusive of different business types, including start-ups and scale-ups, which may have different resource needs.

*Duration:* 12-18 Months (Begin July 2018)

*Lead:* County Administration

*Potential Partners:* Community Foundation of the Dan River Region; Town of South Boston; Longwood Small Business Development Program; Farm Credit; USDA Microloans Program and Local Food Promotion Program

*Financial Needs:* Possible funding for program or programmatic choices; county funding to leverage private-public partnerships

*Measurable Outcomes:* One new program or funding source developed and implemented by January 2020.

### Strategy 5.2. Examine and accommodate when able opportunities for large infrastructure development that would support agriculture and forestry operations.

**Action 5.2.1:** Evaluate the opportunity for a commercial kitchen or cannery in Halifax. One potential location could be the old cannery, which has already been examined for its redevelopment potential. The Danville Regional Foundation has also commissioned a feasibility study for a commercial kitchen, which can inform county actions.

*Duration:* As opportunity presents itself

*Lead:* County Administration

*Potential Partners:* Danville Regional Foundation, Tri-county Action Agency

*Financial Needs:* None

*Measurable Outcomes:* An evaluation of the suitability of a commercial kitchen or cannery based on availability of private entity to lead initiative and necessary market demand within larger region (including outside Halifax).

**Action 5.2.2:** Evaluate the opportunity for another sawmill in Halifax. Trees are one of Halifax's underutilized resources. According to forestry stakeholders, sawmills in the region are at capacity. If a potential operator showed interest in developing a sawmill in Halifax, they would need to understand the regional market capacity and have access to available land.

*Duration:* As opportunity presents itself

*Lead:* County Administration

*Potential Partners:* VDOF, VCE, private forestry consultants

*Financial Needs:* None

*Measurable Outcomes:* An evaluation of the suitability of a sawmill based on availability of private entity to lead initiative and necessary market demand within larger region (including outside Halifax).

<p><b>Action 5.2.3:</b> Engage and work with parties showing interests in developing meat processing facilities, grain mills or aggregators, processing facilities for hops and barley, or a food hub.</p>	<p><i>Duration:</i> As opportunity presents itself</p>
	<p><i>Lead:</i> County Administration</p>
	<p><i>Potential Partners:</i> VCE, Southern Virginia Beef Alliance, Southern Virginia Meat Goat Association</p>
	<p><i>Financial Needs:</i> None</p>
	<p><i>Measurable Outcomes:</i> An evaluation of the suitability of a meat processing facility based on availability of private entity to lead initiative and necessary market demand within larger region (including outside Halifax).</p>