

FALL 2014

LOUDOUN

Producer

For Loudoun Agribusiness

Become a Mentor Farmer

New farmers in Loudoun County are more likely to have worked in a cubicle than on a family farm. They're known as "second-career farmers," and they need help. Loudoun is looking for established farmers to mentor these aspiring agricultural entrepreneurs. If you're a seasoned farmer, you're invited to apply to the new Certified Mentor Farmer Program.

"Mentors offer new farmers the benefit of real-world experience gained from years of successful farm production," said Loudoun Agricultural Development Officer Kellie Boles. "This includes assisting first-time farmers with things like field and crop planning, farm management, buying and selling livestock, organic production, and marketing."

The Loudoun County Department of Economic Development partners on the Certified Mentor Farmer Program with Virginia Cooperative Extension's Loudoun office and Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Loudoun Extension Agent and Mentor Coordinator Jim Hilleary reviews mentor applications and introduces the mentors accepted into the program to new 'mentee' farmers. "This is distinct from other introduction-to-farming programs,"

Hilleary told the Washington Post earlier this year. "It doesn't teach you how to be a swine producer; it doesn't teach you how to raise cattle. ... Rather, it helps you develop a mind-set for the challenges that are to come. And if [mentees] say 'This is not for us,' then that's a success, because we just saved them a lot of time and money."

The Washington Post article quoted Hilleary as explaining, "The idea is to develop a cadre of experts who are willing to serve as coaches and mentors for these beginning farmers [who] are just getting started. It's also another kind of reality check, because [mentees] can see this work firsthand, because they're expected to help with their mentor's operation. So if they want to learn about vineyards, they'll learn by growing grapes. If they want to learn about livestock, they learn about livestock by handling livestock together with the mentor."

Loudoun graduated the first crop of certified mentor farmers this summer. They are Doug Fabblioli, owner of Fabblioli Cellars; Ben Sedlins, vineyard manager of Fabblioli Cellars; John Moore, farm manager at Temple Hall Farm Park, and Sarah Searle. You can read about mentor experiences on the blog at biz.loudoun.gov.

Economic Development Director Buddy Rizer said, "The Certified Mentor Farmer Program is one of the ways we're growing the pipeline of future successful business owners in Loudoun County."



Ben Sedlins, vineyard manager and viticulturist at Fabblioli Cellars, and one of the first Loudoun graduates of the Virginia Certified Mentor Farmer Program.

To achieve certification, Loudoun farmers forward an application to Hilleary. If selected, mentor candidates complete training provided by Extension staff in Leesburg. For more details, call 703-777-0373 or go to www.VABeginningFarmer.org.

You Might Get Carded

Coming soon to a mailbox near you: a postcard encouraging you to use your land for agricultural production. It's part of the county's plan to grow the number of agricultural businesses in Western Loudoun.

"Encouraging landowners to use their land for agricultural production benefits everyone," said Loudoun Agricultural Development Officer Kellie Boles. "It will increase the number of agricultural businesses, which helps grow the rural economy. Rural businesses contribute more than \$69 million to the Loudoun economy each year, diversifying the county's revenue base."

Agricultural production includes using land to grow crops or raise livestock, as well as making products from those crops and livestock – such as wine, wool or cheese.

Economic Development Director Buddy Rizer noted, "Building the county's agricultural economy offers a key cost-avoidance opportunity. Farms require less infrastructure – fewer roads, schools and utilities – than residential communities. A thriving agribusiness sector actually saves the county money in the long run."

The initiative began with an email sent to Western Loudoun landowners. Next, paper postcards will be mailed to landowners in rural parts of the county. The goal is to reach all eligible landowners in rural Loudoun by the end of June 2015.

Boles said, "The department will work with individual landowners to help them find the right solution for the time and effort they'd like to invest in their land. We can help connect



landowners to new farmers looking to lease land for agricultural production. The department is also a valuable resource for landowners who want to start their own business growing wine grapes, raising livestock or harvesting honey."

Landowners with questions can call Kellie Boles at 703-777-0426 or email DED@loudoun.gov.

Growing the Rural Economy

Loudoun's small farms have a big impact. An estimated \$69 million in direct revenue to the county each year. Not content to rest on our success, the county aims to double Loudoun's rural economy by 2023. The plan we're using to get there is called the Rural Economy Business Development Strategy.

The strategy was created by the department and the Rural Economic Development Council, and approved by the Board of Supervisors. The strategy lays out a 10-year, industry-by-industry plan. We've already achieved a number of our goals in just the first year of the strategy.

The first achievement was separating the information for rural business owners from the information for customers and tourists on our websites. The former has been moved to the biz.loudoun.gov website, and the latter is now on the redesigned www.LoudounFarms.org.

"The Loudoun Farms website is designed to help grow the rural economy by promoting visits to Loudoun farms and the sale of Loudoun farm products," said Agricultural Development Officer Kellie Boles.

Another achievement has been the launch of the Equine Alliance. Loudoun has 15,000 horses – more than any other county in Virginia. Creating a formal organization has already made this industry stronger. Members are now working together on developing multi-user trails, and coordinating equestrian events and other initiatives.

