The Virginia Cooperative Extension Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (CLRFS) Steering Committee

Ed Jones, Director of Virginia Cooperative Extension, established a temporary steering committee for a Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (CLRFS) team in November 2015. His charge to this committee was to identify current VCE programs and program activities related to CLRFS and develop a workable and inclusive organizational structure for supporting these efforts across the Commonwealth. The steering committee realizes that Extension programming related to CLRFS is already happening all across the state and in partnership with a number of organizations, groups, and agencies. However, many people are unaware of existing programming. The VCE CLRFS Steering Committee has therefore established the following vision, purpose and goal statements:

VCE CLRFS Vision Statement: We facilitate innovative and interdisciplinary approaches and collaborations that span the agricultural and food systems landscape in Virginia and beyond to attain a more holistic understanding of food system complexity to collectively bring about social, economic, and ecological change that benefits all Virginia residents.

The Purpose of the VCE CLRFS Steering Committee is to: Develop an action plan based on the collective impact framework to enhance and promote community, local, and regional food systems resources, information, and partnerships to Virginia Cooperative Extension specialists, agents, and community partners supporting “systems-level farm to table” work.

The primary goal of the VCE CLRFS Steering Committee is to facilitate Virginia Cooperative Extension’s CLRFS educational programming at the community, local, and/or regional level by:

♦ Providing guidance and instruments of program planning, development, evaluation, and reporting
♦ Compile and make CLRFS resources available through an online platform
♦ Expand existing knowledge and create opportunities to enhance community, local and regional food systems while building capacity with a diversity of community stakeholders.

The VCE CLRFS Steering Committee as initially formed includes: Kim Niewolny and Joyce Latimer as co-chairs, Kelli Scott, Sarah Morton, Caitlin Miller, Eric Bendfeldt, Theresa Nartea, Leonard Githinji, Karen Gehrt, Crystal Tyler-Mackey, and Bobby Grisso.

As our work has developed, several other individuals have joined the effort in various working groups established to address different aspects of our objectives. These include: Virginia Tech students, Adam Anderson, Bradley Turner, Robert Bass, and Lorien MacAuley; Chris Mullins (VSU), Charley Maxwell (VCE), Meredith Ledlie Johnson (VCE), Leanne DuBois Harrow (VDACS), Joell Eifert (VT), Lori Greiner (VT), and Karen Vines (VT).
VCE’s CLRFS Working Groups (as of 3/29/16)

Outreach, Growth and Inventory – Key tasks:

1) Host a public forum to showcase VCE work and partnerships in CLRFS
2) Identify mechanisms of “buy-in” from all VCE faculty and volunteers, and community partners working in CLRFS (Forum, Forum evaluation, listening sessions?, ....”)
3) Create an online, “living” resource of CLRFS projects, resources, and people that is easy to use, accessible to, and inclusive of, all CLRFS efforts in Virginia
4) Use this collected resource to enhance and expand work in CRLFS across the Commonwealth.

Structure & Framework – Key tasks:

1) Build relationships and trust with stakeholders to create shared space, knowledge, and activity for CLRFS work and impacts.
2) Explore new ways to work together across Virginia & regionally
3) Address core areas, processes, and emergent needs
   a. Food Desert Initiative
   b. Beginning Farmer Start-up
   c. Capacity building, community assessment, evaluation

Data Collection, Research & Evaluation – Key tasks:

1) Gather what existing data is available (i.e., knowledge, skills, behaviors, conditions changed)
2) Create a data resource matrix to assist in gathering and aggregating data,
3) Develop a template for key common measures to help shape strategies and programs at local and state level

Communication and Engagement – Key tasks:

1) Engage with stakeholders to identify and align appropriate communication tools/vehicles/processes for CLRFS work and impacts
2) Interface evaluation and communication processes
3) Develop action plan for mobilizing community assets and partners in order to bring people and resources together (“Rainmaking”)