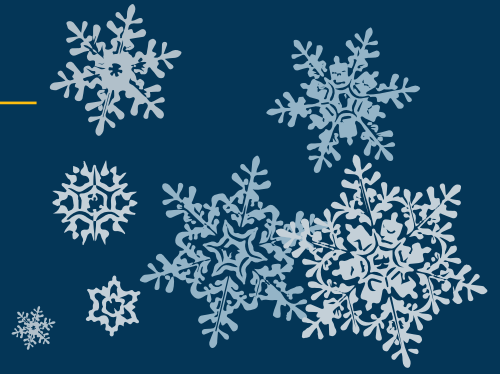
Other parts of the strategy will take much longer to complete. For example, the creation of a Viticulture and Enology Education Center to support Loudoun's wine industry. To work toward that goal, the county applied for and received a state grant for a VEEC feasibility study. Another piece of the strategy involves improving the link between Loudoun's rural and urban economies. Staff worked toward that goal by helping plan Visit Loudoun's annual Epicurience event, and also by taking part in farmer's markets this summer and fall.

"The strategy has nine over-arching components, and to be successful, we need everybody in Western Loudoun to get involved – all our farmers, businesses and organizations," said Economic Development Director Buddy Rizer. He added, "We're off to an excellent start, and the next few years will see the growth of the rural economy in exciting ways."

Act Now to Be in the Holiday Brochure

Do you sell Christmas trees, holiday greens or floral products? Now is your last chance to be included in the 2014 "Christmas in the Loudoun Valleys" guide. This brochure promotes participating Loudoun farms to area families, and is distributed in libraries and other county facilities.

To be included in the guide – or to be added to the list to receive a copy – send an email today to Cassie.Walls@loudoun.gov.



Why You Should Run Ads on Facebook and Twitter

You hear a lot about social media. You probably know people who use social media for their farm business. You may even be one of them. But just making announcements on social media doesn't always help your business. Unless you're also advertising on social media, you might be leaving money on the table.

Take Facebook for example. It's now the largest social media company on the planet, with more than a billion users. But it doesn't charge anybody to open a Facebook account. So how do they make their money? One way is by requiring businesses to run ads in order to reach all of your followers.

Let's say your business has 1,000 Facebook followers, and you announce you're having a sale or a special event

this Saturday. Facebook will probably only show that announcement to about 200 of your followers. To reach all the people who signed up to hear from you, you need to run ads.

The good news is, Facebook ads can be incredibly effective for small businesses – at a fraction of the cost of traditional ads.

Think about it: an ad in a local or regional newspaper could cost you as much as \$1,000. With Facebook and Twitter, you can spend a fraction of that amount, and reach just as many people as the newspaper – if not more. Plus, you can tailor your social media ad specifically to your target audience. You'll get instant metrics that tell you what's working and what's not,

allowing you to spend your advertising dollars in a laser-focused way.

This is what Loudoun Economic Development does. In 2013, after years of running traditional ads, we decided to pilot social media advertising. We saw results almost immediately. In the first month, we achieved a whopping 79 percent growth in the number of Facebook followers, almost doubling our audience. Running ads also grew our Twitter fan base, but becoming more popular wasn't our only goal.

We measured success by how many people were leaving our social media pages to visit our website. In one year, the number of visitors who clicked through to our website from Facebook alone increased by 950 percent!

What would happen to your business if you had a 1,000 percent increase in web traffic? How many more customers would you reach? And how much money would you save by doing ads on Facebook and Twitter instead of just in printed publications?

There are a number of free resources where you can learn how to effectively advertise on social media. Start by reading these articles online: "The Beginner's Guide to Facebook Ads for Startups, Small Businesses and Nonprofits" at TheNextWeb.com; "Effective Tips for Creating Successful Facebook Ads" at ADEpresso.com, and "A Quick and Dirty Guide to Setting Up Twitter Ads Campaigns" at blog.hubspot.com.

Loudoun County Economic Development
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Stay up-to-date on Loudoun Economic Development news on our blog!

News About Loudoun
The Loudoun Economic Development blog features news that impacts our local economy, tips for business owners, and more. Learn about what's happening in...

DIZLOUDOUN.GOV

Learn More

With Facebook and Twitter, you can reach as many people as the newspaper - if not more. Plus you can tailor your social media ad specifically to your target audience.

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Where's Warren?



Warren Howell, long-time Loudoun resident and owner of Allder School Berries in Purcellville, took our newest staff member on quite the adventure. They ventured into a field with white turnips, China rose winter radish, jumbo beans, beets and much more. As Warren says, "When farming gives you lemons,

good farmers make lemonade." This farmer did just that! This year, the beets ended up being too close together so the team hand picked/thinned out the area. Instead of letting the picked items go to waste, the product was sold at the market as a novelty item.

Can you guess where they went?

Email us his location by November 17 and be entered to win a very special ag-related prize: LoudounBiz@loudoun.gov.

Hint: This farm can be seen at the Leesburg Winter Farmers Market.

Did you find Warren?

In our last edition, Warren was at Moutoux Orchard in Purcellville.

Subscribe Today!

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